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AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF INTERVENTION STRATEGIES ON THE EXPERIENCES OF LONE PARENTS

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Abstract

True to its manifesto pledge, New Labour arrived in power in 1997 pledging to fundamentally reform the U.K. welfare system. Premised upon the notion of too many rights and too few responsibilities, New Labour sought about restructuring both the benefits system itself, and perhaps more importantly, the underlying assumption of what benefits entail. In so doing it was hoped, the "something for nothing culture" may be challenged and cycles of dependency broken. Manifest in the generic New Deal programme, groups within society seen as having particular difficulty finding work were to be offered advice and support in finding work, education or training, and where to be bound to either accept such offers under threat of sanction. One group seen as having these difficulties were lone parents and in the October 1997 the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was launched.

The flagging of NDLP however assumes an economic rationality on the part of lone parents in that if more money is available through work, lone parents will make a rational decision and indeed go to work. However, as suggested elsewhere (Evason and Robinson 1998), lone parents remain sceptical over such initiatives, often putting parenting preferences over and above the opportunity to access employment. This research therefore examines what those preferences may be and what are the latent influences that may persuade or dissuade lone parents to leave the home for paid employment. The thesis further describes some of the consequences of those decisions

Qualitative and qualitative evidence is provided that demonstrates lone parent's decisions are taken that reflect interpretations of socially prescribed norms and values and that to presume an economic rationality drives this group is to underestimate the complexities of the situation they may be in. This thesis concludes that such interventions can work for some, but for many the choice to stay at home is often reflective of the style of parenting the lone parents and society considers most appropriate.

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Chapter 1. Background

Following its election victory in 1997, the incoming Labour government embarked on a programme to reform fundamentally the United Kingdom's post-war welfare state. The reforms were outlined in a number of government policy consultation papers and were intended to address neo-liberal concerns about the welfare state, although neo-liberal solutions have been rejected in favour of a "third way". Thus government's welfare reform package is premised on a conception of citizenship that emphasises equally the importance of "entitlements" and "obligations", especially the obligation to work. This is reflective in much of the rhetoric of New Labour whereby the demands of modern society can only be met by partnership between both the state and its citizens.

The foundations of such an approach are however not new. One influence on Tony Blair's, (and thus New Labour's), philosophy is the Scottish religious philosopher John Macmurray. Macmurray argued that individual fulfilment could only be found in communities of intense personal relationships where people were bound together by mutual obligations. It was the individual's (Christian) duty to meet those obligations placed on them, primarily through helping others (Macmurray 1961). Consider the eulogy to Macmurray's work paid by Tony Blair:

"John Macmurray is not one of the twentieth century's most famous philosophers. This is surprising. Actually his work is more accessible, better written, and above all far more relevant than most of what I and many others studied as hallowed texts at university. I also find him immensely modern... in the sense that he confronted what will be the critical political question of the twenty-first century: the relationship between individual and society." (Blair 1997) .

For Macmurray the individual cannot be considered separated from collective. There remains a fundamental connection between the two.

"There are few things that I desire to do which do not depend upon the active co-operation of others. I need you in order to be myself."

Macmurray (1961 p83)

"We become persons in community in virtue of our relations to others. Human life is inherently a common life."

(Macmurray 1957 p37)

These thoughts represent an idealised model of how society should operate. So for New Labour, as suggested by Tony Blair in the year before New Labour's first election victory: *"the search is on to reinvent community for a modern age, true to core values of fairness, co-operation and responsibility"* (Blair 1996).

Perhaps the most influential modern commentator on the concept of "community" and its application to wider society is Amitai Etzioni. At the heart of Etzioni's position is a rejection of the principles underpinning libertarianism and "old" style socialism. Etzioni's places himself in between the two, arguing for a:

"...profound commitment to moral order that is basically voluntary, and to a social order that is well balanced with socially secured autonomy"

(1997 p57)

Levitas (1997) make the point strongly however that the basis of Etzioni's arguments are a remoralisation of social life and offers evidence from his work to make her point. There is indeed some substance to this. Writing in 1992, the Communitarian Network, of whom Etzioni is a major contributor, penned a position paper (signed and endorsed by Etzioni) that offered advice to the incoming President of the United States as to how the family could be strengthened as an aid to development of a sense of community. They suggest policies should be implemented that *"ensure deadbeat parents live up to their responsibility"*; that offer an alternative to *"the culture of divorce"*, and that address the problem of social security payments that place *"a premium on divorce"*.

Thus communitarianism has become a popular and influential way of describing political and ideological appeals to community and community values on both sides of the Atlantic. For proponents of communitarian ideas, these appeals rest on a rejection both of the market-led ideology of the New Right and of paternalistic and centralised state approaches to welfare of the old left. Communitarianism is therefore viewed by its advocates as steering a path between unfettered markets and an imposing state. For Etzioni, societies like the US and Britain are faced with problems of demoralisation; a decline in morality and the absence of a commitment to fulfilling obligations:

"Communitarians call to restore civic virtues, for people to live up to their responsibilities and not merely to focus on their entitlements, and to shore up the moral foundations of society".

(Etzioni 1995 pIX).

Society is suffering due to the competition between individual entitlements and duties. The revival of institutions, such as the family, would rediscover the ethical basis of society and thus instil and reinforce the sense of mutual responsibility. Etzioni (1995 p15) uses the analogy of a three legged stool to describe the current state of society. He sees the state and the markets as providing two legs, with civil society providing a shorter, less developed third leg. The answer is to lengthen the third leg through moral education. This, he argues, would enable the stool to rest on a solid foundation.

Bellah (1996) however, whist supporting the sentiments of Etzioni, advises that morality cannot be divorced from social justice, suggesting:

"a dangerously narrow conception of social justice can result from committing oneself to small town values."

(p13)

Bellah's argument is that true communitarianism cannot be achieved unless a clear focus is placed upon both political and structural aspects. Essentially, economic democracy,

collective political control over the distribution of wealth and economic decision-making, is needed to form communities and without this communities are nothing more than loose collections of individuals.

The assumption that communities can only be developed by making political action the centre of their lives represents the heart of Bellah's approach. Political movements, such as unions, are praised because they promote a political understanding of community.

> *"Suspicious both of the massive private power that was undercutting the basis for independent citizenship and of government without popular control, these movements sought to use government at all levels to bring a degree of public responsibility to the new technologies and the wealth they generated."*
>
> (pp 212-213)

Even moral values must be determined through political action. Bellah dismisses talk of a crisis in family values on the grounds that those who divorce or fail to marry are often unemployed and thus unable to get married or do not have enough income to support an existing family. Moral arguments therefore are useless, even counterproductive, unless a social democracy has been established. Rhetoric of a renewed commitment to traditional family values only seek to alienate further sections of society whilst detracting from the failure of collective responsibility. Not personal morals, but collective economics that are subjected to democratic political controls are the answer to family and community decline (Bellah 1996 pXIV).

In essence, (liberal) communitarians do not seek to re-impose notions of traditional values, but replace them with values they consider more aligned to modern life. Thus Bellah (1991 p209) suggests alternative family forms must be accepted to form communities that operate on the basis on inclusively. Communitarians in the vein of Bellah seek a radical transformation of every aspect of life but this transformation has ultimately got to be seen in terms of a redistribution of power.

The call for community certainly does not come exclusively from the left. Indeed, many prominent figures on opposite ends of the political spectrum have sought community based on a reinvigoration of local institutions and the virtues they teach. This notion of a civic renewal takes much of its rhetoric from Alexis de Tocqueville, a French aristocrat who travelled across America in the 1830's and whose work, *Democracy in America* (1969) has influenced American, and thus British understanding of community. Emphasis here is placed on the praise of local associations and the insistence that individuals learn and adopt the habits necessary for a free and vital public life in these associations. According to de Tocqueville, American self-reliance is, in fact, communal:

"The beginnings of this attitude first appear at school, where the children, even in their games, submit to rules settled by themselves and punish offences which they have defined themselves. The same attitude turns up again in all the affairs of social life. If some obstacle blocks the public road halting the circulation of traffic, the neighbours at once form a deliberative body; this improvised assembly produces an executive authority which remedies the trouble before anyone has thought of the possibility of some previously constituted authority beyond that of those concerned".

(p189)

Rather than an absence of authority, de Tocqueville saw in America a healthy participation in authority on the part of the people, this being made possible by the range of local civic associations. As Tocqueville put it, such local, civic associations:

"...are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they put it within the people's reach; they teach people to appreciate its peaceful enjoyment and accustom them to make use of it." (p162)

de Tocqueville's vision of America also contained a moral dimension, understanding democracy as the best system under contemporary conditions by which individuals could develop proper moral characters. This morality is therefore based upon both the political and the individual level. The political level can be defined by the devolution of

democratic power and the ability of groups to become part of the democratic process. This however is wholly dependent upon a system of mutual respect and trust between the state and its citizenry. Alternatively, the individual level is concerned with the willingness to take this responsibility and add to the process. These sentiments have appeared to cross the Atlantic and have informed thinking across the British political spectrum. Indeed, in a speech to the National Council for Voluntary Associations, William Hague (2001), the then leader of the Conservative Party pledged, should his party had been elected, to establish an Office of Civil Society, suggesting:

"a good society depends upon free and independent families, neighbours and charities"

Despite the desire expressed by Hague for "a good society", no doubt Bellah would argue that the methods proposed for attaining one is nothing but the state abdicating its responsibility and does nothing to alter the power structures in place, and indeed, sympathy for this point can be found elsewhere (Midgley 1986). Nevertheless the New Right doctrine of self-reliance fits neatly with the idea of community participation and can be said to do so primarily for three reasons. Firstly, the restructuring of capitalism during the last 30 years has left many communities socially and economically isolated. Whilst there is still a need for capital accumulation to continue, these communities need to be integrated within mainstream society to pre-empt and/or mediate in, any conflict that may arise between them and the state (Sullivan 1994). Secondly, community involvement allows *"consumers"* the opportunity to elaborate upon their needs thus providing the opportunity for the market to meet those needs by the provision of goods and services (Croft and Beresford 1992 p32). Thirdly, the reduction of the role played by the *"nanny state"* requires the community to shoulder a greater responsibility in the care of its members, thus helping to relieve some of the economic burdens the state may face (Sullivan 1994 p23).

In addressing the three main points outlined, many commentators from the left of the political spectrum agree in essence with the assessment of those on the right but offer the following critique. Firstly, Gramsci (Craig, Derricourt and Loney 1982) identified the

state as a mechanism by which capitalism exerts power over the population. If one accepts this definition, it follows that any state sponsored initiative is designed to perpetuate the capitalist system, therefore rather than be described as a buffer against social action it is in its nature a form of social control (Crow and Allen 1994 p161-162). In addressing the second element, Freidman (1992 pp14-18) argues that, because of lack of a financial resources, communities requiring development are superfluous to the purpose of capital accumulation. This, he argues, results in "tail-end poverty" programmes done for reasons of charity or political expediency, not with the aim of instilling real choice. Thirdly, the shift from state to community based service provision is purely a mechanism for maximising the use of free resources, to reduce the overall cost per client to the state with very little recompense to carers (Heginbotham 1990 p17). It is the state offloading statutory responsibilities onto often impoverished communities (Craig, Derricourt and Loney 1982). If one accepts this overall critique, the call by the state for the development of community can only be defined as a complete contradiction in terms (Midgley et al 1986), indeed, a Marxist analysis suggests that communities and their development need to be seen in the broader context of the class struggle (Twelvetrees 1982).

This perspective grew mainly from the government sponsored Community Development Programmes of the 1970`s (Twelvetrees 1982), which were given the task of addressing the problems faced by many inner city communities, but, adding weight to Bellah's arguments, quickly came to the conclusion that the plight of those within those communities was at the mercy of the wider economic factors that may prevail (Loney 1983). Whilst local initiatives may achieve limited success it is the overall structure of production and labour that needs to be addressed. What does have to be acknowledged at this point is that often the term *community* is analogous to a specific type of community and thus care has be taken. The further one was to look up the socio-economic scale, the less the concern over the lack of community becomes apparent. "Communities" thus becomes synonymous with impoverished communities; community development becomes synonymous with economic development and the communities that are lacking community spirit are those that are disenfranchised by the economic system.

Nevertheless both the political right and the left, at least rhetorically, agree that the concept of community and the desire for community development is honourable, and is something worth pursuing. However a further dimension to the idea of communitarianism needs to be considered that emphasises private morality as the starting point for the collective morality. Although Levitas (1997) rightly identified Etzioni as being a supporter of the family, (this phrase is used as supporters of the "family" would use it), he does nevertheless concede:

"The communitarian movement favours the new familism: recognizing the importance of the family without favouring a return to the traditional one".

(1992 p9)

At first glance this may appear to give support to alternative family forms, yet no such support is intended. Etzioni re-emphasises his assertion that two parents[1] are better than one. Etzioni's point is an economic one. So long as both parents are able to give moral education to their children and are able to spend time with them they should be allowed, indeed encouraged to work. So communitarianism is consistent with the changing family, so long as the family retains its traditional form. The concessions given appear to be to tolerate the changing nature of gendered assumption within the family and accept the inevitable; that more women are going to work

1.1 Changing Household Structures

So discussion shows how both politicians and academics alike have pointed to the family as a building block of societal relations, but, somewhat grudgingly at times, have accepted that the nature of the family is changing. However comments on the family, especially those offered by politicians and the popular press, does inevitably position the

[1] Lewis (2002) suggests that Etzioni, and the wider communitarian agenda, does express a certain nostalgia for the traditional male breadwinner care model. It is however unclear how communitarians such as Etzioni view same sex couples raising children.

traditional patriarchal nuclear family as the ideal, this despite the fact that in greater numbers, more people are choosing to live in alternative family forms.

Social Trends (2002 p42) reports that the percentage of married men and women between 1971 and 2000 fell from 71% to 53% and from 65% to 52% of total households respectively. In the same period the number of one person households doubled from 6% of all households to 12%. Another factor to consider is growth in co-habitation with projections estimating that if current trends continue, the proportion of co-habiting couples will almost double from its present position of 12% to 22% by 2021 (Social Trends 2002 p42).

Statistics go on to map a series of changes of family/household composition over the last 30 years, including the drop in the number of dependant children per household; the fact of greater numbers of people marrying later in life; women having their first child later in life; the growth in divorces and subsequent remarriages and, of particular interest here, the growth of lone parenthood. However before any information is given on the characteristics of lone parent families, it is worthwhile trying to define just what constitutes a lone parent family. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2000 Annex A) defined a lone parent family as *"a father or mother together with his or her never married child(ren)"*, whilst a lone parent household was defined as *"a household which contains one or more lone parent families, but no married couple or cohabiting couple families"*. Whilst these definition combines may give some indication as to what constitutes a lone parent family in the common sense, it is clear they do not go far enough to describe the actual experiences of lone parents themselves. For example, would a lone parent and child(ren), living with a with the lone parent's mother or father be classed as a lone parent family, household or both? Equally, is a lone parent with financially independent adult child(ren) the same family type as a lone parent with young children? Clearly then the definition of a lone parent family and/or household could also include additional elements other than just living arrangements. Graham (1982) describes a variety of definitions that all have a common additional element to that above to include an aspect of care for children. Yet even combining these extra elements still may not be

adequate to include all those who may be (self) classified as lone parents. Lone parents in a steady non-cohabiting relationship may receive financial, emotional and practical help from their partner in their caring responsibilities, whilst others may be co-habiting yet still classify themselves as lone parents. It is therefore clear that any definition is fraught with danger, thus a definition will not be attempted here. Suffice to say at present that the methodological stance described in Chapters 2 and 3 will give an explanation as to how lone parents were classified with regards to inclusion in this study.

Regardless of definitions, in 1971 the number of (official) lone parent households stood at 570,000 and by 2000 the number had risen to 1.7m (Family Resources Survey 2002). Some three million, over one in five, children live in a lone parent headed household, and estimates predict that a third to half of all children will spend at least some time in a lone parent family (Ford and Miller 1998). The routes into lone parenthood are of course diverse, although the greatest increase is found in the number of single parents (46% in 2001 (National Council for One Parent Families 2001)). This does however have to be placed into the context that when registering a child, less than 1 in 7 lone mothers had never lived with the child's father, suggesting this figure may be reflective as much of patterns of partnership as anything else. Further to this, lone parenthood should not be seen as static, when as reported by Marsh (2001), the average period of lone parenthood is approximately five years. The composition of lone parent households in terms of numbers of children is slightly less than that of partnered parents, standing at 1.7 and 1.9 respectively. The number in single parent households is less still at 1.5 children (National Council for One Parent Families 2001) [2].

1.2. The Family and Community

Despite the changing nature of the family and differing lifestyle choices, the key to the remoralisation of society is based upon the strengthening of morality in and through civil institutions such as the family; education system and voluntary associations; the assertion

[2] This refers to never married parents. There is an obvious danger here that defining "single" parents as such may cloud over co-habitation.

of the supremacy of public/community interest over special interests; and the reversal of the problem of too many rights, too few obligations. For New Labour however the concept of community is inseparable from the concept of the family. As Jack Straw, the current Foreign Secretary, writing in The Guardian whilst in Opposition (1996) argued:

"The absence of prejudice should not mean the absence of rules, or order, or stability... Let our social morality be based on reason--not bigotry. But let us not delude ourselves that we can build a society fit for our children to grow up in without making a moral judgement about the nature of that society... Any decent society is founded on duty and responsibility."

In Labour's green paper on welfare reform, Frank Field (1998) had been somewhat more detailed in suggesting:

"The family is the bedrock of a decent, civilised and stable society. But it is under enormous strain. Divorce and separation have increased, lone parenthood has risen and child poverty has worsened. The reasons for this may be varied, but the impact is clear: more instability, more crime, greater pressure on housing and social benefits."

(p13)

"A fundamental principle of the welfare state should be to support families and children. But the way of doing that today must change. The shape of the family has changed significantly in recent decades. But families remain the building block of society."

(p57)

"Changes in society mean that parental separation is becoming less exceptional. By providing parents, children and families with great support, our policies may help to stem the tide of family breakdowns."

(p59)

How this relates to policy, especially welfare reform, will be addressed presently, but statements such as these do demonstrate the importance placed on the family and how moralistic judgements may inform the practical application of policy. Indeed such is the importance placed upon the concept of family by New Labour, in 1998 the government published the consultation document *Supporting Families*. Jack Straw, in his foreword to the document, appeared to accept that the nature of the family is changing:

"...it is a hard job to be a parent. More marriages end in divorce. More children are brought up in lone parent families. Government could not turn the clock back even if it wanted to do so. There never was a golden age of the family. Family life has continually changed - and changed for good reasons as well as bad". (p3).

The trials of parenting are acknowledged; government accept that relationships may fail and that government policy is unlikely to reverse the trend; the notion of an idealised family life is exaggerated and family norms are constantly evolving. However, the document continues:

"...children need stability and security. Many lone parents and unmarried couples raise their children every bit as successfully as married parents. But marriage is still the surest foundation for raising children and remains the choice of the majority of people in Britain. We want to strengthen the institution of marriage to help more marriages to succeed". (p7).

"The evidence is that children are best brought up where you have two natural parents and it is more likely to be a stable family if they are married. It plainly makes sense for the government to do what it can to strengthen the institution of marriage". (p5).

"There are more children being brought up in single parent households, and there is more child poverty, often as a direct consequence of family breakdown. Rising crime and drug abuse are indirect symptoms of problems in the family". (p9)

Despite the assurance that it is not the intention of the document to stigmatise other family types, an embedded link can be found in the connection of alternative family forms and deviancy, crime and anti-social behaviour in general. This may however be widened and a further connection may be found between the lack of "community" and the changing nature of the family. This leads us inevitably to the current debate surrounding the existence of "the underclass".

1.3. The Underclass

Underlying much of the debate surrounding the existence of the underclass is a contest between structure and culture as the determinant of social development. On one hand there is the view that economic and societal structures have forced those who may not have strong marketable skills onto the margins of the economy, whilst on the other, the marginalisation is a consequence of pathological traits that reflect the rejection of mainstream values within predefined societal groups, for example lone parents.

The contrasting arguments presented earlier of both Bellah and Etzioni, and how they connect to social groupings, can be found throughout the literature. It is however the position taken by Etzioni that has found most favour, if not necessarily in the academic literature, certainly with all mainstream political parties, and most definitely with most elements of the press. This in itself is nothing new. From the classification of "sturdy beggars", to Marx's *lumpenproletariat,* to Oscar Lewis' identification of the Culture of Poverty in the 1960's, the notion of a separate class of people unwilling (or unable) to accept the values of mainstream society has a recurrent theme by which specific groups can be identified.

Perhaps the most influential commentator on the existence and the characteristics of the new underclass has been Charles Murray. Invited by *Sunday Times* in 1989 to determine whether the underclass existed in this county, Murray concluded that the underclass existed, it was growing, and that neither of the two main political parties had adopted policies that would address the problem (Murray 1990 p35). The basis of Murray's

argument is that the underclass can be distinguished from the poor by the application of three criteria; crime; labour market detachment and, crucially for Murray, illegitimacy. Murray paints a picture of a benevolent welfare state whereby the need for a woman to marry the father of her child has largely evaporated. Financially, there is no need as the state will provide enough for both her and her child(ren) to live a lifestyle similar to that if the child's father was to support them. Similarly, social sanctions are of no consequence as the communities in which this takes place have accepted such behaviour as the norm. The children of such partnerships are then socialised into accepting this behaviour also and thus perpetuate these principles from generation to generation.

Quickly seized upon by politicians and press alike, Murray's comments fuelled what Baggully and Mann (1992 p117) describe as a *"right wing moral panic"*. All indications were that this class of people posed a threat to social order through criminal activity, had withdrawn voluntarily from the labour market and supported themselves through welfare handouts and criminal activity, and were having children without the intention of providing role models as to the behaviour wider society deemed appropriate. Indeed as identified by Baggully and Mann (1992 p118), *"...in popular language they were portrayed as.. idle thieving bastards"*. Thus the underclass are not seen as being victims, but are seen to be the architects of their own position.

Murray's arguments came at a time when the realities of the turbulence of the market, such as negative equity in property prices, were affecting elements of society not used to such fluctuations. After the recession of the late 1980's a focus upon societal divisions became a subject of debate amongst many of the broadsheet newspapers. The interest in Murray's work by the Sunday Times renewed interest in the *underclass*, adding to the prejudices of an increasingly insecure middle class population. The presence in Britain of rising levels of illegitimacy, criminality and unemployment gave Murray the opportunity to apply his theories, developed originally from his findings on the underclass in America. Murray nevertheless was quick to identify where the problem lay.

"If illegitimate births are the leading indicator of an underclass and violent crime a proxy measure of its development, the definitive proof that an underclass has arrived is that large numbers of young, healthy, low-income males who choose not to take jobs" (1990 p17).

Not only are many of the able-bodied choosing a life on benefits, but a high proportion are defrauding the state by working illegally within the alternative economy while also claiming benefits. It is the combination of these practices which amount to an alternate set of values based on either dependency or fraud; these for Murray characterise the underclass in Britain today.

Yet the cornerstone of Murray's argument rests upon the rise in illegitimacy. In a follow-up to his original essay, *Underclass: The Crisis Deepens*, (1996) Murray describes how births outside of wedlock have risen (almost) constantly, (apart from the time of Cromwell) (p102), describes how economic inactivity had risen in the ten years to 1991 (p100), and further identifies how crime had increased from 1987 to 1992 (p99). In a commentary on his essay, David (1996 p150-152) suggests Murray has correlated trends in an attempt to infer a causal relationship between the variables, yet despite this, policy makers have adopted much of Murray's rhetoric.

The constant theme running through Murray's work is centred around the premise of a benevolent welfare state making lone parenthood attractive and only a retreat from this position will have any consequence. Murray's analysis is then not so much taken from a cultural explanation for the growing phenomena, but implies an economic rationality on behalf of the underclass. If this is so, the problem is not the underclass themselves, but the fault of the economic system in which they live, and the underclass are not significantly different from the rest of society where economic rationality is held as the model yielding most benefit. Yet this economic rationality is at the heart of Murray's solution to the problem:

"I favour eliminating benefits for unmarried women altogether...A strong case can be made that these radical changes would produce large reductions in the number of children born to single women".

(1996 p125).

"The only way the active avoidance and the demands are going to occur is if childbearing entails economic penalties for a single woman"

(1996 p127).

"The financial benefit for married couples must match the best financial situation in which an unmarried mother could find herself in...Otherwise the system retains a clear and present incentive for single women with boyfriends to remain unmarried and represent themselves to the benefit office as women living alone".

(1996 p125).

Thus the solution for Murray is clear. If the social security budget is unable to meet the costs of raising benefits for married couples, then the benefits for lone parents should be reduced, preferably scrapped. Indeed this can be the only answer, for as he argues, whilst single women seldom have first babies to secure income benefits, sometimes they do have second babies specifically to remain on benefits (1996 p46), although no evidence is presented to support this claim.

In commentaries on his essay's Alcock (1996 p142), in a similar vein to that of David above, draws attention to the dangers of trying to extrapolate causal relationships from statistical mapping, highlights how withdrawal of benefits based upon moral grounds is fraught with danger, (especially for those at the receiving end) (p147), and that the impact of wider economic pressures and its influence on class polarisation is completely ignored (p148).

David (1996 p152) points to Murray's often journalistic rather than scholarly interpretation of data; refers to how his proposals are based upon scientific reasoning,

(economic rationality) but are made with moralistic judgements (p151) and suggests that Murray assumes homogeneous characteristics of an often diverse social group (p151).

Phillips (1996 p156) shares some of the concerns of Murray insofar as trends in the rise of lone parenthood are concerned and indeed the change in family composition, but goes on to add that Murray is somewhat preoccupied with those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale whilst ignoring other social groups. For her, Murray's analysis rests on morality, but a morality only designed for one social group.

Slipman (1996 p162) suggests Murray gives no thought as to how wider economic circumstances has impacted upon family composition and given rise to conflict within the family as their members compete for both space and power, highlighting the influence of changing working patterns for both men and women. She also suggests that any discussion about the family that is gender neutral is bound to offer the wrong solution to the wrong problem (p164). Slipman concludes that the focus of policy should be through educational support and training, rather than to adopt punitive measures that will inevitably increase hardship (p165).

A further issue to consider is that since Murray's arguments are based upon a model of economic rationality, the implication is that lone parents are able to live a lifestyle similar to that of two parent families. The evidence is that this is just not the case. In terms of wealth lone parent families remain over-represented in families living in relative poverty, making up over 21% of all households defined as such, equating to about 3 million individuals (DSS 2001)[3]. This equates to 61% of all lone parent families living in relative poverty, higher than any other family group. The result of living on such a low income is of course one of the foundations of social exclusion, and research conducted by Bradshaw et al (1999) found that lone mothers are at high risk of exclusion specifically due to this lack of income.

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[3] This using the DSS definition of half male median earnings.

Further to this, research commissioned by *Gingerbread* (2003), a national support network for lone parent families, focused upon some of the dynamics lone parents may experience as a result of lack of income, found that one third of their sample group did not feel any connection with their local community and concluded that this had led to a feeling of social isolation. Over a quarter thought their children's physical development was being curtailed due to lack of amenities and a safe place for to play, and over 86% thought better amenities for children was a priority for their neighbourhood. Debts were also a major concern, as was the worry of trying to balance a limited budget. The culminating effect of these various dynamics was that over a third were suffering from stress, anxiety and or depression with the major cause of this just being having to cope with everyday pressure. Despite Murray's analysis, a vast array of evidence ((Rowntree (1902); Abel-Smith and Townsend (1965); Finer (1974); Mack and Lansley (1985); Pappenheim (1995); CPAG (1998)) demonstrates that that lone parents have both historically and presently been, and are, over represented in poor families. As yet no credible research has been conducted that is able offer conclusive proof that lone parenthood increases the likelihood of either social or financial inclusion. Nevertheless, Murray's arguments have gathered support and indeed influenced policy and it is this that will be discussed in the next section.

1.4. New Labour's Welfare Programme

In 1992 the then Labour leader, John Smith, established the Commission on Social Justice (CSJ) to reappraise Labour's welfare policies. The role of the Commission was to consider social justice and its application to economic well-being whilst also examining the long term role for government in social welfare. The main report of the commission, *Strategies for National Renewal*, (CSJ 1994) involved a retreat from some of the central aspects of the post-1945 welfare state, particularly in relation to collectivism and the pursuit of equality of outcome, by instead, calling for equality of opportunity. The report did acknowledge growing social polarisation but at the same time suggested this was inevitable whilst simultaneously expressing a view that welfare spending was a drain on resources. The report thus firmly placed itself in between the New Right and Old Labour

and attempted to provide a framework for the development of third way rhetoric into policy formulation.

The commission's report does indeed resonate with much that is identified as the language of New Labour. The need for strong communities, the transference of the welfare state into a *"...springboard for economic opportunity"* (p224), society to be a place where *"...rights carry responsibility and individuals have their chance to realise their potential"* (p3). The report highlights the need to tackle welfare dependency and stresses the importance of paid (and to a lesser extent unpaid) work as a means by which self fulfilment can be achieved. The commission called for both fair regulation and flexibility in the labour market, and further drew a distinction between three types of policy approaches: Deregulators, who advocate the free market, levellers, whose priority was the redistribution of income, and investors, who see a redistribution of opportunity as the surest means of redistributing income. In identifying with the latter approach, the CSJ set the scene for much of the subsequent rhetoric concerning welfare reform.

1.5. The New Approach and Moral Urgency

"When welfare was run by friendly societies and mutually owned organisations few questioned the fact that welfare affected how people behaved. Welfare was not simply strictly policed; the range of benefits full recognised the danger that some people would claim benefit to which they were not entitled if the regime was slack. Welfare was seen not merely as a means of meeting a need, but by its organisation, and the means by its delivery, it was conceived as a tool for building good character.

The biblical view of human nature - its fallen status, yet conceived to be redeemed - was lost sight of in left-wing intellectual circles by the 1960s. Welfare was by them seen primarily as an act of altruism and this paternalistic view was advanced behind the cover of politically correct statements, so much so that even the Right lost the confidence to mouth, let alone act on, the broader, age-old understanding of mankind. The resulting paralysis of both will and mind resulted in little concern for how different types of

welfare (insurance or means-tested) affected behaviour; and to raise the question of fraud was to be automatically deemed politically unbalanced.

'Thinking the unthinkable' was the task for Labour's final years in opposition before 1997, and was part of the strategy of making Labour electable. It was never meant to be an activity undertaken in government".

(Field 1999).

Despite the comments presented above by Field, one may argue that whilst New Labour may not have gone as far as Field wished with welfare reform, welfare reform is an overriding objective of the government and is approached with Field's identification of the fallible human in mind. Heron and Dwyer (1999) suggest that unlike Thatcher, New Labour accept there is such a thing as society and that by locating the lives of the individual within the social setting, a fit with the communitarian agenda it pursues is found. Thus, in communitarianism finding expression with New Labour in its support for the family, communitarianism also finds its way into policy with its emphasis of partnership, co-operation and duty. Indeed as a government minister charged with welfare reform, Field suggested:

"It is one of our mantras that work is the best form of welfare. We say it often and loud because it is true. And communicating the message is an important part of shifting people's expectations; no one in a position to undertake paid work should expect to stay on benefit. Everyone should expect to be given the opportunity to work". (1997).

The emphasis on the work ethic is clear as is its connection to resurgence of community:

"Paid work is the surest escape route from poverty. It gives people more than just money. It boosts self-esteem for the individual, provides a role model for the family, and gives communities a weapon against social exclusion". (Field 1998).

Etzioni also spoke of the need for work (1997). He argued for the creation of community jobs suggesting they are a valuable way of promoting responsibility both to oneself and ones community (p82). Welfare therefore should not be passive, but should attempt to promote desirable qualities in its recipients. Field appears to agree:

"One of welfare's roles is to reward and to punish. The distribution of welfare is one of the great teaching forces open to advanced societies".

(1996 p111)

Thus the moral compulsion for welfare to attempt to influence behavioural patterns is established. An important issue touched upon by Willetts (1992) does however have to be acknowledged here. The arguments presented earlier by Etzioni demonstrate that in order to meet his proposed criteria for the resurgence of a sense of community, there exists an interdependent upon both state and citizen. Both have rights, both have responsibilities. If one party is not prepared to meet its obligations it should have no call on the other to meet theirs. If one party expects its entitlements, it should respect the entitlements of the other. The judgements of what the role are for state or citizens are therefore based upon moral judgements as to what obligations or entitlements are to be expected or given. This is also the case for the arguments made by Bellah, and thus questions of morality are relevant regardless of the distinction that comes about when the balance of rights and responsibilities are weighed. Indeed, any discussion of citizenship, or what citizenship entails, has to address a moral issue. The salient point here is that enmeshed within citizenship are rights and freedoms, and therefore state obligations. (Beveridge's concern for citizens to be free from the "five giants" is a case in point (Lowe 1999)). It therefore follows that any welfare system is, by definition, based upon a moral judgement as to how the collective will provide for the individual. The point may be philosophical but it is nevertheless crucial. If welfare is seen as it has been, certainly post Beveridge, it is regarded as something all contribute to, and at various stages, draw from. However, words take on different meanings dependent upon how they are used and where they are said, in terms of both space and time. A liberal in America is substantially different from a liberal in Britain. The term "welfare" may also have undergone a transformation. If

welfare is no longer taken to describe a system of mutuality, but is thought of as something whereby special groups are supported by the working population, many of whom are unlikely to have to call upon it to support themselves, it could be that support for the system may itself wane. Thus, the moralistic arguments about those deserving or undeserving of support have the opportunity to shape policy. This is nothing new, but it is somewhat demonstrative of how lurches to either the political right or left, in this case the right, impact upon not only the delivery of service, but also influence the psyche of the population and thus allow policy makers at times, despite Field's (1997) admonishments, to *"think the unthinkable"* and thus introduce policies that at one time may have been thought too unpalatable.

The extension of this line of thought as a matter of principle however does expose somewhat of a contradiction in policy. Communitarianism is founded upon the reciprocal nature of human social relations and the practical application of this can be found in New Labour's call to work; Etzioni's (1995) desire for a remoralisation of social life and even in Murray's (1990) wish for the Underclass to guide children to accept social (thus socially negotiated) norms. So whilst this reciprocity is called for from all in society, the method to do it, in many cases, remains a private affair. Additionally the resources and the responsibility to do so also remain a private affair. In relation to lone parents some headway has been made in providing practical assistance to access care-providing services, but this remains connected to take up of paid employment. Thus as welfare may no longer be seen as a system of mutuality where all may both contribute to and call upon depending upon individual circumstances, caring is equally seen as an individual action having little or no relationship with wider society (Watson et al 2002). The denial of the interdependency of human relations thus obscures the fundamental differences between the needs of different groups of both carers and cared for and further perpetuates unequal access to care and unequal caring responsibilities (Dean 2002). The effect of this is to impose caring responsibilities upon carers, and models of care on the cared for, that may not be reflected of the needs of either therefore missing the fundamental point that the needs of both are not static but change in relation to both individual circumstances and in relation to wider societal influences.

1.6. Welfare to Work

Perhaps the most obvious way one may distinguish between Old and New Labour in terms of welfare is the shift from accepting inequalities as a result of structural factors that the individual has little control over, to the acceptance of inequalities as consequences of individuals traits. As suggested by Lund (1999), obligations and rights are linked by judgements of character and the willingness of claimants to attempt to improve character. Central to this has been the call to work for those not working and a desire for those in work to adapt to the uncertainties of modern employment practices. Importantly, work has become the key to solving problems of both social exclusion and welfare dependency. Described again in terms of a reciprocal relationship between state and citizen, the DSS publication, *A New Contract for Welfare* stated:

"The responsibilities of individuals who can provide for themselves and their families to do so must always be matched by a responsibility on the part of government to provide opportunities for self advancement. The government's aim is to deliver services of such high quality that there would simply be no reason why people should not take them up... The government's commitment to expand significantly the range of help available therefore alters the contract with those who are capable of work. It is the government's responsibility to promote work opportunities and to help people take advantage of them. It is the responsibility of those who can take them up to do so... Those who unreasonably refuse an offer or fail to take up a place will be sanctioned".

(1998 p31)

Whilst financial implications for the Treasury were mentioned, the underlying thrust of the New Labour message was that reciprocity, through work, was the salvation of the poor. With the redistributive agenda firmly in the domain of Old Labour, New Labour was able to locate its policies as part of its "new" approach. The impetus for this type of action had however been growing steadily for a number of years. Mead (1997) had argued that programmes aimed at reducing the numbers on benefits through voluntary

action were always doomed to failure, adding that welfare recipients needed *"a push to realise their own desires to work"* (p32). Thatcher (1987) also spoke about entitlements and obligations. The following Conservative administration apparently agreed and had replaced Income Support with Jobseekers Allowance requiring recipients to provide proof they were actively seeking work. The stage was therefore set for New Labour to tackle the problem of welfare in their distinct way, and thus the "New Deal" was introduced.

1.7. New Deal for Lone Parents

Having left behind the redistributive agenda, New Labour introduced two weapons they claimed would tackle social exclusion. The first, "New Deal" was formulated before the election and was included in the party manifesto and was to be financed by a windfall tax from privatised utilities. The second, the Social Exclusion Unit, was charged with identifying and tackling the consequences of social exclusion and formulating and supporting policies that may address this.

In its pre-election form, "New Deal" was aimed at three groups considered to face particular difficulties in accessing employment; young people aged between 18 and 24, the long term unemployed and lone parents. The rationale underpinning the generic New Deal programme appeared to demonstrate how New Labour were committed to addressing the problem of welfare and in so doing would influence other concerns voiced about those parts of society in need of reintegration into the mainstream. Whilst the first two components of New Deal, young people and long term unemployed, are integral to the whole project, it is the latter, New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), which is central to this thesis.

NDLP proposals were unveiled by Harriet Harman, the then Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, in 1996. Under NDLP claimants with children over the age of 5 years and 3 months[4] (referred to as "target") would be invited to participate

[4] No specific justification for this age was given.

in the programme (lone parents with children under this age (("non target") may opt in), and would be offered help and advice on jobs, benefits, training and childcare, through the provision of a designated advisor. Phase one of NDLP was piloted in eight benefits areas in July and August 1997. In April 1998 all target new claimants were to be invited to join and by October 1998 the scheme was extended to all claimants (DSS 1998).

It was however recognised by Government that if it were to keep its pledge to "*make work pay*", the issue of low pay needed to be addressed and as such the National Minimum Wage (NWM) was introduced in April 1999. In addition to making work a more attractive proposition, the minimum wage was flagged as contributing to social justice by tackling both exploitation and inequality in the labour market. Set at that time at £3.60 per hour for individuals over 21, Government claimed some 2 million people would immediately benefit from its introduction. Others however were less optimistic. The Low Pay Unit (1999) predicted that any rate below £4.94 would have negligible effect upon those on such low pay and as such was, although a step in the right direction, a smokescreen to appease traditional Labour voters. Nevertheless, NMW was seen by Government as being integral to their welfare reform package and, combined with a reduction of the taper for in-work benefits, such as Working Families Tax Credit, and a national childcare strategy with publicly funded nursery places for all four year olds, the poverty trap would be eliminated and the pledge to end child poverty within 20 years would have a solid foundation upon which to build. Yet, whilst much of the flagging of NDLP was presented as a opportunity for lone parents to access the labour market, financial considerations for the Treasury were never far behind. A commitment to ensuring that absent fathers would be held financially accountable for their children was made and a press release by Harman made clear the financial costs to the taxpayer, suggesting that every lone parent cost the Treasury £10,000 per annum if dependant upon benefits for their entire income.

Initial assessments indicated a satisfactory start for NDLP. Woodfield and Finch (1999) claim that of the 3,963 lone parents participating in NDLP, 1,289 (33%) had found work, (it must however be noted that over 22,000 lone parents were originally invited), whilst in

June 1998, Harman claimed that lone parents who had been helped into work by NDLP were £39 per week better off, and that their benefit dependency had been reduced by £42 per week. Other preliminary assessments were equally optimistic. Measuring the NDLP effect in the pilot areas against control areas, Hales, Shaw and Roth (1998) found that there had been a 4.5% move off income support in pilot areas compared to 3.1 % in control areas. They added that control area labour market conditions were more favourable so these figures may actually underestimate the New Deal effect. Further research conduced on behalf of the Benefits Agency was however not so optimistic. Hales' (2000 (a)) assessment of the pilot stage of NDLP suggested that whilst NDLP has had some success, this was primarily with those who were already committed to starting work in the short term, or those who may have done so in any case.

Not all however were overly impressed with NDLP principles. Lone parent groups, such as Gingerbread have welcomed NDLP as a positive step but remained somewhat cautious regarding its success. In response to New Deal legislation they highlighted an array of factors needing consideration if New Deal is to have lasting and measurable benefits. These included gender discrimination in the workplace, deregulation and casualisation of wages and conditions of employment, the lack of a comprehensive national childcare strategy and regional variations in the economic environment which could all potentially undermine the effects NDLP may have (Gingerbread 1998). They also stress the importance of NDLP remaining voluntary. The right of a lone parent to stay home with her/his child(ren) they believe is fundamental.

This indeed was a concession given to NDLP. Under the other elements of the New Deal programme, claimants were required to take part in the programme under the threat of sanction. Appearing to recognise the unique difficulties lone parents may face, lone parents were under no such compulsion, but were merely invited to attend an interview. As of April 2001 however, all lone parents in the target group, making a new or repeat claim, were required to attend an interview. For those lone parents already claiming income support (IS), a rolling programme dependent upon the age of the youngest child is to be extended so that by 2003/2004, all lone parents will be required to attend. For

new claimants who fail to attend, no IS payments will be made, whilst for existing claimants, failure to take part will lead to a reduction of 20% of their personal allowance (£10.60 in 2001/2002). Darling (2001) claimed, despite the findings of Hales (2000), this was because: "*We know from the results of the NDLP programme that getting advice and support about work, childcare and training can only benefit lone parents.*"

1.8. Gender, The Concept of Care and Child Free Time

What comes through with the discussion above is that whilst NDLP may be designed to offer lone parents greater tailor made opportunities to access paid work, the programme could be said to be gender neutral. That is, whilst focusing upon parenthood in its widest terms, it does not narrow the debate to look at parenthood in terms of motherhood specifically. The previous section paid some attention to this, and it will be addressed in more detail presently, but one has to recognise that gender discrimination in the workplace, allied to parenting preferences, does impact upon not only the decision of lone mothers to attempt to secure adequate paid employment, but also the ability to do so. This, not only in relation to that of partnered mothers, but also in relation to lone fathers.

Labour Market Trends (2002) describe how employment rates for partnered mothers stood at 70.2% compared to 50.3% for lone mothers. Additionally, 33.5% of lone mothers with child dependants aged 0-5 were in paid employment, compared to 58% of partnered mothers. This trend is continued in a comparison between lone fathers and lone mothers. Lone fathers with children aged 0-5 are reported as having a 47.7% employment rate, some 15% higher than their female counterparts. This needs to be set into the context of wider work patterns where male economic activity rates stand at 84% whilst female economic activity rates are reported as being 73%. However of all those being classified as being economically active, women are 5 times more likely to be in part time employment than men, equating to 44% and 8% of total female and male economic activity respectively (Social Trends 2003).

Warren (2000), in an analysis of the 1995 British Household Panel Survey, concluded that women are far more likely to be in poorly paid work than men and continues that, if not necessarily the status of the work, but whether women worked full time or part time did appear to be predicated upon caring responsibilities. Further to this, a process of what she terms *"working class jobs for working class women"*(p7) had occurred, where lower status, poorly paid work was predominately carried out by women with lower and/or less qualifications. However Warren concludes that whilst the perception of gender roles, in terms of its influences upon parenting and caring, may not be enough to explain the heterogeneous nature of part time female employees, class is[5]. That is, the underpinning of the diverse nature of female (mothers) employment is driven by class, in that those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale have fewer resources to mitigate the effects of societal expectations of parenthood, or to be more precise, motherhood. Gender inequality therefore is most pronounced at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Indeed, it is especially felt by those in this socio-economic position when caring obligations are at their most intense.

The result of the above is that, as reported by the Cabinet Office (2000), women are likely to experience what they describe as the "female forfeit". That is, over the life course, women's earning are likely to be far below that of men. The report highlights how, as a result of a variety of factors, such as differing educational achievements; lack of promotion; pay discrimination and fewer working hours, a childless woman is likely to earn in the region of £200,000 less than a man. This gap however can widen to the region of £500,000 in the case of a woman with two children. This "mother gap", as it is termed, is a result of the time away from the workforce to have children, and the reduced number of hours worked when the mother returns to paid work. This all has to be put into the context of job segregation whereby much of the work available to women is gender specific, thereby less *economically* valuable.

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[5] The determination of women's "class" can be a contentious issue. Warren acknowledges this and provides evidence of how women's class were determined in isolation to their male partners.

The conclusion one may draw from this is that a myriad of factors conspire to produce gender inequality in the workplace. Warren (2000) does attempt to analyse gender within a class context on the basis of empirical data, but also acknowledges that the overall answer lies with an analysis where gender is the starting point and then moves on to consider socio-economics. It is indeed the issue of gender that remains the focal point in any discussion of the differences in male and female access to the workplace. Notwithstanding the issue of class, a factor that does precede this is the issue of caring and the gendered assumptions this is founded on. Gregory et al (2001) draw attention to how power disparities between men and women result in a categorisation between those who choose to care, often fathers and other men, and those who must care, mothers and other women[6]. The contradiction is that whilst traditional models of care within the context of gender remain, even though policy is formulated to allow women easier access to paid work, traditional caring models are yet to be seriously challenged (McKie et al 2002). Indeed, Ford (1996) found that only 5% of his sample of lone parents cite childcare as the only barrier to paid employment, with 42% suggesting it was that their children needed their mother at home as the major obstacle. Thus the assumption that the availability and adequacy of childcare is enough to persuade women to (re)enter the workforce ignores the less obvious dynamics of the gendered nature of caring and, in this case, motherhood in particular.

One method for viewing these dynamics in relation to care is through the concept of *caringscapes*, as developed by McKie et al (2001). The essence of *caringscapes* is that the caring experience's of individuals must be seen within the context of spatial and temporal influences whereby carers navigate a way through their care providing responsibilities. Whilst it is acknowledged that some can plan a way through these *"terrains"* (p5), often plans are subject to wider influences, such as changing social policy, availability of resources, the influence and needs of the cared for, and crucially here, conventional gendered prescriptions. Thus care and caring needs cannot be seen as static, they change in relation to a plethora of influences that are in turn influenced by where the carer and/or the cared for may be and when they are actually there. Gregory et

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[6] It is acknowledged that male lone parents would fall into this category.

al (2003) conclude that unless policy, and specifically NDLP, takes into account the lived experiences of parents, most notably that of mothers, a gap between what is provided and what is needed will remain and this will inevitably impact upon overall policy aims. Yet despite an array of initiatives by Government attempting to support parent's childcare needs, this gap remains. Noble, Smith and Cheung (1998) describe how many lone mothers have to rely on informal networks of childcare, and whilst this may not always be free, it was both the only affordable care available and the only care able to cope with different demands in terms of irregular hours worked and/or children's time off school.

Another dimension worthy of some consideration at this point is that discussion of childcare is focused on the needs of the parent/worker, with no attention given to the needs of the parent/carer. Childcare is thus described in terms of its relationship with work and the access it allows to the workplace, hence the demands of care itself are unacknowledged. An argument could be made that this is reflective of how childcare is viewed in relation to other forms of caring. If one considers the Department of Health document, Caring About Carers (2003), which describes carers as *"people who look after a relative or friend who need support because of age, physical or learning disability or illness, including mental illness"*. A parent/worker however is "*a parent of a disabled child"*. There is no doubt that parents of children with special needs may need extra support, but it is somewhat telling that age is thus defined as old age and the emotional and physical demands of raising children are given less prominence.

To place this into some context Graham (1984 p170) quotes earlier studies where friends, neighbours and families are less willing to offer help to lone mothers as opposed to partnered mothers, and describes situations whereby the more help with caring that is needed, in terms of emotional support, the less that is offered. The result of this is a continued growth in the isolation experienced by the lone parent leading to an increase in the levels of stress experienced and indeed it would appear this trend has continued (Benzeval 1998). This clearly may impact upon the ability and/or willingness of the individual to consider a change in lifestyle direction and thus may have direct

consequences upon policy aims[7]. One has to consider here that whereas in partnered couples, notwithstanding the gendered nature of caring, respite from caring responsibilities may be available, it would appear that for a lone parent this respite may not be as forthcoming.

Yet despite the trials and difficulties associated with caring, the caring relationship between mother and children remains a powerful determinant in the formation of the self concept[8]. Watson et al (2002) draw attention to how the allocation of care to women provides a vehicle to publicly demonstrate both femininity and the social and economic functions society prescribes. Leyens et al (1994) do draw attention to how this self concept effects behavioural intentions in that who, or what, we consider we are, or may be, has direct influence upon what we choose do or what we choose not to do. The implication is that the caring relationship informs both the carer and the cared for, and that this in turn has direct consequences as to any decisions that may be take as to the model of care that may be provided.

1.9. Economic Rationality

The justification for NDLP has always rested on claims that research suggests lone parents want to work. However, a more accurate description is that most want to work at some point in the future (CSJ 1994). Levitas (1998) makes the point that after the introduction of NDLP, Harman's defence of the programme was to be found, more often than not, located within a moral discourse. She reiterated that money was not the only aim of NDLP, but that by breaking the cycle of dependency, self esteem and independence may be raised, and children of lone parents will now have positive role models on which to base their behaviour. Clearly then parenthood without work is deemed the wrong type of parenthood.

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[7] The effect of this will be discussed specifically in a forthcoming Chapter.
[8] This is addressed in detail in Chapter 5.

Nevertheless the success of NDLP hinges upon the decisions taken of each lone parent to participate. Government believe that if financial rewards are adequate, this will provide enough of an incentive for lone parents to embrace the philosophy of NDLP and therefore the programme will be of benefit to both the government and to lone parents. This however pre-supposes that lone parents are likely to adopt a stance of economic rationality and that the cost-benefits analysis will be the one that will have the greatest influence. This has been criticised, not least in Bradford University's seminar series: *Parenting, Motherhood and Paid Work: Rationalities and Ambivalences* (1999). This section will draw upon three papers presented there.

Duncan and Edwards (1999) argued that the crux of government policy implies an economic rationality whereby personal financial goals are the overriding motivation for behaviour. Thus if policies are in place that allow financial improvement, and if NDLP is able to present available information as to how this financial improvement may be made through integrated measures, such as Working Families Tax Credit, behaviour modification will follow. However, what if this model of economic rationality is not how lone parents make decisions about how they will raise their children and how they will combine the role of mother and worker? The central argument is therefore that lone parents may be guided by motivations other than that of economic rationality. They suggest that socially prescribed rules over duties as a parent and carer rather than parent and financial provider, may have more influence. In other words, a different rationality may drive lone parents insofar as a moral rationality may be of greatest concern. Where compulsion is concerned, large numbers of lone mothers may be forced to do what they consider to be morally wrong.

Glover (1999) follows the same line of argument and suggests that the basis of government's response to lone parenthood assumes a dual role theory whereby lone parents separate their roles of parent and worker and alternate between the two. She suggests this is too simplistic a concept since as the relationship between the two spheres of women's lives are subject to cultural norms and expectations concerning what may constitute effective motherhood. She argues that women are more likely to attempt to

juggle the two spheres rather than separate them, thus the provision of structures that allow women to access employment may not necessarily lead to greater numbers of women accessing paid employment. She maintains that women are active decision makers but acknowledges that cultural expectations influence decisions taken.

Martell and Driver (1999) go further. They suggest that the focus on paid work undermines the priority given to the family, which is based upon unpaid parental work. Contradictions abound. New Labour do not put economic value on unpaid work but do recognise its importance in child rearing. Inclusion for the child is centred around family and parenting, yet inclusion for the adult is linked to work.

Himmelweit (1999) also draws attention to the cultural expectations of parenthood, but further asserts that models of economic rationality are not equipped to explain fully motivations for parenthood. She argues that child rearing is an investment, but the returns for this investment are relational rather then economic. Thus whereas in classic economic theory relationships are reducible to contracts of exchange, here the investment is based upon altruism, rather than the motivation of reward.

The message that comes through from the seminar series is that a whole array of factors need to be considered before one can make a definitive statement about what will be the best method to enable lone parents to access employment. The reliance upon a system based upon economic rationality may therefore be limited. Cultural expectations need to be considered with individual motivations, thus choices and constraints may exist simultaneously and operate on a variety of levels, these often varying from individual to individual.

1.1.1 New Labour and Social Exclusion

"Poverty and social exclusion affect many different aspects of people's lives. They exist when people are denied opportunities to work, to learn, to live healthy, active and fulfilling lives..."

Department of Social Security September 1999 (p2)

Supporting NDLP is the notion that the programme will have lasting effect upon the social exclusion faced by lone parents. However if one were to consider the statement above, it is apparent that the key to addressing social exclusion is located within the principles laid out earlier. Government provide opportunities, the socially excluded should access them. Thus in true communitarian fashion the onus is on the individual to give back to the system. However, the shift in focus from regarding disadvantaged groups as suffering poverty, to identifying them as being socially excluded is itself problematic on a variety of levels. At its most fundamental level one should consider the metaphor itself, and this has been succinctly addressed by Judge (1995).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that human thought is metaphorical, thus, metaphorical thinking underlies all of our statements about the world, and all of our understanding of the world. If we think of society as essentially homogeneous, then those outside society, the excluded, are, by definition, different. Judge argues the use of such metaphors implies a mechanistic problem, (they are shut out), and thus a mechanistic solution (let them in). Put in this manner, the metaphor encourages the excluded to get "in". As Judge points out, what else is suggested? But what if those who are in, do not want to allow entry to the outsiders? How, he argues, would "in" be transformed? Is there room inside for all? The "exclusion" metaphor may therefore be highly motivating for those outside, but not so for those inside. The dynamics of individualism may not necessarily make those inside ready to make room for the outsiders. Thus, he continues,

the competitive nature of society ensures that status is derived from exclusivity. Conspicuous consumption fuelled by advertising and imagery provides a powerful motivation to maintain status whether that be at the expense of the excluded or not.

Judge offers a somewhat simplistic answer to this by proposing a mind shift, not looking at inclusion with an economic yardstick, but as an expression of quality of relationships and "community". This he suggests can be the basis of sustainable growth in the quality of life enjoyed by the excluded. If we can separate life quality from commercial interests, the excluded may find ways they can enjoy the benefits of the included even if economic progression (another metaphor) is not attained.

Whether Judge's answer is a realistic short term goal or not is debatable. The pressures to succeed financially on the excluded are just the same as those on the included. Further, some may argue this is a somewhat patronising attempt to determine what the problems are for the excluded, as it suggests that quality of relationships for the insiders are not without problems. One could also argue that Judge's assessment, however well meaning, would further perpetuate the distinction between those inside and outside. Economic success is preserved for the already included, whilst success for the excluded is defined in different terms.

Whatever one may think of Judge's overall solution, he does raise an important issue. Poverty is about lack of resources, but social exclusion can be relative to whatever one would care to define inclusion as. Thus if there are different expressions of exclusion, one can have different discourses about how to tackle it. Levitas (1998) makes this point, suggesting that the current debate surrounding social exclusion has at its core three main elements. The redistributive discourse, termed RED, the moral underclass discourse (MUD) and the social integrationist discourse (SID). Table 1 overleaf provides a summary of the characteristics of Levitas' categorisation.

Table 1. Causes and Solutions to Social Exclusion			
	RED	***MUD***	***SID***
Causes of exclusion	Emphasis on poverty as prime cause of exclusion	Emphasis on pathological behaviour as prime cause of exclusion	Emphasis on unemployment as prime cause of exclusion
Relationship to benefits	Benefits should be increased to tackle exclusion	Benefits create exclusion by promoting dependency	In work benefits can be used to increase employment
Solution to exclusion	Redistribution of resources and power	Challenge dependency culture	Increased opportunities to paid work

Taken from Levitas 1998

The discourse surrounding RED can be identified with the approach of Old Labour. Many commentators, perhaps most notably Townsend (1979) have identified social deprivation as an integral factor in the lives of low income groups but came to the conclusion that the solution for such problems lay in tackling societal structures via resource redistribution. However, the currently dominant definition of social exclusion, certainly that favoured by New Labour, has tended to define **exclusion** in terms of the **social,** using an arbitrary definition as to what the **social** constitutes (Gordon 1998). This theme is continued by Gordon who suggests that the social exclusion debate is no longer defined by the consequences of social injustice, but has become redefined to include the threat posed to social order and social cohesion. The danger for Gordon is that this redefinition (taking on much that is suggested by Murray (1990); Dennis and Erdos (1993); Mead (1998), weak labour market attachment and benefit dependency as a primary feature of social exclusion), narrows the debate insofar as employment becomes the overriding objective for policy direction and in doing so ignores other fundamental obstacles the socially excluded may face.

Levitas (1998) concurs with Gordon, arguing that the current policy approach to social exclusion has at its core two basic principles, each fashioned by a definition of what the **social** actually constitutes:

- The **social** defined as paid income (work).
- The **social** defined by the moral behaviour of the individual and fit with perceived societal norms and customs.

Levitas goes on to suggest that the central assumption of this response is that mainstream society is benign, but, she continues, the various social and economic dynamics of the "included" (the employed), remain underestimated (p 26). The behaviourist position also may not take fully into account the effects of the macro economic conditions that exist, for example, long term unemployment, whilst at the same time contributing to the stigma associated with variant lifestyle choices (e.g. lone parenthood) (p 21).

Thus for Levitas the approach to social exclusion is firmly located within, and alternates between, both MUD and SID. However, she makes a salient point in that whereas RED, SID and MUD all accept that paid work can reduce exclusion, only RED adds the proviso that it must also reduce poverty (p169). Indeed the question could be asked whether social exclusion is a way of downplaying a focus on poverty. If SID and MUD are focussed upon equality of opportunity, and accessing those opportunities, it marks a distinct shift from Old Labour's previous aim of equality of outcome, toward a focus upon equality of opportunity.

There are however certain advantages to using social exclusion as opposed to poverty to measure disadvantage. Social exclusion can emphasise multi-dimensional factors which are often combined with money-poverty, some of which can be addressed more through reorganisation of patterns of life than through financial investment. This concept reminds us that some problems faced by the excluded would not necessarily be solved even if their income were significantly increased, although this might of course help. Etzioni's communitarian agenda is one example. The concept of social exclusion also suggests the

ways that hardship and marginalisation result from a combination of social processes, rather than being a fixed consequence of a stratified social system. In this way, social exclusion is helpful as a framework for identifying the particular barriers faced by specific groups of people, for example lone parents, the elderly etc, as they make efforts to take part in social life as fully as possible.

The Government's defined key to social inclusion however remains paid work (DSS 1999). Indeed, the focus of NDLP is one of economics, (reducing the burden to the taxpayer through paid work for the target group), but, Evason and Robinson (1998) demonstrated that even with work the tangible benefits may be minimal. This is a central point to commentators such as Levitas (1997) and Gordon (1999) in that by defining inclusion by work and exclusion by unemployment, the dynamics of, for example low pay, remain ignored. This assessment is confirmed by Dooley et al (2000) who found that analysing employment, not as a dichotomy between working and not working, but along a continuum from adequate employment through to inadequate employment (involuntary part time or low wage) to unemployment, produced results suggesting that both of the latter categories did impact upon the quality of life (especially in terms of mental health) of their study sample.

Lone parents are however somewhat sceptical with regards to incentives to return to work (Evason and Robinson 1998). Concerns were based upon the uncertainty of regular employment, loss of some means tested benefits (housing benefit, free school meals, school uniform grants etc), childcare arrangements and other practical issues lone parents may face. This research also demonstrated that psychological processes may be just as important in preventing lone parents from entering the workplace. Concerns over the ability to provide effective parenting were paramount in the decisions made. This, together with the recognised psychological barriers those outside the workforce may experience in accessing paid work, may conspire to provide insurmountable hurdles for some of the target population of NDLP.

Hales (2000 (a)) demonstrated that NDLP can have a positive albeit limited effect, however the report also suggested greater success may have been found if the prototype had been able to develop links with other complementary services available. This is perhaps a crucial point in the assessment of NDLP. The report acknowledges that one of the limitations of NDLP is that few resources are allocated towards building self-esteem and raising self-confidence within volunteers in their ability to find employment. Yet the report also indicates that over 25% of those finding employment through NDLP, did so, not because of NDLP identifying appropriate employment, but because the personal advisor helped to raise confidence and foster a "*positive attitude*".

Developing a "positive attitude" is perhaps the key to success for NDLP. Media portrayals of lone parents (especially never married mothers) places them firmly outside mainstream society (Millar 1998) and reinforcement of such stereotypes can have damaging effect upon the self esteem of the individuals in question. Winefield et al (1993) argue that this can lead to internal causal attribution of their position, where those in question view themselves as failures, rather than acknowledging the limitations of society in providing opportunities. If this is so, then the exclusion is not only structural, but psychological, and returning to what social exclusion is, it must include the whole experience of the **social**, in terms of the lack of integration into society. Indeed, the comment made by Darling (1999): *"Poverty today is complex. It's not just a simple problem about money, to be solved through cash alone"*, and that an integral part of the problem remains *"a poverty of expectation"* take on clearer meaning when viewed in these terms.

Bryson, Ford and White (1997) found that lone mothers can be better off both materially and perhaps mentally (Dooley 2000) and that both are affected by the qualifications individuals may or may not have. They also point to the fact that those without any qualifications were likely to continue to receive some in-work benefits whilst also being highly likely to be receiving low pay[9]. They further describe how opportunities for

[9] Average hourly pay for lone mothers was £4.23, with an average of 21.5 hours per week worked (Hales et al 2000 (b))

personal development and/or training were extremely limited for manual workers or those without prior qualifications (a majority of lone mothers), further entrenching their economic position. The report concludes that this can only be overcome by the setting of a medium term agenda that targets lone mothers specifically and provides appropriate training and education to those on the way towards being ready to enter the workplace. It does however emphasise that the geographical location of such initiatives is an important feature as to how successful they will be in terms of accessibility, as is the provision of adequate childcare facilities.

In summary, whilst NDLP is a positive step forward, both structural and psychological barriers remain. These barriers that can hinder the step into employment, and once there, other barriers may prevent lone parents from becoming fully self-sufficient and prevent the Governments' aim of further reducing the overall burden to the taxpayer.

1.1.2 Small Scale Community Based Interventions

Whilst NDLP is designed to operate at a macro level, at the micro level are small scale community based initiatives. It is however problematic to attempt to provide a blanket definition as to what such schemes attempt to provide. For example, the highly successful scheme *"New Opportunities for Women"* based in Croydon, teaches basic catering, nutritional and budgetary skills alongside I.T. and job-search training (Merrick 1997). Other schemes, such as the London based "*Training for Life"* emphasise the importance of paid work but sees this as best achieved through a combination of both skill development and personal growth (Training for Life 2002). Others schemes, such as Liverpool One Parent Family Trust simply offer advice and support as and when required.

What is apparent is that such schemes can include dimensions from a radical community work perspective with the emphasis upon equality of outcome, and from a more politically expedient perspective with the focus upon equality of opportunity. This is perhaps not surprising as community practitioners have had to shift focus to include

aspects concerned with economic development, rather than only focus upon social justice, in order to gain funding (Ledwith 2001 p173). This is perhaps exemplified by the fact that funders for the "Training for Life" programme includes European, central and local government. Alternatively, The Liverpool One Parent Family Trust receives no government funding and is wholly reliant upon charitable donations. It is not the case that community development is incompatible with economic development, but in the application of community based programs, the boundary may become somewhat blurred.

This can be a perennial problem for those involved in assessing the effectiveness of such programs. Given that tangible objective targets may have to be set to access funds, and the objectives then met to secure additional funding, the measure of success is often dependent upon the original criteria set with other less obvious benefits either undervalued or ignored. For example, the *New Opportunities for Women* initiative found that a spin off of the initiative was the way the women involved had developed informal networks of mutual support that went beyond the boundaries of the scheme (Merrick 1997).

If this is the case it provides an opportunity to draw together the different strands of community development and justify how the term "community initiative" or "community scheme" is used within this thesis. Given some of the benefits of initiatives primarily concerned with micro economic development may be the same as those with a more radical focus, community initiatives in this thesis will be taken to mean those that:

- are established to address local needs;
- are aimed at those in the local geographic community;
- recruit participants on a voluntary basis;
- are able to provide the opportunity to develop systems of mutual support;
- have some focus upon personal development.

1.1.3. The Rationale Of Small Scale Interventions

The rationale of NDLP is that improvement of income of the target population will facilitate an improvement in the spectrum of indicators of inclusion. For example, self esteem, attitudes towards self-health, it may raise expectations, may combat depression, may improve motivation and may change the perception of lifestyle issues of lone parents (DSS 1999). However, given the evidence presented above by Bryson, Ford and White (1997), that whilst NDLP does indeed facilitate a return to the workplace for some, many of these indictors of exclusion remain. Small scale community initiatives on the other hand, can attempt to focus upon psychological indicators first. For some, their philosophy is that if hidden barriers to inclusion are tackled as a by product of training and education, the excluded may be able to achieve a greater level of inclusion even without the benefits of paid work. (This was a point originally raised by Townsend (1979) who suggested that the negative effects of lack of material resources were often tempered by, amongst other things, good social networks and by good mental health). This is perhaps the crux of what some community interventions are attempting to achieve. For example, the "Liverpool First" (1999) wider regeneration strategy, accepts employment as being only one of series of indicators that define the exclusion a community, and the individuals within that community, may face. Equal focus is placed upon spiritual, physical and mental well-being, upon the development of good social support networks, accessible recreational activities and upon the fostering of greater community involvement in decision making processes. The DfEE have recognised that such initiatives may have a role to play within the "back to work" programme and have commissioned research into this area.

1.1.4. The Benefits of Work

The rationale of this study is to attempt to determine if the scope of policy in both the statutory and the voluntary sector is enough to facilitate a change in the experiences of lone parents. As discussed previously however, the focus of government policy is to set in place mechanisms that allow a return to the workplace for lone parents. This, they have argued, is enough to combat the consequences of the process of social exclusion many

face. Given the inclusion of mental health in the indicators of social exclusion and also given, as previously stated, lone parents are likely to be in low pay, and indeed stay in low pay, it is worthwhile briefly visiting the literature as to determine what the psychological benefits of work may be.

Jahoda (1982) offers a conceptual framework within which it is argued paid work is not just a vital economic function but a central social institution also suggesting work has five underlying functions that bind the actor with reality. It imposes time structure, provides social contact with those outside the family, gives common purpose, it gives an individual identity and it enforces activity. Jahoda (p61) further asserts these functions cannot be reproduced by anything other than work and therefore any work is better than no work at all. For the majority of people, the workplace is now the sole institution capable of satisfying these psychological needs; needs she suggest are essential to mental well being. Jahoda recognises but rejects the value of voluntary work in that activity is not enforced, but chosen, thus time structure is not imposed, but is also freely chosen. The actor thus has the ability to ignore these element if they so wish without (financial) penalty (p72).

This approach has been criticised, not least by Fryer (1986), who suggested that its basis is one of control. It assumes that people are intrinsically dependent upon outside forces to give purpose and definition to existence. Alternatively, Fryer proposed Agency Theory, starting from the assumption that people are agents who attempt to assert themselves, who are motivated and independent. Fryer suggests that whilst the economic consequences of non-employment may impair agency, this can be moderated by maintaining an optimistic outlook as to what the future may hold.

Whilst these two views provide somewhat of a bi-polar assessment, perhaps a more flexible framework of analysis can be found within Warr's Vitamin Model (1987). Although Warr used this model to pay particular attention to the settings of paid work and unemployment, he does suggest that its features may be studied in a variety of environments (1987 p1). The Vitamin Model identifies a variety of environmental

features that appear to have a curvilinear relationship with mental health. Just as vitamins effect physical health, Warr maintains that these components affect mental health in a similar manner. Warr, unlike Jahoda, recognises the distinction between good and bad employment but further draws no definitive distinction between employment and unemployment. Just as some work based environments may either benefit or hinder, so may some non work based, for example, educational environments. Given the model can be applied in the context of work, training, education, non-paid employment, under employment and unemployment, it gives considerable scope within which to approach the data. For this reason it is worth spending a little time to become familiar with the arguments presented. The following components make up the model, however it does have to recognised that overlaps will exist between the different features and therefore some theoretical arguments will be applicable across more than one feature.

1. Opportunity for control
2. Opportunity for skill use
3. Externally generated goals
4. Variety
5. Environmental clarity
6. Availability of money
7. Physical security
8. Opportunity for interpersonal contact
9. Valued social position

Opportunity for control

Warr (p4) argued opportunity for control has two essential features. The opportunity to choose a given action and the potential to predict the outcome of that action. Warr starts with this component as he suggests that if this feature is addressed the remaining features of the model may be maintained, or even improved, with greater ease. This feature is clearly linked to an examination of locus of control (Rotter 1966) whereby an internal locus of control can not only help individuals cope better with challenges, but also

maintain a more positive outlook as to how they may cope with fresh challenges. A parallel to this may be found within Seligman's (1975) approach of Learned Helplessness, whereby individuals may become trapped by their situation due to lack of confidence concerning their ability to influence events. This in turn can then have negative effects upon health.

Opportunity for skill use

Warr's second feature, opportunity for skill use, emphasises the manner in which an environment may encourage or discourage the use and development of skills. Warr (p4) suggests an environment that allows the development of new skills also encourages the setting and meeting of targets. Warr further argues that skills use may imply a level of control over the environment and therefore has to be seen within the context of the previous feature.

Externally generated goals

Warr here make the point that externally generated goals need not necessarily be externally generated requirements. Whereas Jahoda's (1982) assertion was that work was necessary to impose structure on the individual, Warr's point is precisely that because they are imposed they become demands or requirements instead (p5). Goals, Warr argues, can be a label that can be applied to targets that may be both voluntary or imposed. The point here may be made that whereas demands from an environment may lead to a specific behaviour, it is nevertheless only behaviour as a response to a specific condition. As with a symbolic interactionist approach, it may not necessarily have meaning for the worker/actor. Self selected goals however may be generated by the environment that imply meaning for the individual and thus may link onto a development of a sense of agency and control for the individual.

Variety

Warr approaches this feature mainly from the perspective of work, suggesting the repetitive nature of some work environments may not be wholly conducive to mental well being (p6) and indeed may even be counter-productive. However, the inclusion of this component in the model demonstrates its flexibility insofar as it allows analysis across the different environments the study population may operate in. Implicit in this is the acceptance of parenthood itself as an occupation. However it also allows education, training and indeed attendance of support groups to be treated analogous.

Warr (p96) cites two studies (Johansson 1978 and Riskind 1983) that demonstrate the benefits of variety and although both studies were primarily concerned with the workplace, they do suggest that environmental variety does have positive effect upon mental well being.

Environmental clarity

The essential feature of this component rests on the clarity of feedback and predictability of behaviour. If an environment can provide clarity as to the consequences of behaviour, actions may be performed in line with normative expectations of behaviour. Warr cites a number of studies suggesting a positive relationship between feedback of actions and job motivation and intrinsic motivation (p146) and further suggests this is essential is the improvement of opportunities for control and skill use.

Availability of money

This has been touched upon earlier within the context of social exclusion, but, perhaps a telling point in its inclusion in this model is that it demonstrates that even in paid employment, finance can remain a major issue.

Physical security

As with the previous feature, it is telling that Warr choose to include physical security within his assessment of work and mental health (p6-7). Warr demonstrates here, both implicitly and explicitly, that environments entirely outside the workplace exert influence in the workplace. The essential dimension of this feature of the model draws upon Maslow's hierarchal of needs (1954) whereby basic needs, such as shelter and safety, remain a prerequisite of future development. Within this model, unless these needs are addressed, higher needs such as self esteem and self confidence cannot be achieved. Perhaps the most important feature of this model is that it accepts individuals to be self motivated acting on demands they consider important, and thus may not necessarily be able to be manipulated by the promise or threat of reward or sanction.

Opportunity for interpersonal contact

Argyle (1972) identified three overriding reasons why people work. Whilst the first two are respectively concerned with economic rationality and social currency, the third is centred upon the need for social contact. (He further suggests this is the main motivation for women returning to work after rearing children[10]). This gives some credence to the findings of Lin and Ensel (1984) who found that increased social support had a significant influence in the reduction of depression.

Valued social position

The final aspect is concerned with the value ascribed by others to a specific social position. Applied to occupation specifically, Maier (1955) demonstrated how judgements are made according to either the occupation or occupational class of an individual or group. We can of course extend this somewhat wider insofar as inferences are made of some social groups by the wider population, not only concerning employment of lack of employment, but also in consideration of lifestyle choices. Indeed the stigma attached to

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[10] This is of course somewhat dated and ignores the motivation for financial independence.

some groups, and their presumed behaviours may become manifest in self-fulfilling prophecies and thus may effect the other features previously identified in the model.

1.1.5. The Influence of Media

If one is attempting to measure in some way the perception the public may have of lone parenthood, the limited nature of truly independent research into this area at once raises problematic issues. If one were to accept that there is a gap in the literature as to this particular issue, one may only estimate if stigma does indeed exist in examining what has been written about lone parents, by whom, when, and how this has, and is, shaping policy. Whilst this may not provide conclusive evidence as to the levels of stigmatisation experienced by lone parents it may provide a pointer as to the nature of the stigmatising process and give a flavour as to its content.

One may identify three strands of this stigmatising process. Academic arguments may provide the foundations of the views put forward, whilst the representation of lone parenthood within the media may give an indication of the information the public receive. Finally Government policy and rhetoric may provide an indication as to how central Government is developing its response in order to keep pace with changing family forms.

Lone parents have been long been subject to intense scrutiny and a wealth of research exists suggesting lone parents are likely to suffer hardship and disadvantage (Chandler 1991; Hardley and Crow 1991; Morris 1996). Marsh and McKay (1993) identified lone mothers as being particularly susceptible to financial hardship, whilst Ford et al (1995) found 25% of lone mothers to be in severe hardship at any one time and up to 40% as experiencing severe hardship within the previous three years. Whilst these figures may not be in any doubt, and whilst there is an acceptance that levels of State support is a contributory factor, a separation does appear when attempting to determine the dynamics that underpin the figures.

One explanation for this is based upon society's reluctance to embrace the changing nature of family composition and provide mechanisms whereby lone parents have the opportunity and support to be able to achieve greater levels of income, (providing of course they can find paid employment with sufficient wages and organise childcare). This line of argument is concerned with the gendered nature of both the workplace and overall social policy and suggests that they both are to a large extent dominated by assumptions made in the Beveridge report concerning the role of women as firstly housewives and mothers, and secondly, generators of income. The underlying feature of the assessment is that, in short, the fact that lone parents are so susceptible to financial hardship, and its consequences, is no surprise given the inadequacy of benefit levels. Furthermore the nature of society and indeed social policy presents often insurmountable barriers for lone parents to overcome these inequalities.

Counter to this argument is one as presented by, amongst others, Murray (1994) who, as seen earlier, suggests that the growth of lone parenthood is both a symptom and a cause in the breakdown of the social norms valued by society. This line of argument rejects the notion that benefit levels are too low, instead suggesting that it is the benevolence of the welfare state that has contributed to the rising number of lone parents and fostered a culture of dependency. Only by challenging this culture of dependency may the cycle may be broken and thus the next generation may be socialised into accepting the values of mainstream society.

Whilst commentators such as Murray emphasise such morality from an economic viewpoint, others, such as Phillips (1997), approach the subject with a more traditionally based moralistic judgement. Phillips suggests that successful societies are often built upon the premise that mothers are dependent and should be financially supported by the man who has fathered the children (p122). She goes on to suggest that single lone mothers are poor because they are "unwed", and that the only viable option is to reverse this "cultural slide" (p125).

1.1.6. Lone Parents In The Media

"Single mothers, and the dependency culture that surrounds them, is perhaps the most pressing social problem this country faces"
Daily Mail (11/07/98).

Whilst some would argue the above quotation to be a somewhat distorted exaggeration of the situation, it is by no means unique in its criticism of lone parenthood. One should accept that the popular media have long subject lone parents to a process of demonisation but one must also accept that this demonisation takes on a new character than was previously the case. Whilst lone parents are no longer openly described as being *"pathologically disturbed"*, (as was the case in the influential Bowlby Report (1953)), as reported in The Daily Telegraph (26/10/95), they have been described as an *"annoyance to decent people"* by a leading backbench Conservative M.P. Whilst this may appear a somewhat extreme case, one must also consider William Hague's promise that to make Britain a *"better place to live"*, the Conservative Party would, if re-elected, *"increase the opportunities for older children of lone parents by expecting their parent to work"* (Conservative Party 2000). This line however is not exclusive to the Opposition. In answering questions whether lone mothers should loose benefits if they refuse to attend a New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) interview, Tony Blair suggested this was *"the right thing to do"* (Daily Mail 10/02/99). Indeed, Labour M.P. Clive Soley, went on to suggest that mothers with young children who may not wish to access employment are a *"particularly difficult group"*.

These comments are clearly reflective of the economic based morality suggested by Murray, however lifestyle based moral judgements are also evident in the popular media. The Daily Mail (02/01/01), citing an "authoritive survey", reports that the problem of the growing trend in drink, drugs and tobacco abuse amongst children is a direct result of poor parenting and goes on to argue that *"problem of drink, drugs and smoking is particularly bad among British children in single parent families"*. The article points to the fact that Britain has the highest rate of lone parenthood in Europe and suggest a direct

correlation between lone parenthood, poor parenting and substance misuse. It also describes how family campaigners have blamed the Government for *"failing to stand up for marriage as the best basis for raising children"*. This line however also appears to integral to Government thinking. Speaking in February 2001, Home Office minister Paul Boeteng suggest *"that increasing numbers of women were choosing to be single mothers, at the expense of their children's welfare"*. He goes on to say that, *"Their decision to leave the father out in the cold left their children without a positive male role model, leading to problems in later life"*.

What these comment demonstrate are the considerable overlaps between Murray's assessment of economic morality and Phillips' description of a morality based upon lifestyle choice. Whilst the latter exerts influence upon policy, the thrust of Government's policy towards lone parenthood appear to rest upon the former, that is, being based upon a "Back to Work" agenda.

The comments above represent only a fraction of the available information concerning lone parenthood. However, even in the examination of these few comments one may begin to see a picture emerging. The demonisation of lone parents within the popular media poses lone parents as threats to the fabric of social order. They are characterised as rearing delinquent children without the guidance of a proper father, while scrounging benefits and housing off the welfare state. Furthermore they are doing this willingly. Policies are therefore both required and justified that removed benefit support for lone motherhood, forcing them into paid work. In other words, policies should utilise economic rationality in order to achieve a morally desirable state. As Duncan and Edwards (1999) argued, lone mothers are used as a symbolic vehicle for a restructuring of the welfare state that goes beyond this particular group alone. They further use the example of changes to the homelessness legislation affecting all groups being made on the back of "single mothers jumping the housing queue". There is some echo of this in much of the media coverage concerning lone mothers and of ending the "something for nothing" benefits culture through the compulsory NDLP interviews.

1.1.7. Public Perception

As started previously, little research exists as to the perception the general public have of lone parents. However, Snape and Kelly (1999) in research commissioned and published by the Benefits Agency sought to gauge some opinion from the public concerning lone parents, and their reliance upon welfare, from both members of the general public and from lone parents themselves. The following are comments taken from this report.

The report suggests that impressions of lone parents were formed by a combination of media portrayals, personal experience and anecdotal hearsay. Whilst some of the interviewees appeared somewhat sympathetic towards lone parenthood and recognised some of its complexities, others were quite scathing. As one interviewee stated:

"Your first thought, when there is talk about lone parents ...is an under-age pregnant girl" .

Another suggested:

"They are mostly youngsters...A lot of them get pregnant on purpose to get houses and everything else"

The report also suggest that a caricature of a lone parent exists as having *"six children from four fathers"* living in social housing, detached from the world of gainful employment and being a considerable and long term burden upon the State.

Whilst there were differing levels of appreciation as to the routes to lone parenthood, the report acknowledges that by and large the study cohort did regress to negative and stereotypical images. Indeed, the report suggest that:

"It sometimes appeared difficult for people to leave behind these more extreme images of lone parents even when their own personal experience contrasted the stereotype" (p8).

Although there was an acceptance that many of the images of lone parents in the media were somewhat exaggerated for political reasons, the interviewees did nonetheless appear to agree that the media did portray lone parents in a wholly negative light. This was not to say that all interviewees believed the media portrayal to be representative, but that the general population may think it to be so.

1.1.8. Lone Parents Views About the Popular Images Of Lone Parents

The report highlights how lone parents themselves consider they have been subject to negative media portrayals and goes on to highlight how lone parents suggest that these media portrayals do not necessarily give a fair reflection of their experiences. It also notes how lone parents often consider themselves stigmatised and describes the subsequent loss of self esteem and confidence.

Whilst one may accept that the stigma associated with lone parenthood has lessened one must also note the point to which it has lessened to. Lone parents are no longer placed into psychiatric institutions as they once were. Neither are they openly castigated as being *"pathologically disturbed"*. This however should not detract from the issue at hand. Lone parents are stigmatised and perhaps the most conclusive evidence is that taken from lone parents themselves. If policy makers and those in positions of authority choose to ignore this then one needs to ask the question whether they are choosing not to listen to this significant minority for political reasons. If this is not the case then one may only assume that this is just another occurrence of policy makers telling a group what their experiences are, rather than asking what those experiences are.

Structural problems faced by lone parents, such as the consequences of low income, are not unique to this group. However how those problems are manifest are clearly unique. The fact that central Government have seen fit to devote so much time and energy to its New Deal for Lone Parents programme does indicate that policy makers, certainly those at the highest level, regardless of their motives, have begun to recognise the exceptional

circumstances faced by this group. It does indeed follow that unique circumstances require unique answers.

1.1.9. Aims and Objectives

Research has previously been undertaken into the effectiveness and limitations of work incentives for lone parents (McKay and Marsh 1994; Evason and Robinson 1998), but as yet no comparable analysis has been conducted across a range of indicators with lone parents who choose to access either NDLP or one of the community schemes available or indeed those that may choose to access neither. Therefore the aim of this research was to examine those choice and determine the consequences of such actions. In doing this the following objectives were set.

- To determine some of the latent influences that may guide lone parents decisions.

- To compare and contrast the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of those involved in either NDLP or a community initiative against a control group remaining "at home".

- To determine attitudes, perceptions and experiences of a cohort of lone parents, pre and post involvement in either government or community sponsored intervention programmes.

- To investigate the current and future perceptions of a sample of lone parents on issues such as mental well-being, health related behaviour and perceived employability.

Chapter 2. Choosing The Methodology

Within social inquiry, four fundamental components must be addressed.

1. *Ontological*: What are the presuppositions about the fundamental character of social life, therefore what can be studied and what claims can be made?
2. *Epistemological*: What principles will guide us to acquire the knowledge?
3. *Methodological*: How can this knowledge be validated?
4. *Methods*: What specific techniques will be used to collect evidence?

In attempting to address these questions, a review of the literature exposed a maze of philosophical claims and counterclaims, each professing to offer the researcher the optimal principles and procedures for discovering the truth, or the reality, of the processes under investigation. A starting point was found within a quotation from Denzin & Lincoln (1994) who suggested that *"the choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked and the questions depend on their context"*. The questions needing to be asked were intertwined with the experiences of the study group concerning both their current and past experiences and their perception of the future. This in itself posed a problem insofar as whilst broad question of "how" and "why" may be served with the use of qualitative inquiry, the study also wanted to discover evidence of "what" and "when"; this lending itself towards quantitative inquiry.

Researchers have long debated both the benefits and limitations of both investigative methods with each representing a fundamentally different inquiry paradigm, with the actions of the researcher being based on the underlying assumptions of each paradigm. Before choosing a paradigm it was considered important to ensure familiarity with the arguments presented.

2.1. Positivism

Positivism assumes an that an objective world bound by covering laws exists independent of social actors (and researchers) which scientific methods can more or less readily represent and measure, and it seeks to explain and predict causal relations among key variables (May 1993). Under the ontology of "naïve realism", positivism's experimental methodology focuses upon the formulation and testing of hypotheses. Based upon rigour, reliability, validity and objectivity, positivism holds that only through empirically generated evidence that we can understand these laws thereby offering predictions as to outcomes. Positivist principles emphasise research designs using sampling techniques and quantitative data gathering procedures, the measurement of outcomes, and the development of causal models with predictive power. Here the researcher is concerned with making claims with "how things actually are", based upon the verification or rejection of hypotheses.

2.2. Postpositivism

Operating under an ontology of "critical realism", Gephart (1999) describes postpositivism as being consistent with positivism by assuming an objective world exists, but claims of being able to understand the world perfectly are rejected. Rather, postpositivism holds that any claims about "how things actually are" can only be made probabilistically. Here, the positivist focus on experimental and quantitative methods used to test and verify hypotheses have been replaced and/or modified with the (although not exclusive) use of qualitative methods of inquiry to gather broader information outside of readily measured variables. Through the increased use of alternative techniques, postpositivist methodology seeks to falsify, rather than verify hypotheses. Consistent with the falsification hypothesis of Popper (Flew 1979 p281), given the complexity of real world phenomena, only one counter-example or feature is needed to falsify a proposed relationship but one must assess all possible variables to verify a relationship is consistent across all such conditions.

2.3. Critical Theory

Critical Theory holds that the material world encountered is real and produced by and through capitalist modes of production (Gephart 1999). The researcher and the researched are engaged in active dialogue that is both value mediated and value dependent, therefore the values of the investigator inevitably influence the inquiry. The distinction between ontology and epistemology becomes blurred, as what is assumed to exist and what can be known is connected to the relationship between the researcher and the study group. Central to the research process is that reality is located within political and social constructs and that to understand the dynamics of such processes the investigator must come to know that reality from the perspective of the "other". Unlike positivism and postpositivism, the aim of critical theory research is not solely to provide a representation of a reality, but to provide a forum for political action to address the inequalities found through the research process.

2.4. Interpretivism

Assuming a "relativistic" ontology, interpretivism is concerned with the meaning social actors place upon situations and events. Interpretivists argue that knowledge and truth are the result of perspective (Schwandt 1994 p125), therefore where you stand may dictate what you see. Thus reality may not be true in an absolute sense, but is created by the actor(s) as an interpretation of the world they perceive. As with critical theory, there is a convergence of ontology and epistemology, where the researcher attempts to place him/herself into the world of the researched. The researcher thus is charged with creating the findings, with the researched, from an interactive process between the two. The outcome is a detailed consensus eliciting the views of both.

2.5. The Philosophical Challenge, Methodological Compromise and Method Pragmatism

The positions above demonstrate the link between philosophical thought and methodological procedure. Methodology lays down the rules to be followed in the testing or generation of statements of fact and/or reality. Philosophy justifies the methodology, and, as argued by Williams and May (1996), the methodology contains statements about the philosophical assumptions (ontological and epistemological) made. As argued by Hughes (1990 p11):

"...every research tool or procedure is inextricably embedded in commitments to particular versions of the world and to knowing that world"

Unquestionably, positivist ontological and epistemological assumptions are those that historically have held sway, and whilst the underpinnings of positivist philosophy has increasingly been challenged, its methodological prescriptions continue to exert considerable influence in social research (Hughes and Sharrock 1997). Whilst a traditional positivistic approach denied the relevance of metaphysical propositions, Fischer (1998) argues that positivist principles have been softened to accommodate the ontological and epistemological concerns raised. Although still claiming an objectifiable world, subjective reality could still be measured in line with the underlying positivist principles if science could establish objectively measurable observations (Hughes and Sharrock 1997 p49). By the use of carefully constructed questionnaires, attitude scales etc., a picture of mental (metaphysical) states could be observed. For the empirical sciences this provided a gateway into explaining social actors internal phenomena objectively and quantifiably through both quantitative and qualitative measurements. Here the values people may hold are just as real as physical matter by virtue of the fact that they can be observed by both verbal (self reporting of values and beliefs) and non-verbal (actions) means. Whilst statements such as these may be open to criticism by some insofar as it assumes a (postpositivist) objective reality exists irrespective of whether we can know it perfectly or not and, crucially, independent of the researcher, it provides the

justification to continue with positivistic methodologies and to seek to develop increasingly sophisticated techniques and statistical tools to improve the measurement of social phenomena. Here it appears that both quantitative and qualitative methods can call upon similar epistemological assumptions (epistemological relativism) but may somewhat separate on ontological grounds (ontological relativism).

This is an example of how researchers have attempted to reconcile the differences between philosophical propositions and methodological pragmatism. This can be seen in the statements presented by Hughes and that of Patton (1990), who suggests he would like to:

*"**increase** the options available to evaluators, not to replace one limited paradigm with another limited, but different, paradigm. . . Rather than believing that one must choose to align with one paradigm or the other, I advocate a paradigm of choices. A paradigm of choices rejects methodological orthodoxy in favour of **methodological appropriateness** as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality. The issue then becomes not whether one has uniformly adhered to prescribed canons of either logical-positivism or phenomenology but whether one has made sensible methods decisions given the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available. The paradigm of choices recognises that different methods are appropriate for different situations"* (pp. 38-39).

Miles and Huberman (1988) concur:

"We contend that researchers should pursue their work, be open to an ecumenical blend of epistemologies and procedures, and leave the grand debate to those who care most about it" (p. 223).

They advocate this primarily because they do not envisage the philosophical debate being resolved, and further add that concerns over epistemological issues can hinder rather than aid the research process (pp223-224). This is not to suggest that the journey to such a

point has not been long and eventful. Smith and Heshusius (1986), in a revue of the literature, highlight three phases tracing the evolution of this pragmatism:

1. **Conflict**. Where there was an antagonistic relationship between proponents of different philosophical stances.
2. **Détente**. In which, whilst recognising the differences, there was less focus upon philosophical stances and greater emphasis upon procedure
3. **Compatibility and cooperation.** Where ontological assumption are minimal with those related to procedure considered primary.

Although researchers have attempted to reconcile the differences between philosophical stances, Lincoln and Guba (1985) warn that one must be aware of the underlying assumptions of each paradigm. Pointing to the logical inconsistencies within the different paradigms, they suggest that not making distinctions is akin to *"...a compromise between the view that the world is flat and the view that the world is round"* (p. 93). This is not to say that ontological and epistemological issues should be paramount, but that one must be aware of the assumptions contained within the choice of methods.

2.6. Quantitative or Qualitative? Towards a Mixed Methodology.

A common approach concerning the dispute over quantitative and qualitative methods has been to cast quantitative and qualitative research methods as polar opposites in terms of ontological and epistemological assumptions. The dichotomies comprise essentially: a) a single, static reality versus a multiple, fluid, constructed reality; b) objectivity versus subjectivity; c) causal explanation versus understanding; d) facts versus values; e) outsider's perspective versus insider's perspective (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Patton, 1990). In the search for some common ground, commentators such as Cook and Reichardt (1979) have suggested that given the ontological assumptions of positivism has largely been surpassed by postpositivist assumptions in social research, (at least in theory), and that common ground can be found in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. They suggest that concepts such as the theory-ladenness of fact and

theory, (observation is influenced by both the actor's and the researcher's frame of reference), the fallibility of knowledge, (propositions cannot be proved), and the indetermination of theory by fact (there may be numerous possibilities compatible with data), all suggest that we should view the assumptions associated with both methods as separate ends of a continuum, rather than simply as a dichotomy. However the relationship between quantitative methods and positivist inquiry continues. In addressing this Fetterman (1988) suggests:

"They are commonly accepted handles for both the contrasting paradigms and the methods associated with them. However, each paradigm employs both quantitative and qualitative methods . . . Focusing on methods, however, is like focusing on the symptoms rather than the disease" (p. 18).

It appears then that the use of either and/or both methods of data collection is a trade off between depth and breadth and between generalisability and specificity. Whilst quantitative data may explain phenomena superficially, with rigour the results can be extrapolated. In contrast qualitative data may provide deeper, fuller explanations, but there may be issues as to whether these results apply beyond the confines of the study group. These issues will be addressed in depth presently, but suffice to say that the distinction between the two methods is possibly too simplistic. It may be the case that neither approach satisfies scientific rigour. Quantitative researchers may have to accept that some of their data may not be accurate and valid, for example, some survey respondents may not understand the meaning of questions to which they respond, and some people's recall of even recent events can be faulty. Alternatively, qualitative researchers have developed better techniques for classifying and analysing large bodies of descriptive data. It is also increasingly recognised, in line with interpretivist arguments, that all data collection - quantitative and qualitative - operates within a cultural context and is affected to some extent by the perceptions and beliefs of the researchers themselves.

2.7. Using Mixed Methods.

One criticisms aimed at qualitative researchers' from their quantitative counterparts is that their research design leaves question marks over both the internal and external validity of their study design. Conversely, qualitative researchers argue that quantitative research strips meaning from data and does not allowing the complexity of human interaction to surface. Notwithstanding the compromises outlined earlier, the literature still continues to contain arguments that prescribe one method over another, often to the others' entire exclusion from the research process. (Staddish et al (1991) do however raise an interesting point by asserting that quantitative measurements rests on qualitative assumptions about which constructs are worth measuring and how constructs are conceptualised).

Duffy (1987) in offering a distinction between the two broad paradigms also provides an illustration of the limitations and benefits of both. Table 2 provides a graphical interpretation of these distinctions.

Table 2. Quantitative and Qualitative Methodological Assumptions	
Quantitative	**Qualitative**
Strives to control for bias so that facts can be understood in an objective way	Strives to understand the perspective of the other, looking to firsthand experience to provide meaningful data.
Strives to accumulate facts to determine causes of behaviour	Strives to understand the changing and dynamic nature of reality (whether perceived or real)
Strives to identify and isolate specific variables within the context (seeking correlation, relationships, causality) of the study	Strives to provide a holistic view of what is being studied
Collected under controlled conditions in order to rule out the possibility that variables other than the one under study can account for the relationships identified	Collected within the context of their natural occurrence

Taken from Gephart 1999

Bowen (2000) suggests that by combining methods, the disadvantages of both paradigms may be compensated resulting in an all round stronger research design. The overall aim is to achieve the situation whereby the blending of both methods produces an outcome that acknowledges the contribution of both. Indeed, Jayaratne (1993) suggests that qualitative data can support and give meaning to quantitative data, whereas quantitative data may provide evidence about those overlooked in the qualitative process. Nau (1995) further elaborates, highlighting how a mixed methodology may provide data that may otherwise have been overlooked. This approach, referred to as "Triangulation" (Denzin 1990 p593), allows a comparison both within and across methods and data sources and adds to the overall validity and trustworthiness of findings.

2.8. Interpretivistic Methodology

The collection and analysis of qualitative data was based upon a interpretivist/constructivist paradigm. Whilst some would make a distinction between the two, it would appear the differences rest purely on ontological grounds. Constructivism appears to assert both ontological[11] and epistemological relativism. Interpretivism, whilst accepting epistemological relativism, appears to be compatible with both relative and absolute ontologies (Gephart 1999). One may argue that the practical application of either assumption are, to all intents and purposes, analogous. Nevertheless the aim of this inquiry is to understand the interpretations the participants hold of their lived experiences, thus seeking to understand phenomena and to interpret meaning within the social and cultural context of the natural setting. Carr and Kemmis (1983 p 88) suggest that to identify the actor's motives and intentions correctly, is to grasp the subjective meaning the action has for the actor. In support of this idea, Fetterman (1988) indicates this perspective holds that what actors believe to be true is decidedly more important than any objective reality insofar as actors act on what they believe, and, further, there are real consequences of these actions. In order to uncover what people believe and to render meaning about their actions and intentions, this inquiry attempted to interact dialogically with the participants. Within this interrelationship, values of the researcher and the study

[11] Hesse (1980) asserts that truth may be determined by consensus.

population cannot be avoided. Unlike positivists who attempt to separate values from facts and offer explanations of reality which are empirically verifiable, one has to accept the bond between values and facts and attempt to understand the study cohort within their social context.

The justification for this can be found originally in the writings of Kant who believed that sensory experience was not a reliable source of knowledge because of the fallibility of the senses, wherein we may see a phenomenon which is not completely accurate. Kant suggested that sensory experience must be interpreted before it can become knowledge, thus suggesting that the mind brought something to the interpretive process. This theme was later expanded by Piaget who described this Kantian idea of interpretation as *assimilation*, whereby what is perceived is interpreted and assimilated by existing cognitive structures (Hayes 1984 p117). This means that how we perceive our respective environments is interpreted by whatever perceptual framework we have set up. According to Piaget, knowledge is an active construction of the knowing system driven by the quest for equilibrium, (the cognitive system's need for order and stability). Piaget's, and indeed the whole interpretivist/constructivist rejection of the empiricist conception of knowledge is founded on the notion that knowledge cannot be viewed as a copy of the external world since in order to know whether something is a good copy of something else one needs to independently access both versions so as to compare them. The fundamental question is how could we possibly have access to reality independently of our knowledge of it? This in effect, again, returns us to the ontological questions previously raised. What can be said about reality? Whilst not wishing to downplay the importance of such questions, this question will not be pursued further. Suffice to say that whilst epistemological relativism is accepted, no claims as to whether ontological relativism exist or not are made.

2.9. Research Focus

The design of any interpretive inquiry differs substantially from its positivist counterpart. Unlike conventional inquiry, which prescribes the overall study plan, the generation of

hypotheses, the measurement variables, etc, the design of an interpretive study begins as a broad outline of plans open to change throughout the study. The emphasis has therefore been one of flexibility. Plans, research questions, theories, data collection strategies and analysis all evolved from the beginning point as more was learned about the people involved in the study and the processes that effected them. Rather than describing in advance every aspect of the design, where possible these have been elaborated upon as part of an on going process. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest that researchers should not formulate research questions a priori, rather they should let research questions emerge from the data collection itself. However, those who advocate a blending of designs, for example, Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that both emergent design and a more structured approach can be inter-compatible. They suggest that:

"Highly inductive and loosely designed studies make good sense when researchers have plenty of time and are exploring understudied phenomena, or very complex social realities. But when one is interested in some better-understood social phenomena within a familiar culture or sub-culture, a loose, highly inductive design is a waste of time". (p.27).

There is no reason for not being able to apply this principle to the differing areas of the study itself. Indeed Patton (1990) points to the vague nature of inquiry and to its tangible constraints by suggesting:

"There is no rule of thumb that tells a researcher how to focus a study. The extent to which a research question is broad or narrow depends on purpose, the resources available, the time available, and the interests of those involved. In brief, these are not choices between good and bad, but choices among alternatives, all of which have merit." (p.166).

Whilst the research in its application remained open to flexibility, there also remained a fundamental commitment to the notion that this study would respond to the inherent challenges of inquiry focused on human experience. Unlike inanimate objects, humans

are able to make and share meaning. Whereas scientific explanation of an objective, positivistic nature is the lasting tradition of the natural and physical sciences, social science research attempts to understand the meaning of social phenomena. The sense making which is so central to human activity sets people apart from the rest of nature. Humans are complex requiring responsive and adaptable research methods. The researcher needs to have empathy toward the researched to understand their position, feelings, and experiences. This need for empathy can be found within the qualitative research doctrine of *verstehen*, (understanding), referring to our unique human capacity to make sense of the world. As Patton (1990) suggests: *"humans can and must be understood in a manner different from other objects of study because humans have purposes and emotions; they make plans, construct cultures, and hold values that affect behaviour"* (p.57).

2.1.1. The Focus Of The Study And Its Fit With Interpretivism.

This focus for this inquiry, an examination of the experiences of lone parents, is categorised by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a conceptual problem, that is a research problem resulting from the interaction of an array of factors that raise questions as to their foundations. In determining the focus for such enquiries, two purposes were served. Firstly, the boundaries for the study were established, and secondly, the inclusion-exclusion criteria for new information that came to light was set. In line with the advice given by Lincoln and Guba (1985 p.227), the enquiry attempting to establish both value, (merit and worth), whilst also offering both a formative and summative assessment. (Merit refers to the intrinsic qualities of the evaluand (that which is being evaluated), worth refers to its extrinsic qualities). Given the potentially wide terms of reference of the study, the need for selectivity and the danger of data saturation was acknowledged, nevertheless it also remained open to new avenues of enquiry providing they were within the study's remit.

In determining the appropriateness of the research paradigm, and the degree of fit with the focus of proposed studies, Lincoln and Guba (1985 p229-230) recommended several

criteria for consideration. Interpretivistic research may be an appropriate research paradigm for studies in which:

a) the phenomenon under investigation is represented by a multiplicity of complex constructions
b) there is significant investigator-phenomenon interaction to the extent that the interaction may influence the investigation
c) the phenomenon under investigation is context dependent
d) participant and observer values are likely to be crucial to the outcome of the investigation

It was considered that, albeit to different degrees, the components of the study did meet each of the criteria illustrated. Lincoln and Guba (1985 p232) do however warn us that although it may appear that the research focus may fit with interpretivistic enquiry, care must be taken not to apply this model without due consideration. They suggest that if existing theory is introduced a priori, rather than grounded in the data, it may still be consistent with this approach, but care need to be taken to ensure that findings are truly consistent with existing theory.

There are however other specific arguments that pointed the study in the direction of an interpretivistic enquiry, but to explain fully it is necessary to explanation of what the notion of "community" actually entails. Attention was given earlier to some of the arguments underpinning the communitarian debate and how these arguments have given shape to both policy and wider social thought. What has yet to be explained however what exactly is "community" and how this may have effect upon the study itself.

As Bellah (1996) acknowledges, "community" is a relatively elusive concept and extremely difficult to pin down. Williams (1975 p37) identified it is a "warm" and "persuasive" term, but subsequently found over 90 different uses for the word, whilst Mann (1969) had suggested that "community" is often used without real understanding of meaning. These latter two comments may be somewhat disingenuous in that community

is more than a word, it is in itself a concept with a long philosophical tradition (Haste 1998) and does signal a particular world view, and yet confusion over meaning does occur. It is argued however that "community" as used by those from a communitarian tradition, is in part a statement describing a view of social relations based upon shared experiences (Baxter 1995; Etzioni 1995; Tam 1995). This therefore assumes a subjective social world collectively shared and this is supported by Haste (1998) who argues that social beings create identity through the exploration of shared meaning and thus we recognise that these experiences are shared by those whom we categorise as members of our community. Knowledge then in this case is socially constructed by the actor paying particular reference to social categories they consider they belong to. We can recall that the basis of policy is founded upon a communitarian vision, therefore the assumption is that the experiences of exclusion are socially shared. Yet, given NDLP is in some ways voluntary, there is also the acknowledgement that lone parents do experience their lone parenthood in different ways. Thus, the experience of lone parenthood could be said to be interpreted dependant upon the reciprocal relationship between the individual and their environment. The practical application of this is that there has to be an acceptance that experiences are socially shared and have shared meaning and this has expression in the literature most notably in Symbolic Interaction (Blumer 1969).

2.1.2. Study Perspectives

Central to Symbolic Interaction Theory is that humans interact with each other using agreed upon sets of symbols and is useful in explaining several aspects of human development and social/interpersonal interaction. It is a social-psychological theory that attempts to conceptualise human conduct at a relatively complex level. The broad conceptual units of the theory are:

- *the role* - the unit of culture (anthropology)
- *the position* - the unit of society (sociology)
- *self* - the unit of personality (psychology).

Issues of socialisation and self-reflection detail the process of humanisation in the social sense. Concepts of self modification of behaviour during interaction and the notion of symbol exchange influence the dynamic nature of social interaction. Symbolic interaction argues that society is the product of interaction between people and that this interaction takes place through the use of symbols which have meaning for the individuals involved. It is through this meaning that actors have the ability to make indications to the Self. It allows the actor to engage the world as one who interprets it and forms decisions upon which to act from that interpretation. Here the actor is faced with, not only physical objects, but social and abstract objects also that make up the individuals perceived reality.

In a somewhat similar vein, Social Identity Theory states that symbolic, not material sources are the key to social competition and involves three central components (Turner 1981). The first is categorisation. Humans categorise objects in order to understand them, and in a similar way categorise people (including ourselves) in order to understand the social environment. Social categorisation not only helps in simplifying and adding meaning to the humanity, but it also helps to define who people are (Leyens et al 1994). Individuals define themselves by knowing what categories they belong to and then define appropriate behaviour by reference to the norms of those groups.

The second component, social comparison, encompasses the work of Festinger (1954) who claims that individuals need to evaluate their own beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in reference to others. Here, striving for positive self-concept is a part of normal psychological functioning. Individuals within social groups gain self-esteem by comparing themselves with others in their group, and also by seeing themselves as a member of a group with a level of social prestige (Tajfel and Billig 1974). Turner (1981) further suggests that group members compare their group with others, in order to define their group as positive, and therefore by implication, see themselves in a positive way. That is, people choose to compare their groups with other groups in ways that reflect positively on themselves.

The final part of the Social Identity Theory is social identity. Social identity follows the need to compare differences between groups in order to establish a more favourable disposition for the in-group. Maintaining self-esteem is important when comparing, and is essential to preserving, social identity. Social identity also looks at the different dimensions on which groups can be compared. Higher ratings for outgroups may occur on some dimensions that do not hold high relevance for in-group members. For example, if parenting is most important to one social group (e.g. lone parents), then they may rate other groups higher on, for example, career prospects, simply because those values are not what their in-group holds to be most important (Leyens et al 1994).

What these two perspectives offer are considerable scope within which to examine data. The place of lone parents, in both spatial and social terms, could be argued to be highly dependent upon the categories offered by symbolic interaction theory with a clear interaction occurring between its dynamics. The use of social identity theory will enable the study to determine if those of the study population involved in either New Deal or community based interventions consider they have moved into groups they consider offer greater social prestige.

2.1.3. Broad Psychological Perspectives And Their Relationship With The Study.

Given Strauss and Corbin's (1990) assertion that it is acceptable to identify theoretical perspectives to approach and interpret data it was considered appropriate to review the theoretical perspectives offered in the literature that may have relevance for the study. (The list is a broad outline and is not exhaustive). An overview of these theories is now offered as is a description of how they may relate to the study.

2.1.4. Rational Choice

An examination of literature critical towards lone parenthood is often underpinned by the assertion that the choice of lone parents to become lone parents is based upon the notion that their choice is rational. That they calculate the likely costs and benefits of their

actions before deciding their what their action will be. This approach is known as rational choice theory, and its application to the social world takes the form of exchange theory.

Scott (1999) suggests that where economic theories describe the relationship between goods, services and the markets, rational choice theorists argue that the same general principles can be used to understand interactions in which such resources as time, information, approval, and prestige are involved. Within the rational choice theories, individual motivation is expressed by goals which are in turn expressed by preferences. Rational choice theories hold that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate that which will be best for them. Rational individuals choose the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction and the greatest benefit (Elster 1989; Carling 1992).

Providing that rational choice theory of human behaviour is correct, in line with assessments of lone parenthood by, for example Murray (1990) and Mead (1997) we find both low labour force participation of lone parents, and indeed the growing incidence of lone parenthood, specifically because of the high quality and levels of benefits. Implicit in this assumption is that it makes economic sense to enter into lone parenthood. It is economically rational. However, Heap et al (1992) suggest that rational choice also becomes evident in the process of socialisation. That behaviour which complies with socially prescribed roles will gain approval from other social actors, therefore offering rewards in a manner similar to the way economic activity bring financial rewards.

Duncan and Edwards (1999) argue that is the acceptance of this model of behaviour that has both informed and directed policy. They suggest the restructuring of welfare assumes a homogeneous economic rationality whereby individuals take cost-benefit decisions in the maximization of their personal gain. If policy therefore is constructed in a manner that allows such decisions to be made, lone parents will alter behaviour in the desired way by re-entering the workforce. If indeed Duncan and Edwards' assertion is correct, and if this is taken into the context of the amount of financial, and political, capital government has invested in New Deal, it does appear that government are attempting to

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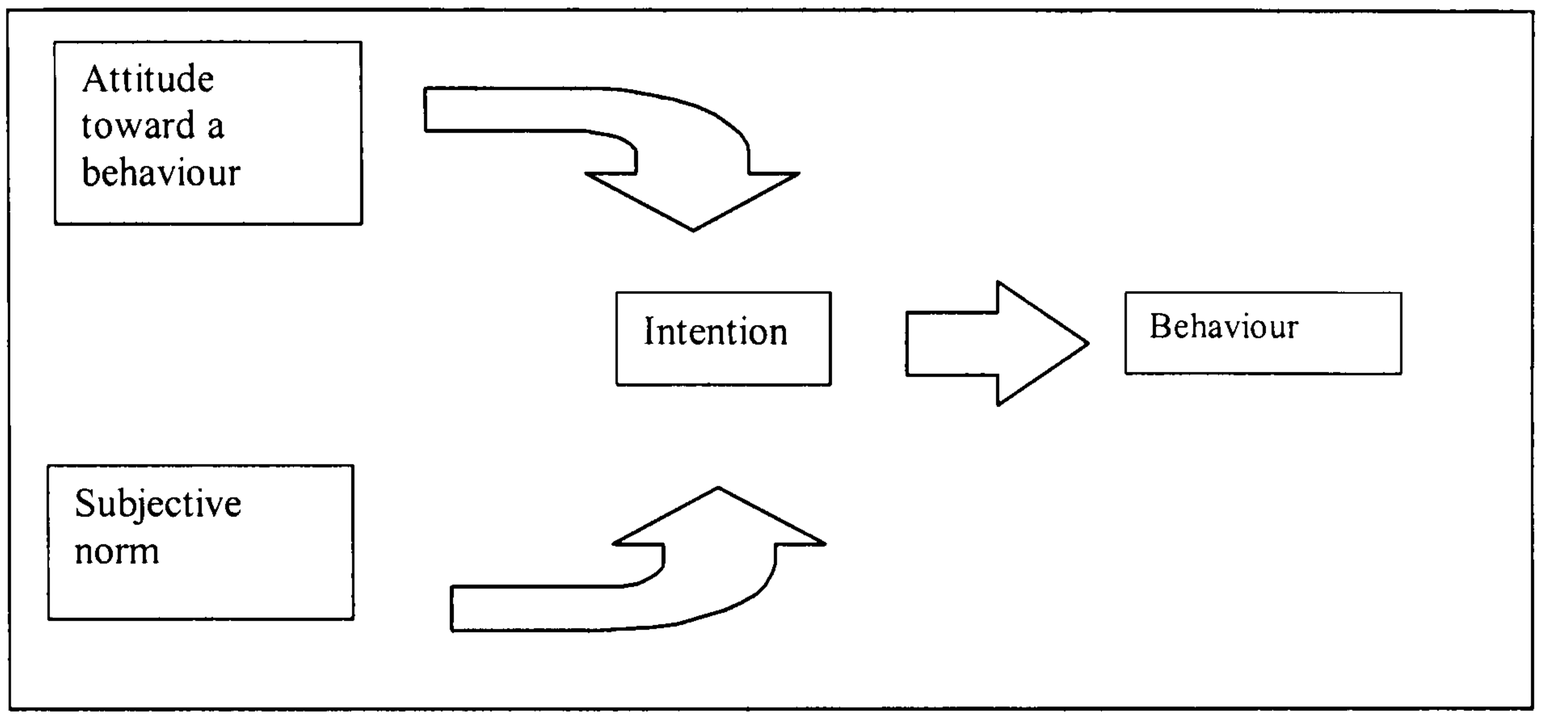
Attitudes then are a general feeling of towards the object or act (Fishbein and Ajzen 1972 p11) and subjective norms are the sum of normative pressures (Fishbein and Ajzen 1972 p16). The relative weight of attitudes and norms can vary between situations and between members of different groups. The theory is represented diagrammatically in Figure 1.

Fig. 1. Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein,1980).



An important assumption that underlies the Theory of Reasoned Action is that beliefs are the foundations of subsequent attitude toward the behaviour. Beliefs can underlie a person's attitude toward the behaviour (behavioural beliefs), or a person's subjective norm (normative beliefs). Whereas behavioural beliefs refer to one's belief that a given behaviour will lead to certain outcomes, normative beliefs refer to the person's beliefs that other people will think that he or she should or should not perform the given behaviour.

Beliefs are relevant to our main discussion of the changing experiences of lone parents because the beliefs of lone parents themselves are shaped largely by past personal and social experience, whether by direct observation or inference processes. For example, their beliefs about their role as mother/sole carer/worker are likely to be rooted in gendered assumptions of their role and are reinforced through social norms and practices. Because beliefs are thought to underlie a person's predisposition to feel favourably or unfavourably toward a behaviour (e.g. accepting work or training) the study will attempt to assess if policy alone is sufficient to achieve change in the belief structure of the study group.

Theory of Reasoned Action works most successfully when applied to behaviours that are under a person's volitional control. If behaviours are not fully under volitional control, even though a person may be highly motivated by their own attitudes and subjective norm, they may not actually perform the behaviour due to intervening environmental conditions. Thus Ajzen (1985) developed the Theory of Planned Behaviour to predict behaviours in which individuals have incomplete volitional control.

The major difference between the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour is the addition of a third determinant of behavioural intention, perceived behavioural control. Perceived behavioural control is determined by two factors; Control Beliefs and Perceived Power. Perceived behavioural control indicates that a person's motivation is influenced by how difficult the behaviours are perceived to be, as well as the perception of how successfully the individual can, or can not, perform the activity. If a person holds strong control beliefs about the existence of factors that will facilitate a behaviour, then the individual will have high perceived control over a behaviour. Conversely, the person will have a low perception of control if they hold strong control beliefs that impede the behaviour. This perception can reflect past experiences, anticipation of upcoming circumstances, and the attitudes of the influential norms that surround the individual (Manstead *et al* 1983). This holds a clear relationship with the study. The documented difficulties associated with lone parents combining work/training/education with their role as sole care provider (Hardey and Crow 1991; Ford, Marsh and Finlayson 1996) unquestionably raises issues that may impinge upon both Control Beliefs and Perceived Power.

Chapter 3. Methods

3.1. Ethical considerations.

Before examining the actual process of data collection and analysis, two important issues have to be addressed, that is, the ethical considerations of social research and the role of a male researcher involved in research with women. To deal with the practical implications of the matter of ethics first, as with any piece of social research that attempts to focus upon the experiences of human subjects, there is always a danger that individuals involved in a study may experience emotional discomfort, for example embarrassment, nervousness or distress (Arksey and Knight 1999). This was recognised and mechanisms were put in place that could offer support and/or advice to those who may have needed or requested such, in that permission was obtained from two support groups to include their telephone numbers and contact addresses in a study information leaflet. All of those providing qualitative data were made explicitly aware of this during initial contact. It was also fully recognised that many lone parents may not wish to be part of the study, but may feel pressured by direct, unsolicited contact. To overcome this, contact was made at an early stage of the research process with the Liverpool One Parent Family Trust (November 1998), who agreed to inform lone parents at the Trust of the aims of the research and ask if they would be willing to engage in conversations with the researcher. This process was conducted over the course of two weeks and appointments were made by the Trust and details then forwarded on. Twelve female lone parents agreed to take part in the initial discussions and each was given a short leaflet outlining the researcher's details, the aims of the research, assurances of confidentially and the commitment to allow the participants to leave the study at any time. As will be described presently, lone parents attending other community schemes also provided data and a similar process was followed, in that requests for contact with the lone parents were made through gatekeepers. A consent form was provided for the lone parents to sign with the above information for those involved in one to one interviews, but during some of the group discussions participants did enter and leave the discussions at regular intervals and as

such not all of those involved were able to give written consent. However all lone parents involved in group discussions were given the leaflet described above.

During these initial discussions, participants were asked to request permission from other lone parents they may know as to whether they would be willing to join the study and some of the study population providing qualitative and quantitative data were recruited thus. After the development of the questionnaire (see following section), copies were left with community schemes gatekeepers and included on the cover sheet was a request for the lone parent to be interviewed and those providing qualitative data were also recruited in this manner. Additionally, all lone parents who did complete a questionnaire were asked if they would be willing to distribute one or more to other lone parents and this proved an effective way to contact lone parents who may have been hard to reach. Finally, all completed questionnaires; transcripts and tape recordings were kept in a secure location whilst pseudonyms have been used for all of those who provided names.

Whilst the above details the practical steps taken to maintain the ethical integrity of the study, operating at a deeper level is the fact that as a male researcher involved in the collection of such data from women, ethical consideration must also be given to the research process from the perspective of patriarchal power relations. Oakley (1981) argues that the assumption of "good" science as being objective and detached is grounded in supposedly superior masculine traits, whereas "poor" science is reflective of women's lack of ability to be analytic and emotionally detached. Oakley does go on to describe how her own research was enhanced through the development of intimate personal relationships with her study group, and also offers evidence from the literature that highlights the difficulties involved in remaining emotionally detached. Oakley further draws attention to how, as a feminist researching women, she was "inside" the processes being observed (p57). That is, being a woman had allowed her to directly experience the impact of gender disadvantage and discrimination. However, her comments are founded upon the notion of power relations within the interview process and how the power gap between the researched and the researcher can be based upon, for example, supposed expert power, or, as in the case in this work, patriarchy. Being on a level footing with the

researched, that is, from the same social group, allows for greater understanding and thus a closer reflection of actual experience. Hearn (1998) follows a similar line describing how power differences between the researcher and the researched can result in the possibility of collusion whereby the researcher may defer to the researched so as not to be seen to be oppressive. Hearn further describes how the emotional effort put into the study did have effect upon himself, and acknowledges that this must have been connected to the emotions of his study group, thus highlighting how difficult it is to maintain impartiality and objectivity, if indeed this is what is wanted.

McKee and O'Brien (1983) draw attention to the dynamics that may occur when the researched and the researcher are from different social groups. Notwithstanding Oakley's (1981) comments of how insiders are better placed to apply understanding (verstehen) (Patten 1990), McKee and O'Brien's study with men highlighted that where the researcher and the researched are of different genders, the relationship between the two has the possibility of reverting to a mirror of societal relations between men and women, that is, men holding control in the public (and the private) space. Herod (1993) also followed this line of argument suggesting that where the researched and the researcher are of different genders a different complexion to both the collection of data and its interpretation is, if not inevitable, then highly likely. This was a consideration that needed attention in that many of the women involved in the study may have been at a vulnerable position at that time, and as such care had to be taken to ensure that questions were not overtly discomforting. Further to this, due to the dynamics that may have been in place, some of the interviewees may not have been willing to discuss some of the more personal aspects of their experiences. To put it simply, some of the women involved in the study may not have spoke frankly to a man[12]. In view of this, discussion groups were arranged at four locations with lone mothers and these proved to be valuable exercises in terms allowing some of the women to elucidate upon their experiences in an environment designed to mitigate some of the above considerations. Indeed anecdotally, some discussion group members commented upon the cathartic nature of the exercise.

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[12] This was rarely evident although this may be due to the honesty of the women or due to the process Oakley describes.

However not all commentators accept the insider/outsider dichotomy as unproblematic. Rose (2001), citing Dyke (1997), demonstrates that a same gender interviewer does not necessarily facilitate insider status for the interviewer and that even if one where to be classed as an insider, a danger exists in that the image of neutrality may be compromised. Another risk noted by Rose is that a danger may exist where unfavourable social comparison is made by the interviewee with the interviewer, and thus issues of empowerment are then challenged. Further citing Dyke (1997), Rose also notes that relations between individuals are rarely static, but rather are based upon fluid exchanges where both can claim to be expert or novice dependent upon the situation, the question or indeed the needs of either at that particular time. Yet the problem remains, can men usefully interview women? Buchbinder (2003) suggests they can, but advises that to do so, men need to be sure to present the voices of women in terms of the gender power relationships that exist and this can only be done with continuous and rigorous reflexivity.

3.2. Sampling and Study Recruitment.

The population of interest to this study were lone parents meeting the upper limit of the NDLP original target criteria. That is lone parents who are aged 18 years or over and have at least one child who normally lives with them who is aged 16 years or under or aged 16 to 18 years and in full time education. The study was originally also aimed at those lone parents meeting the lower age limit of the NDLP, that is those with children aged 5 years and three months or older, but given the target criteria for NDLP changed, it was thought prudent to change the entry criteria for the study also. Additionally, it was found that many lone parents were attending schemes with children under the original lower age limit and it was considered a limitation on the study if their experiences were not included. Section 1.1 did however highlight how difficult it is to actually define what exactly a lone parent may be therefore on the front page of the questionnaire and at the first meeting where qualitative data was taken, study respondents and volunteers were made aware that this study was concerned with lone parents. It is of course the case that some of those involved may have been in stable long term relationships, may have had

joint custody of their child(ren), or indeed lived for example with their parents, yet they may still classify themselves as lone parents. Therefore in line with the methodological position taken, regardless of actual family structure or relationships, if the lone parent's children were of the age defined above, and crucially, if the lone parent's themselves thought of themselves as such, they were included within the study.

A primary consideration for any social research is that the sample used should be representative of the study population. To this end the Benefits Agency were contacted and requested to provide access to information for lone parents receiving benefits within the Merseyside area. Given issues of confidentiality, it was accepted that the Agency may not allow access to this information, therefore it was also suggested that, using the method described by Hales, Shaw and Roth (1998) (selection based upon National Insurance Number characteristics) the Agency themselves contact a random probability sample of the population (Shipman 1997) at the expense of the research budget. The Agency however refused to take part in the study. A similar situation was found in respect of community based interventions. Issues of confidentiality were again paramount, furthermore, given the pressures on budgets and resources for many initiatives, it was not considered appropriate to request additional resources be used for the benefit of the study.

As it was not possible to obtain a sample frame, a method of non-probability sampling was chosen as an alternative method of data collection (Trochim 2000). It is accepted that representativeness may have been compromised by use of this method, but Shipman (1997) suggests that this may be tempered by the use of a method of quota sampling. This advice was taken and based upon information from Social Trends (1998) and ONS (1997), a sample based upon national characteristics and profiles of lone parents was considered appropriate. It did however become clear that access to lone parents was problematic, and given the low numbers of lone parents who have become involved with New Deal, this method would have seriously impinged upon the time available for the research.

CHRM (2000) describe a situation whereby because of the nature of the subjects and the types of data requiring collection no single method will work effectively. They go on to suggest that it is acceptable to combine methods, however, they do warn that this may impact upon the external validity of the study. A decision was taken that this would be an acceptable limitation upon the study, and therefore a mixture of both a purposive sampling method (Chein 1981) and a snowball sampling method (Hall and Hall 1996) would be a viable alternative. (Purposive sampling refers to hand-picking the sample needed in order to learn from those who best exemplify what is being studied, snowball sampling consists using respondents to refer researchers on to other respondents). Whilst concerns over representativeness are accepted, this proved to be a successful method in recruiting respondents that may otherwise have been hidden from the research programme.

Three cohorts of female lone parent volunteers were recruited. Those participating in NDLP, those participating in any initiative or involved with any support group (participants), and those not (non participants).[13] Participants were recruited from three Community Colleges in the Liverpool area; from the network of Parent School Partnerships operating at many of the primary schools in the area; from smaller scale interventions such as the Liverpool One Parent Family Trust and a number of mother and toddler groups. These were chosen as they were considered to represent the full spectrum of why individuals may choose to participate in interventions. The Community Colleges offers a wide range of courses, many of which will allow a recognised qualification to be gained. The Parent School Partnerships offer the opportunity to engage in a range of activities most of which may be considered to be hobby based, whilst the Liverpool One Parent Family Trust operate primarily as a organisation designed to provide advice and support as and when required. Mother and toddler groups were included as it was thought lone parents may access these as a way of improving social contact.

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[13] For the purposes of this paper the terms *participant* and *non- participant* will be used in the way they are used within the Benefits Agency reports. That is, participants are those that are involved or attend either the NDLP or a community based scheme and consider **themselves** to be part of the scheme or initiative. Non participant are those that either do not attend a scheme or do not consider themselves to be part of one. The rationale for this is that some lone parents were contacted at such schemes who were either attending for

In respect of the collection of the quantitative data, May (1993) advises that in the development of any research tool close consideration needs to be given as to its development and a useful method to use is to engage is some preliminary fieldwork. There are of course practical implications in doing this, in that respondents may not understand a particular question or questions, or there may be some ambiguity concerning meaning. This will be discussed presently, however of primary concern was, as Oakley (1981) had posited, how is it possible for outsiders to understand the dynamics of the insiders. This was not just an issue in relation to gender, but also in relation to lone parenthood itself; the problems associated with finding adequate childcare and the restrictions this may bring; the problems of living on a low income; inadequate housing and social isolation; issues to name but a few. Whilst some of these may have been experienced by a researcher in the past, is it possible for a researcher who has never experienced these dynamics together to fully appreciate the impact they may collectively have. The first concern therefore is not necessarily practical, but could be argued to be epistemological.

To overcome this initial problem, the first discussions with the 12 lone parents arranged by the LOPFT were designed to explore some of the negative and positive issues of lone parenthood itself. Some of this information was obtained from the literature, but it did seem logical to start with somewhat blank slate. That is, it was always the intention of the study to address issues raised by members of the study population itself. These discussions raised such areas as self esteem and the effect this may have on personal agency, also depression, not in a clinical sense, but how emotions where subject to fluctuation day to day. Other areas included how lack of material possessions had negative emotional effect and how perceived control over health could also be subject to changing environmental conditions. With these areas in mind a questionnaire was constructed that, after taking some demographic information, attempt to address the topics raised[14]. A pilot study was undertaken in January and February 1999 with 52 lone parents attending the LOPFT (n=33), the Netherley Access Point (a community scheme

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the first time or only attended at irregular intervals. Volunteers refer to those from either cohort who were part of the study group.

designed to offer support to vulnerable groups in South Liverpool) (n=14) and a Mother and Toddler group in North Liverpool (n=5). Discussions with the respondents suggested that the only real problem was that the questionnaire was too long and that no real information was given that related to what the study was attempting to do. All the questions were said to be clear and unambiguous and as data were entered in SPSS no other problems became evident.

The questionnaire did however have to be shortened and after some consideration it was decided that a section containing an inventory of what possessions the study group may own and/or have access to, should be omitted. The justification was that whilst it may have been useful to compare some of the results from other scales with material possessions, it was internal processes that were of paramount importance. The questionnaire was amended and after scrutiny by three members of the initial study group, distributed to the study population. Quantitative data collection was completed by November 2001.

Data were entered into SPSS and analysed using the methods described by Gupta (1999) and Trochim (2001). Each of the authors provide advice based upon the type of data collected and the type of information that may be required. Advice is then further given as to the appropriate statistical test. Thus, significance was measured using chi-square tests, correlations using independent and paired samples t-tests and prediction using simple, multiple and logit regressions.

An analysis of the data described the volunteers as having a similar profile to that of the national population of lone parents in terms of marital status, number of children, and income and expenditure. Similarity of results was also found in respect of other indicators, such as, as will be seen, the effect of working (or training) on mental health for women (although not specifically lone parents) as reported by Rout et al (1997). Representativeness will not be claimed, but it can be argued that a degree of typicality has been achieved (Trochim 2000). Shipman (1997 p60) argues that whilst non-

[14] The justification for each of the scales subsequently used will be given in the corresponding section.

probability samples can be suspect, the key to the quality of the sample is how they relate to the aims of the research itself.

In respect of qualitative date, volunteers were recruited using the methods described above, whilst analysis followed a process of analytic induction and constant comparison as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The central tenet here is that rather than establish a working hypothesis with which to test data, theory instead emerges from data[15]. As evidence is accumulated, comparison is made with other cases that either confirm or refute the images the researcher has built, thus similarities between cases are categorised and with it, concepts are developed. As data collection continues constant comparison is made between the concepts the researcher has developed, data already collected and new data to the study. In this way, pictures of social life are refined and elaborated in response to both corroborating and non corroborating evidence (Coffey and Atkinson 1996).

The practical application of this was that after each interview, tape recordings were transcribed as soon as possible (mainly within two to three days) with notes inserted into margins. These notes were then coded and compared with existing themes that had previously emerged from data, thus data collection and analysis were an on going and simultaneous procedure. One example of how this fed into the theoretical perspectives further developed, is that as interviews and discussion group data were collected and analysed, recurrent themes included issues such as the development or lack of a sense of personal agency, general lack of confidence and the weight of societal beliefs as to effective parenting. As a result of these emergent themes data were able to be placed within a context of self efficacy and the effect and influences upon such.

It is of course the case that there may have been a misinterpretation during data analysis therefore leading to less than robust findings and conclusions, that is, trustworthiness may be compromised (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose a variety

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[15] This is still consistent with Lincoln and Guba's assertion (1985) that it is possible to identify existent theory with which to *approach* data.

of strategies that can be employed to test the trustworthiness of the qualitative research process, but advise that:

"The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stake-holding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. If the investigator is to be able to purport that his or her reconstructions are recognisable to audience members as adequate representations of their own (and multiple) realities, it is essential that they be given the opportunity to react to them". (p.314).

Other techniques are also suggested, such as an audit trail, discussions with colleagues and data triangulation, and to different degrees each of these were employed, however given both the epistemological stance taken and the ethical considerations raised, member checking seemed the most logical, robust and indeed ethical method of verification that could be made. To again return to the practical application of this, two techniques were employed. Firstly, of the 40 interviewees, 26 were interviewed on more than one occasion and as such the opportunity was there to be able to determine if specific comments or passages of conversation were woven into a context the interviewee both understood and/or considered to be applicable to them. Secondly, as these themes were established and confirmed by interviewees, they were then used as a framework within which to conduct group discussions[16], and as such new themes were able to emerge, whilst existing themes were both elaborated upon or, in some cases discounted.

In respect of the interview process itself, Patton (1990 p278) suggests that qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit. Bogden and Biklin (1998) describe interviewing as a purposeful conversation used to gather descriptive data so that the researcher can develop insights as to how subjects interpret their world. An important consideration is however concerned with how these interviews are conducted. For this study the interview

[16] There is of course an ethical consideration here. Care was taken so as to protect the anonymity of study participants.

protocol as described by Seidman (1998), who advocates utilising open ended questions that build upon and direct the probing of the participants' responses, was the chosen method of interview structure in the first instance. This, it is suggested, allows the participant the opportunity to reconstruct their experiences within the topic under study. It did however become clear at an early stage that even with a semi-structured approach interviewees did want to discuss and raise issues that were not at first seen to be related to the issue in question. Upon analysis and perhaps more importantly, reflection, it did become clear that all the issue raised did, to varying degrees, have impact. It was therefore decided to start interviews with a broad question, for example, "What were your initial reasons for coming here", and then to allow the interview to proceed in the direction the interviewee wanted. It was recognised that by allowing such flexibility in the interview structure problems could be encountered insofar as the focus of the interview can, at times, be somewhat lost. A decision was therefore taken that for follow up interviews, or where specific information was required, for example in relation to health, semi-structured interview techniques were employed (Patton 1990). This did work to the benefit of the study as using different methods of interview techniques (in addition to quantitative data) allows triangulation of data from multiple sources and multiple contexts. Whilst this technique has been criticised by some for assuming a single fixed reality rather than multiple realities through the eyes of the actors (Seale, 1999), it nevertheless remained a useful tool for adding to the conformability and robustness of research findings. Importantly, in line with some of the ethical consideration's previously raised, it also allowed interviews to be conducted in a manner comfortable with the volunteer.

As already noted, for the purposes of data analysis the study was guided by principles suggested by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) who argued that data collection and analysis should be a simultaneous action. In respect of methods of analysis, qualitative research accepts the uniqueness of individual interpretations of reality, being wary of creating an unduly reductionistic or mechanistic picture of a complex set of processes. Nevertheless, commonalities in the process of interpreting qualitative data were intended to be identified but a problem does remain in that as Chenail (1992) points out, the actual

process of data reduction and display is itself fraught with danger. As suggested, one has to take care not be too reductionistic, yet to adhere to the methodological principles accepted the data does indeed have to be reduced. Cole (1995) thus proposes what she terms a qualitative matrix that she suggests enables the researcher to keep a handle on the different themes that may emerge. Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of this matrix.

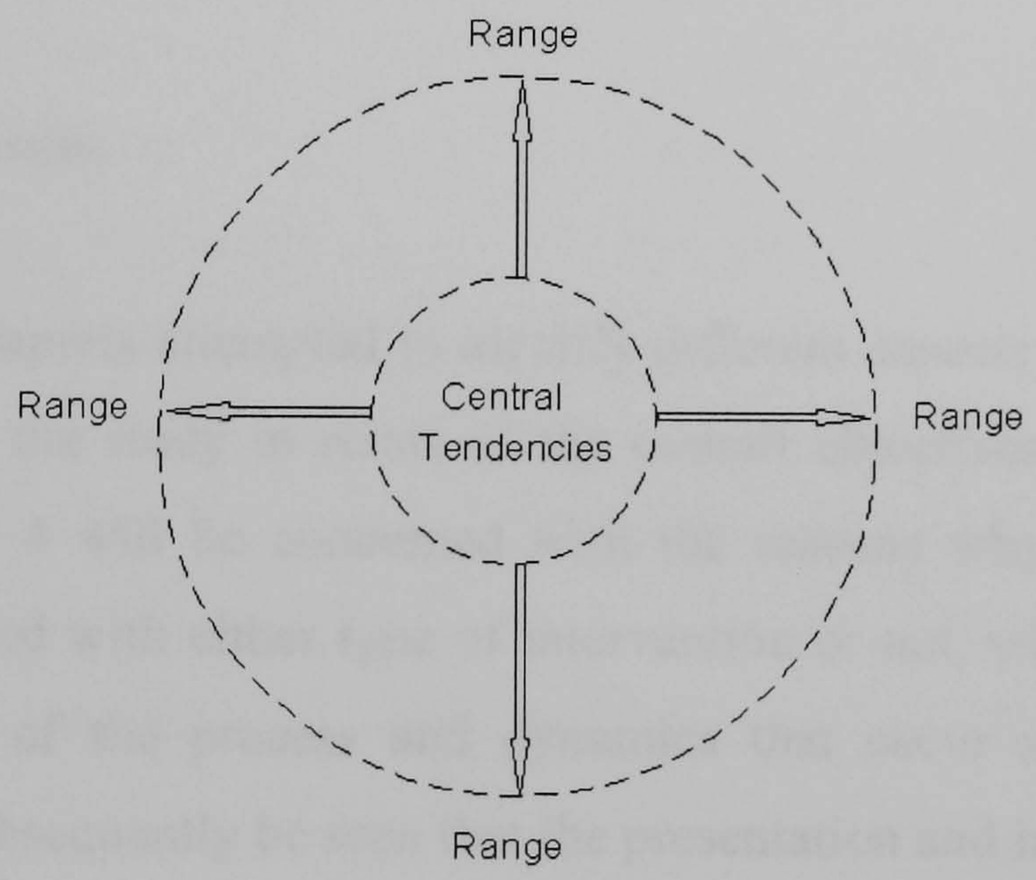

Figure 2. Qualitative Research Matrix
Source: Cole 1994

As can be seen, central tendencies represent how the data come together to form the common themes from the research volunteers experiences, whilst the ranges provide explanation of both how those central tendencies were categorised and what underpinned this categorisation. This proved to be valuable tool, not only for the analysis of the data, but also for what Chenail (1997) terms "keeping things plumb"; that is staying within the focus of the remit of the study. Chenail argues that qualitative research can sometimes lead the researcher away from the original study question in that lines of enquiry are followed that are essentially redundant. As data were collected, analysed and then confirmed rough sketches were made based upon the matrix (an example of this can be

found in Appendices 1) and this did allow information that may not have been relevant to be treated as such. Individual and group discussion data were treated analogously.

Originally, N.U.D.I.S.T. was intended to be used a tool of analysis, but as McKie (1996 p24) warns, it can have the adverse effect of placing a buffer between the researcher and their data. Similarly, albeit anecdotally, conversations with colleagues with strong qualitative research backgrounds also advised care needed to be taken in the use of such computer aided tools. Their argument was that the "feel" for the data could be lost if it becomes too depersonalised. This advice was acted upon and the approach advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and McKie (1996) was thus chosen.

3.3. Presentations of Results.

Each of the following Chapters attempted to identify different aspects of the lives of the lone parents involved in the study in terms of the overall objectives set for the study (Section 1.1.7.). Chapter 4 will be concerned with the reasons why the lone parents choose to become involved with either type of intervention or not, whilst the following Chapters describe some of the process and dynamics that occur as a result of the decisions taken. It will subsequently be seen that the presentation and layout of Chapter 4 will be different from the Chapters following on from it, in that it is attempting to answer a fundamentally different question. If one recalls, Patten (1990) suggested there "*...are not choices between good and bad, but choices among alternatives, all of which have merit.*" (p.166). At the outset of the research, it was decided to allow the lone parents to express in their own terms the reason for their decisions to become involved or not. As such, and keeping with the methodological stance taken, it was not considered appropriate to hypothesise as to what those decisions may be founded on. For this reason, Chapter 4 is based solely upon the collection and examination of qualitative data and after some introductory comments made by the study cohort, the relationship to existing theory was grounded in the data and is discussed as and when it arises.

It will be seen that issues such as self esteem and emotional well being were subsequently examined both qualitatively and quantitatively, and the justification for this is that these

emerged from the qualitative data at an early stage. Thus, quantitative measurements were taken as a result of what the lone parents themselves had identified as issues for examination. The presentation of these Chapters will therefore follow a style that fits with the type of date they are founded upon. An explanation of the varying methods used for the collection of data will precede each Chapter.

3.4. Interviewees Profile

Forty 1 to 1 interviews took place between January 1999 and August 2001 with 11 volunteers being involved in NDLP, 17 volunteers involved in some community initiative and 12 not involved in either NDLP nor any intervention. All of the study volunteers providing quantitative data were in receipt of income support and of the 40 volunteers providing such information, 14 were divorced, 13 were separated and 13 were single. Table 3 below provides a graphical breakdown of the separate cohorts.

Table 3. Marital status by NDLP, Community Scheme Participation and Control Group (n=40)

Marital status	NDLP (n=11)	Involved in community intervention (n=17	Control group (n=12)
Divorced	6	6	2
Separated	2	7	4
Single	3	4	6

Additionally, as stated, information was received from four discussion groups in Liverpool. One at the Liverpool One Parent Family Trust, one at the Anfield Road Junior School Parent School Partnership, one from the mother and toddler group at the Emmanuel Church, Fazakerley, Liverpool and finally one at the Liverpool Community College. Numbers involved in these discussion groups varied as given the physical environment at all four, and the fact that some of the lone parent's children were also there, lone parents were entering and leaving the discussion at regular intervals, although at any given time there were no more than 7 and no less than 3 lone parents involved. For reasons of confidentially, the names of all the study volunteers have been changed, but

where names are used indicates the lone parent did provide such information. When no name is given indicates the lone parent was a member of a discussion group and did not provide such information.

3.5. Study Respondents Profile

The study population had been lone parents for an average of 3.35 years with the longest being slightly over 9 years. They had a maximum of 4 children and an average of 1.88. Table 3 below demonstrates that very few of the study population were under 20 years of age, with over 88% being between 21 and 35 years. Over 95% indicated their youngest children still at home was under 12 years.

As seen in table 4, qualifications were generally low with less than 4% having attained above "A" level. This was not generally seen as a barrier to employment with less than 13% suggesting lack of qualifications hindered them finding employment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most often cited reasons were lack of adequate childcare (42%) and wanting to stay home with their children (22%).

Table 4. Age of study population and age of youngest child at home

	Age (years)	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Under 20	12	4.7
	21-25	94	37.0
	26-35	130	51.2
	over 35	18	7.1
	Total	254	100.0

Age of youngest child at home

	Age (Years)	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1-5	132	52.0
	6-11	110	43.3
	12+	12	4.7
	Total	254	100.0

Table 5. Qualifications of study population (n=254)			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Higher	10	3.9
	A levels	19	7.5
	GCSE's	95	37.4
	Trade	44	17.3
	None	86	33.9
	Total	254	100.0

Table 6. Crosstabulation of attendance at either type of scheme* age of youngest child still at home. (n=254)

Attending	age of youngest child at home at home			Total
	1-5 years	6-11 years	12+ years	
Yes	66	61	10	137
No	66	49	2	117
Total	132	110	12	254

A crosstabulation was performed to assess if the age of the youngest child still at home was statistically associated with the decision of the lone parents to access either NDLP or a community scheme. Table 5 above shows that whilst a pattern was evident it fell slightly below being significant (df=2, sig.=0.078). Of the 137 (53.9%) lone parents who had chosen to access an intervention, a majority had chosen a community scheme (68%) as opposed to NDLP (32%). No discernable pattern was evident when this was considered with the qualifications that were held.

It is worthwhile at this point to give some indication of the financial position of the study cohort, which as may have been expected since non were in paid employment, did place them within the bottom decile of earners. A point that does have to made here is that during some discussions it did emerge that a small minority were working within the alternative economy. It is not known how many, or if any, of those who completed the questionnaire were doing likewise. This is not too surprising in that those who indicated they were working in the alternative economy expressed a deep mistrust of the Benefits Agency and indeed officialdom in general.

No discussion will be made as yet concerning lack of income. Throughout the following Chapters qualitative data will demonstrate how this lack of finance does impact upon the experiences and decisions of the study group therefore to do so now would be to provide only a descriptive analysis of a complex problem. Given the methodological stance of the study, it is better to let the lone parents themselves elucidate upon their experiences within the context of the study's objectives.

The study cohort reported a mean income of £132.05, substantially below the average for full time female earnings of £365 per week, and of the average female manual worker earning of £241 per week (New Earning Survey 2002). The implication of this is that even though nearly 60% did receive financial help from sources other than benefits, a majority did borrow money for day to day expenses, and did have debts causing them concern (Table 7). The attempt to gauge the relationship between the amount of income and if this had any correlation with the financial profile above, t-tests were performed to assess any differences that may exist (Table 8). Correlations did exist with higher level of income and whether the respondents considered they were able to manage their money, if they borrowed money for day to day expenses and if they worried about money often, but, as can be seen not when considering if any debts existed causing immediate concern.

Table 7. Financial profile

	Frequency (n=254)	Percent
Any other financial help		
Yes	103	40.6
No	151	59.4
Ever borrow money for day to day expenses		
Yes	172	67.7
No	82	32.3
Are you able to manage your money		
Yes	149	58.7
No	105	41.3
Any debts causing concern		
Yes	171	67.3
No	83	32.7
Do you worry about money often		
Yes	140	55.1
No	114	44.9

To explore this a little further a chi-square test was used to determine if respondents considering they were able to manage their money well still resulted in them having debts they may be concerned about although no statistical association was evident (Table 9).

Table 8. T-tests of financial profile and income.

	Mean income (£ per week)		
	Yes	No	Sig.
Are you able to manage your money	135.37	127.33	0.044
Any debts causing concern	131.75	132.65	0.831
Ever borrow money for day to day expenses	124.07	148.78	0.01
Worry about money often	119.71	147.19	0.00

It is not clear how much should be read into this in that regardless of the debt one may be in, different people may react differently, however it may also demonstrate that even with good budgeting strategies debt cannot be avoided.

Table 9. Crosstabulation of any debts causing concern * are you able to manage your money. (n=254)

		Are you able to manage your money (n=254)		Total
		yes	No	
Any debts causing concern	yes	101	70	171
	no	48	35	83
Total		149	105	254

Chapter 4. Motivation for Involvement

As stated previously in Section 1.7. it would appear that the philosophy underpinning NDLP is one based upon a commitment to economic rationality for the State and an assumption of economic rationality for the target population. If we are to accept State assertions, all lone parents should want to become involved in one or other of the interventions, if, for nothing else, the financial rewards it is claimed are available. Evidence was also presented earlier claiming that those choosing not to become involved are also making a rational choice at the expense of a benevolent welfare state. The University of Bradford's (1999) seminar series did however place this claim into some context, highlighting many of the constraints, both tangible and perceived, some may face. This Chapter will expand upon this and attempt to determine the motivation of the three separate cohorts of the study population to choose either the NDLP, community based interventions or to choose neither. An obvious place to start is why do some choose neither intervention.

4.1. Non-Participant Group: Economic Rationality

An extensive amount of evidence exists demonstrating the practical difficulties lone parents face in accessing work, with childcare perhaps being the most obvious. This was indeed a recurrent theme in discussions. Nevertheless to simply say an increase in the availability of affordable childcare places would facilitate a rush to the workplace is perhaps underestimating some of the less obvious barriers needing negotiation. Duncan and Edwards (1997) argue the moral and societal prescriptions of parenthood have considerable influence in decisions made and to simply suggest economic rationality is the overriding principle misses the essential element of the decision making process. Indeed 97% of those surveyed wanted to start work, with 55% suggesting this would be at some point in the future, and qualitative data suggested this was more often than not based upon the perceived needs of their children. There was an acceptance that this

would inevitably lead to financial hardship, yet this was generally accepted with a degree of resignation. As suggested by Joanne (1c)[17]:

"We don't have much money but we get by. I know that money is important but you just have to have priorities. At the moment my priority is to be here. If that means us going without then so be it. It wont be like that for ever".

As further stated by Pam (3c):

"People think that just because you're able to spend a bit more then your kids will have a better life. You may be able to buy more things but being a parent *isn't just about that. It's about making sure there's some stability for them".*

This does lend some weight to Duncan and Edwards' assertions. These women appeared to guided by principles other than those contained within an economic rationality perspective however they were making a rational choice. Melberg (1993) provides a way this can be seen without an economic lens, suggesting the notion of rational choice in sociological terms is somewhat different from that contained in economic terms. He suggests that the economic imperative rests on the assumption of selfishness, but can see no objection to the same (non-economic) rationality being applied to altruistic or emotional behaviour. Himmelweit (1997) refutes this suggesting the individuality implicit in rational choice denies the impact of societal influences, however Melberg does suggests that whilst rational choice attempts to provide a model as to the intended outcome of a behaviour, other perspectives, such as symbolic interaction, are needed to provide the meaning ascribed to both the behaviour and the situation.

However, before moving on to develop that point it was evident that economics did play some part in the decision for some not to leave the home. It was not the case that economics was the overriding motivation for decisions, but conversations suggested that there were elements of a financial cost-benefit analysis for a few subjects. None of this

[17] "c" refers to the number of dependent children the lone parent has.

group thought they would be able to substantially improve their financial situation by taking paid employment regardless of in-work benefits, indeed, many though they would be worse off. Yet those who considered they would be financially better off by taking paid work did not consider the extra money gained was worth the extra effort.

"I get the rent paid and so what's the point in going out and slaving away for peanuts? If I'm going to have no money anyway, I may as well be home with them and still have none". (Laura 3c)

Whilst this type of comment is often used as a weapon to attack lone parents, they do have to be taken within the context of lone parenthood itself and the demands it places upon individuals. As explained by one lone parent:

"Bringing up kids is a job in itself. Any mother will tell you that. So I'm suppose to do another job, work twice as hard as I am now and get nothing more for it. Would you do that?" (Nicola 1c)

These comments were typical of the way the question of financial inducements to work were viewed by this group. One lone parent expressed the underlying frustration many had in more unequivocal terms:

"It makes me seethe. I'm a drain on society because I won't go to work for buttons but I ***choose*** *(own emphasis) to look after my kids. There are businessmen who get away with murder. There are people who work for themselves who fiddle their taxes. Everyone knows it goes on but nobody does anything. It's OK for them to get away with things but it's not OK for me or the likes of me. They can all go to hell"* (Naomi 4c)

4.2. Symbolic Role of Parenting

This provides an opportunity to make sense of the decision to stay home insofar as implicit with a symbolic interactionist perspective is the assertion of role taking, and what is perhaps evident from the comments presented is that these women were entirely unambiguous in what their immediate role in life was. Regardless of the economic consequences the role taken was that of parent. Hewitt (1984 p77-78) suggests roles are a cluster of duties rights and obligations associated with a particular social position and goes on to suggest that the metaphor is rooted in theatrical terms whereby the actor plays a role compatible with the cultural script they are provided with[18]. A vast array of evidence exists on the gendered nature of parenting, and indeed conversations suggested that these parents were particularly determined not be seen as being inadequate mothers. It was however clear that lone parenthood itself added a further dimension to this.

"It's bad enough for him that his Dad's not around that much now. I don't think it would be good for him if I wasn't here that much either"(Deb 1c)

This has to be set into the context that lone parents often have to face accusations of inadequate parenting and this perhaps contributes to the acceptance of financial hardship. A good example of this is provided by Lisa, a lone parent with one child aged four. Lisa had arranged childcare with her family and had worked in a nursing home part time for three months. Her ex partner and her family were both financially and emotionally supportive and Lisa was able to work either morning or afternoon shifts. She explained how she had to persuade her employers she could overcome the issue of childcare and how they appeared somewhat reluctant to employ her initially. However a change to work patterns forced upon the employees required Lisa to work nights one week in four. Whilst her family, particularly her mother, and to a lesser extent her ex partner, offered practical support to allow Lisa to continue her employment, to Lisa this was wholly unacceptable. Her motivation to start work initially was based upon a desire not to adhere to the stereotypical images of lone parents and attempt to support herself with the help

[18] Goffman suggested social actors also write their script. This will be addressed presently.

from her child's father. However to Lisa, leaving her child overnight one week in four, even in her parents house so she could continue to work was, paradoxically, considered to be wholly reflective of these stereotypical images of lone parents. Not that she had abdicated financially responsibility for her child, but that she had abdicated child rearing responsibility. To Lisa moving onto benefits was the lesser of two evils.

Lisa's case is interesting insofar as it provides an example of how whilst social actors do play many situational dependent roles, the role considered most dominant does have major influence. Hewitt (1984 p178) explains that roles impose constraint because they impose obligations, and these are our most fundamental images of social structure. Our perception of societal structures thus inform us of our place in it. Lauer and Handle (1977 p78-79) describe how all social roles are constructed with social expectations and these in turn inform behaviour. However they further describe how a multiplicity of roles may produce conflict (p82). Role conflict occurs when the norms that are consistent with one role prevent actors behaving in accordance with the norms consistent with another role. Indeed Collins, Tiedje, & Stommel (1992) warn how their study into role conflict for working parents found is at its most virulent for parents with young children.

At the heart of such concepts as social roles lies the notion of Self. Mead (1934) described how the Self is constructed within a dialectic interaction between the "I" and the "me". Mead suggested the "I" was the element of Self that is unpredictable and novel whereas the "me" is reflective of the expectations of the social environment. In a somewhat similar vein to that of the Freudian concept of the id and the superego, the interaction between the "I" and the "me" result in the formation of the Self. The "I" is the subject performing the action, whilst the "me" is the object acting toward it. Thus the "me" operates in response to a given situation in the present, whilst as that response becomes part of the past, the "me" reacts towards the subject, (the "I"). The Self then emerges from social interaction in which the individual takes on the role of the "other" and internalises the attitudes they perceive in both real and imagined others. The interaction of an individual's self-conception ("I") and the generalised, perceived view that others have of the individual ("me") is central to this viewpoint. Thus by reflecting

on ourselves as the "other" we gain experience into the correct behaviour we should display.

The comments made by Deb (1c) may help to shed some light upon this:

"I could sort out babysitters easy enough, but she's my daughter and she needs me."

This was a response to a question about why she had chosen to stay home with her child. The "I", acting toward the environment (in this case the question) in a disorganised, possibly irrational, way, would be able to organise childcare, but the "me" (displaying rationality) placed greater importance on parenting. This is somewhat simplistic interpretation of a complex concept, but here the socially constructed element of motherhood appears to be the most influential factor in the decision made. The "me" is aware of societal expectations.

This notion of the formulation of the Self rests on the central premise that humans are able to reflect on ourselves from the perspective of the other. We imagine how we appear to others and we imagine their judgement of what they see. The impression this section of the study cohort had of how others may see them appeared to be clearly embedded in the gendered assumptions of parenting.

"I should stay home, at least until she's in school. Lots of women work, but it's alright having them, it's another thing bringing them up" (Melissa 1c)

Another interviewee was far more specific:

"No....I thinks it's wrong to go to work when they're little. Kids need their mother when ***they*** *want them don't they, not just when their mother wants them"?* (Pam 3c)

What was clear from conversations with those that did not want to leave the home was that for them "proper" parenting and work, especially when children were young, are

entirely incompatible. Whilst this (for want of a better word) traditional view of maternity may be not as widespread as it once was (Brannen and Moss 1993) it is clear that it still exerts considerable influence. Conversations were often shot through with references to how children can go "off the rails" or (in one case) "haywire" if they are "left to their own devices". In a somewhat contradictory manner this group of women offered no charge of "poor" parenting for those lone parents who did choose to access employment or training, indeed a majority emphasised the importance of personal decision, but on the whole they did consider their own moral set would not allow them to do so at present.

4.3. Self efficacy and Motivation to Work

A distinction does have to made between those who categorically do not want to enter the workplace at present, and those who would like to, but choose not to. There were of course an array of factors influencing their decision, with childcare unsurprisingly being the most dominant. Similar sentiments were expressed about the need to be available for children at all times but conversations suggested that, notwithstanding the logistical difficulties they faced accessing work/training, a lack of motivation often underpinned their decision.

"I'd love to go to work but what's the point? By the time you sorted everything out you wouldn't have a minute to yourself" (Laura 3c)

"I'll go to work soon, but I've got too much on my plate at the moment. I don't think I could cope if I was doing a full time job right now". (Naomi 4c)

These comments taken in isolation may be seen to add fuel to preconceived fires but it does need to be place into the context of experience, and this lack of motivation to try to alter their working status was firmly located within the context of their lone parenthood. Take the comments made by Karly (2c) :

"If a woman goes to work they have their husband to rely on. I don't. It's virtually impossible to do both and do justice to both".

Regardless of their immediate intentions, the control volunteers did want to return to work but few had any clear plans as to specifically when. Their personal history may have directed some into wanting specific occupations but this was something that would be addressed at some point in the future. There were, albeit different, degrees of ambition displayed, often tempered with the realities of daily life.

"What's the point of thinking about that too much? Who knows what I'll do? You can always get something if you look hard enough but that's at least two or three years away". (Anonymous[19]).

"If I start thinking about what I'm going to do when he's old enough I'd go mad. I've got enough to worry about now, never mind worrying about what job I'll get"(Joanne 1c).

These comments are consistent with other research (Bradshaw and Millar 1991; Leeming et al 1994; Evason and Robinson 1998); and suggest that regardless of the continuing policy commitment to attract lone parents into the workforce, many lone parents themselves have different priorities. However, whilst accepting the logistical difficulties and societal prescriptions faced, a further dimension contained in the examples given is the lack of confidence in the ability to work and provide effective caring. Snape and Kelly (1999 p33) also provide anecdotal evidence of how lack of confidence may undermine the readiness of lone parents to enter the workplace, whilst empirical evidence of this is further provided by PSI (1996). Care does however have to be taken in that when lack of confidence is cited as a causal explanation of not accessing work/training, it is often applied in global terms. There was however no lack of confidence concerning the ability of the mothers to provide effective parenting. Indeed this was highlighted as being a strength. Confidence was lacking in combining roles, therefore a more accurate

[19] Anonymous refers to lone parents who may have given information at discussion groups.

description would possibly be lacking in self efficacy in their attitudes to work.[20]. Using this concept it possibly gives a more rounded understanding of why many lone parents do choose not to access employment. To set targets they have to be seen to achievable, and clearly the practical difficulties of lone parenthood make this particular target appear remote.

4.4. Attitudes To Community Interventions

Conversations concerning the idea of joining community based interventions evoked a wide range of responses. All the women were aware of at least one initiative or group they could join and were also aware that childcare was available in many. Some lone parents were unreserved in their criticism whilst others appeared to be more accepting:

"Learn how to cook? I know how to cook and we eat well. I can imagine what it's like. You get people teaching things we already know". (Laura 3c).

"I suppose they're alright for some people. It just depends on what you want". (Deb 1c).

Those who offered criticism did not appear to be critical of those lone parents who decided to become involved, but were adamant that they were not for them. One thrust of the criticism appeared to hinge on the notion of leaving the home and accepting the discipline of work without the financial rewards. This was allied to the prediction that given local labour market conditions were for the most part unfavourable, only major qualifications were likely to have any distinguishable effect on the type of employment gained.

"What difference is some second rate certificate in aromatherapy going to make? A waste of money and a waste of time". (Laura 3c).

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[20] Bandura (1997 p2) suggests self-efficacy judgements are more task specific than global, and individuals make use of these judgements in reference to specific goals.

The motives of those working at the interventions was also questioned. Indeed some lone parents suggested that if the resources placed into such interventions were used elsewhere, their prospects would be substantially improved.

"The people who work there haven't got a clue. If they paid them to look after the kids everyday I could go to work. But that isn't grand enough for them" (Nicola 1c).

The women who had never attended any type of community group were the most vociferous in their criticism. Those who had attended, for example mother and toddler groups, appeared to be far less critical:

"I used to go a couple of mornings a week. Yes it was OK. The girls who worked there were really nice and it was something to do". (Lisa 1c).

When asked if attending the mother and toddler group may influence her decision to take part in a community intervention:

"It may do. I'm not saying that I will, but if nothing else was available, who knows"?

Community schemes, in all their guises, came under the most criticism however from this group when the language of academic analysis of community action was used. When words like empowerment, user-led, self-help, were introduced into the conversation the response was unequivocally negative.

"You know, it gets on my nerves. They come out with all these statements and they mean nothing. You still go home after it and your still skint. No matter how empowered you are, if you don't pay the gas bill they'll still turn you off" (Maria 1c).

The point to be made here is that whilst academic and theoretical argument distinguish between community development and community work (Shaw and Martin 2000), it may be that those "in" the community do not. Interventions aimed with specific quantifiable

outcomes, such as training initiatives, were viewed the same way as those with less tangible outcome objectives, such as support groups.

4.5. Community Volunteers: Economic Rationality

Those lone parents who had chosen to access community interventions were for the main part also acceptant of their financial position as a by-product of their lone parenthood, however it appeared the undercurrent for involvement for some was based upon an classical interpretation of economic rationality. It was not the case that all of this group had financial motives at the heart of their decision to become involved, (this will be discussed presently) but the number who suggested this was the case was equivalent to those who did not.

The economically driven community volunteers did appear to accept that financial benefits would not be gained in the short term, but may be gained in the medium term. Some were clear how this may happen, some were rather more vague.

"Everything involves computers. If I know even a little about them it'll help" (Marie 2c).

"I'm just sort of testing the water and seeing how it goes. If I can make sure everything goes OK coming here a few a mornings a week, I could do the same if I was going to work". (Natalie 2c).

The common feature of this group was that they did not consider they were ready to enter the workplace at this time but did consider this would become a realistic proposition. This was of course dependent upon a variety of features, such as again childcare, but nevertheless the determination to "do something soon" was a common thread. It did appear as though this particular group viewed the interventions as a stepping stone on the way to work. They were often realistic in their analysis of their current position and how

marketable they may be to prospective employers, and whilst work was seen as unobtainable for them at present, these interventions were viewed as the next best thing.

"As much as I'd like to I can't really take a job at the moment, but she starts school full time in September. I might as well do something now that I'm able to. When she's does go to school I suppose I've more chance of getting a job". (Ruth 1c).

This group did tend to become involved with interventions where they may be able to acquire a specific skill, such as computer literacy or basic foreign language skills, however not all viewed the specific skills as a gateway to employment. Some thought prospective employers may look more favourably on them if they were able to demonstrate some track record of achievement.

What appeared to drive this group in terms of their involvement was nevertheless their financial position. Whilst some did mention the benefits associated with "just working", a majority considered that if they were able to secure work the financial benefits would make a considerable difference to their lifestyle. What is notable is that nine of the seventeen women in this particular group suggested they had (varying) levels of financial support from both family and/or ex-partners and they did accept that without this any financial advantage from working may be offset by loss of benefits. This is a point made elsewhere (Evason and Robinson 1997; Gray 2001), and is a reminder of how the intricate interaction between extra financial support and the opportunities it may generate remains as strong as ever.

4.6. Non Economic Motivation

A number of lone parents (n=8) chose to become involved with community interventions for reasons other than economic gain. The factors underpinning their decision to initially attend were varied, some originally only sought advice whilst some actively looked for social contact and/or social support. Sentiments did tend to emphasise the isolated nature

of their lives and how attendance at programmes offered an outlet from everyday existence. An added common dimension was the benefits of being able to relate to others.

"I just get bored stiff doing nothing. This gives me something to do". (Sarah 2c).

"It's good to be with people in the same position as you. Unless you've been there you don't know what it's like" (Anonymous).

Sentiments were also expressed about the way such initiatives have helped them reconnect with wider society.

"I just feel I'm part of ***something****. I know it's not much but I enjoy coming here. I've made some friends and I suppose it's made me realise that the world doesn't end at my front door"* (Claire 2c).

When asked if she felt any different about herself since she first attended:

"Yes. I've got more confidence now. I know I can't do everything I want to, but at least I don't look at a little set back as a major crisis. You see other people cope and it makes you think, "if they can do it so can I".

This group were unanimous in their praise of such interventions. There were of course an array of factors why this may be so, but conversations suggested the underlying dynamic was how a sense of agency was beginning to develop and how this had a tangible effect on everyday lives. Interviewees revealed many anecdotal examples of how this agency has had effect, but perhaps the one of the most telling comments was made by Angela, a lone parents for six years with two children:

"I've always put the kids first, most mothers do. I always thought that as long as the kids were OK then my job is done. That I didn't really matter. The thing I've realised is that I do matter. That I can have a life that doesn't have to include that kids in ***everything*** *(own*

emphasis) I do. What I'm saying is that I'm a mother first and foremost, I wouldn't change that, but I'm also a person too. As long as I can make sure they're alright, there's nothing wrong with me doing other things".

Angela's comments do perhaps summarise what many had indicated. That they consider they are able to combine a life of their own with their lives as mothers without compromising the effectiveness of their parenting. Angela does however reveal that, unlike the control group who defined themselves solely as mothers, she sees herself as not only a mother, but as someone who can also have other elements to her life.

Angela was somewhat unambiguous in her suggestion she would be comfortable combining parenthood with activities outside the home. Others may have been a little less unequivocal in their comments, but the focus of this group was moving from being centred solely on their children, to include a focus on themselves. Parental duties remained paramount in decisions, yet it was clear this group of women were, as a consequence of their growing sense of agency, developing sense of ambition that placed weight upon personal growth and improvement as well as upon benefits their children may receive as a consequence.

4.7. Role Clarity

Whereas the control volunteers were clear as to their role, those involved in community interventions at times appeared less so. Certainly some of those involved for reasons other than economic did struggle internally with the thought of leaving the home for employment due to effects it may have on children, yet there appeared to be a move for the group towards a combining of roles. This is not to say at this point there was confusion about their role, but perhaps slightly less clarity. We have of course been warned previously of the dangers of role conflict and/or confusion for working parents of young children, but there remains a subtle difference. It has to be recognised the community volunteers were attending voluntarily, thus their motivation was intrinsically generated. Indeed, as pointed out by Sarah (2c):

"I come because I want to, not because I have to. It's up to me".

Horrocks and Jackson (1972 p111) remind us that motivation for role performance can be internally or externally generated and that this is often directly correlated with the level of control one may feel over ones environment. This in tandem with the development of agency reported by this group does suggest that the locus of control of this group may have a greater degree of internality than once was (Rotter 1966). Wallston and Wallston (1981) do note that internality and externality are context dependent, thus it may be the case that the improvement suggested in global confidence has resulted in greater self efficacy in being able to combine roles.

4.8. New Deal Volunteers: Economic Rationality

Whereas the two previously described groups suggested a degree of resignation with their finances, perhaps the most notable characteristic of the NDLP volunteers was their level of dissatisfaction with their current position. Issues such as social contact and environmental stimulation were raised (and will be addressed presently), but the conversation inevitably returned to the question of money. None thought they would be able to substantially improve their lifestyle, but neither did any think lifestyle would not improve. Indeed, these lone parents appeared to approach the subject of work with a degree of pragmatism.

"You don't need loads more. Just a bit more. I'm good with money so any extra will go a long way". (Jackie 1c)

"It's just little things isn't it. I try and give her what I can but I know that if I give her one thing we're both going to loose out on another. We do manage, but if we had more we could manage more. It stands to reason". (Paula 1c).

Whilst some appeared to be concerned with the thought of leaving the home and the effects it may have their children, this was described as a price worth paying. Some

indicated how they felt a sense of guilt at not be able to afford some extras for their children and that working would allow their children to have the same material benefits as others. They did not however solely focus upon the benefits their children may receive. This was the first advantage often identified, but some indicated they would be able to receive additional benefits for themselves.

"There's nothing wrong with me wanting to have a better life. I'm not saying I'd be out every night, but it would be nice to be able to do things for myself once in a while". (Sheila 2c).

What this group were clear about was that apart from the obvious fact of having more available cash, the consequence of this would enable them to lead a type of life more in step with modern society. It has long been recognised that the nature of social exclusion is by definition relative (Mack and Lansley 1984), and this concept appeared to weigh heavily on the decision to become involved with NDLP. Reference was often made to how at present they struggled to keep up with others, and how that affected the quality of life for both themselves and their children. This became manifest by the specific identification of a range of consumer items and lifestyle choices, from cable or satellite television to taking holidays, yet the underlying motive appeared to rest upon a comparison made between what they were able to provide compared to what they considered they should provide.

"Kids want everything don't they? Why should they suffer because it didn't work out between me and my ex. I mean, when I was married I could afford to get them anything. It's not their fault". (Jackie 1c).

It was not the case that all suggested they wanted to access paid employment since the start of their lone parenthood. Some spoke of how they had moved to this stage as part of a gradual process that took into account not only the needs of their children but also their own parenting preferences. Conversely, others suggested this was their immediate aim since the end of their previous relationship. Nevertheless, regardless of the time span

taken to reach this stage their motives were based upon similar sentiments. Finance was unquestionably the most influential factor in their decision, yet additional benefits associated with work did surface, with increased social contact and external stimulation identified as positive by-products of working.

"I've done my bit with the kids. I stayed home when I was married with Liam, and I wanted to stay home with Gemma even after me and him split up. I want to go to work now. I mightn't get the best job in the world but at least I'll have something else other than just the house and the kids". (Teresa 2c).

4.9. The Influence of Media

Few of the NDLP volunteers explicitly suggested the manner in which lone parents are portrayed in the media had anything to do with their decision. Overwhelmingly they considered those that made comments that may be detrimental to lone parents were at best misinformed and at worst had hidden motives. Not just the NDLP cohort, but the whole group of lone parents were quick to distance themselves from the image of teenage mothers with "questionable" moral standards. The two quotes below from Tracy (2c) exemplify the thoughts of most of the cohort.

"There are some who may be like that but most aren't. I was with my ex-husband for 13 years. It gets on my nerves when I hear things like that".

"The papers pick up on what they want to. They write a story about one girl on their own with kids and the next thing everyone is like that".

There were however many comments that hinted at the way lone parents are portrayed and perceived did have some influence. Whilst denying the image of lone parents had influenced her decision, Paula (1c) did nevertheless concede:

"It's not a problem if you're not working and you're married, but it is a problem if you're not working and you're a single mother. I never tell anyone I'm at home on my own. They get an idea about what you're like. That you're lazy or whatever".

This has been discussed earlier and does highlight how the opinion of others can influence decision that may be taken. Whilst not wishing to downplay this at present a fuller discussion will be made presently within the context of further results.

Data does suggest that decisions to access an intervention or not are primarily founded upon the style of parenting deemed most appropriate at that time. Thus the parenting preference can be based upon such things as the symbolism associated with style of parenting, societal prescriptions, financial resources that may be available, the development of skills and the need for social contact. Whilst this may guide the initial motivation, attention does need to be paid to the dynamics that underpin the decision taken. That is, what do lone parents need to negotiate to want to leave the home. The following Chapter will attempt to address this.

Chapter 5. Towards a Typology of Involvement

The evidence suggests the motivation guiding the decision of the cohort to engage, or not to engage, in an intervention was varied and wide ranging. It is possible however to identify characteristics across a range of constructs that may go some way to offering an explanation of their decision. Perhaps the most obvious construct can be found in whether the motivation to access employment is evident or not. It is accepted that lone parents from previous studies (Evason and Robinson 1997) and indeed this study, do suggest they would like to work, but often this is at some point in future. Regardless of the timespan of the declared intention to start work this has to be addressed within the context of a variety of variables. The orientation of the three different cohorts with regards to the focus of their attention, whether that be wholly on their children or whether they were taking into account their own needs did exert some influence on the decision made. This in turn appeared to be influenced by both the clarity of the role and whether there was confidence and/or intention to combine roles.

This appears to be a relevant point and is worthy of further attention as results do suggest that the role lone parents consider the most prominent does have effects upon behaviour, or for that matter, behavioural intentions. In addressing this construct one may begin to locate lone parents along a particular continuum ranging from an orientation toward being a parent to a parent/worker. However this of course does not explain the dynamics that exert influence as to where the different individuals may actually be placed. To do this, we need to return to some of the concepts introduced earlier.

An influential theory for understanding and predicting behaviour can found within aforementioned Fishbein & Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Action (1975). According to this theory, the central component of behaviour is behavioural intention. That is, people do what they intend to do, and not what they intend not to do. These intentions are determined by both attitudes towards the behaviour and subjective norms, these being evaluations of the behaviour and an opinion about what others who may be important to the individual think he or she should do. This has clear resonance's with the results as the

intention to behave is clearly influenced by both the attitudes towards the particular behaviour and the subjective norm. Or to be more precise, the intention to work or stay home is influenced by both the interviewees attitudes towards what it means to be a mother and a worker, and by what others, in this case both other mothers and wider social networks, may think of that duality.

As suggested, results contained in the previous Chapter do tend to support this position. The immediate intentions of the three cohorts appear to be influenced by both their moral interpretation of parenthood and how they perceive society's moral stance. There are nevertheless nuances that do emerge. The moral dimension of the individual does seem to be predicated on a range of common variables, particularly that of their children's age. This in turn could be said to be linked to what it is society deems appropriate for parents of younger children. This however is not alone to predict behaviour. If we are to take the case of a lone parent who wants to start work as soon as possible and who is comfortable with combining roles, this still may not be enough to facilitate change in behaviour, that is, it may not be enough to allow them to start work. They may have to organise childcare and be able to afford that childcare. They may have to look for a job, attend an interview and pass the interview. Clearly then, the intention to perform that behaviour, and its predicates, (attitude and subjective norm) are no guarantee that work may be obtained. Other factors beyond the control of the applicant have influence. This was a point taken by Ajzen (1985) and why the theory was extended to include an element of perceived behavioural control within the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Ajzen (in press) has subsequently reconsidered the usage of the term perceived behavioural control and suggests that it is often used to imply the perceived control one may have over a course of events to attain a particular goal. He suggests that this was not the intention of the construct, that it was intended to refer to the perceived control over factors that may allow, or not allow as the case may be, the ability to perform the goal itself. It does not consider how such factors may be negotiated, it merely acknowledges they exist and predicts the influence they may have. To this end, he suggests a better description would be perceived control over performance of a behaviour. This does not of course describe the mechanics of how that is arrived at (Bandura's concept of self efficacy is perhaps a

better tool for this and will be addressed presently), but it does provide a framework that again can be applicable to all three cohorts.

If we are to take Ajzen's revised construct as he subsequently described we may again start to begin to see where and how subjects may be placed along the parent-parent/worker continuum. The control group identified both internal and external factors that may hinder progression, for example the sense of moral prescription and the ability to organise childcare, and these do seem to be some of these types of motives Ajzen suggests impact upon actual behaviour, or to be more precise, the intention to perform that behaviour. So one may argue that for lone parents to move to a position whereby they want to return to the workplace, and be motivated to put into practice behaviours that may allow it, they must consider that it is a realistic proposition at that time.

This does seem a somewhat obvious conclusion and understandably there has been general support for this type of reasoning (Ajzen 1988). However Terry et al (1999) suggest that the role of the subjective norm in predicting behaviour is consistently relatively weak, and thus a wider analysis is needed to fully understand behaviour. They returns us again to the concept of role but in the guise of how central the performance of a behaviour is to the notion of self concept. The argument is that the intentions to perform a behaviour are predicated not only upon the constructs identified by Ajzen, but also upon the extent to which behaviour performance is congruent to a persons self-concept. This was touched upon earlier (in the way the self reflects upon itself), but we do have to remember that whilst the impression of the self is dependent upon the particular experiences and life history of the individual, and thus provides the distinctiveness and uniqueness humans perceive of themselves, the self enacts roles within the social context. The danger is, as explained by Scheirer and Carver (1980 p233), the social context can, and often does, make different demands upon us insofar as we may be asked to perform two or more roles simultaneously. This they argue can produce an uncertainty about the correct or appropriate behaviour to perform at that time and it is by resolving such conflicts that self concept and self identity is formed and reinforced.

This argument does appear to be valid in that as if we are to consider the opposite ends of parent - parent/worker continuum, it may be the case that both the control group and the economically driven cohort did appear to have clear intentions as to what their roles would be. This may seem contradictory since one rested upon the domination of the role of parent but the other is prepared to play the dual role of parent/worker and may thus lead to the role conflict previously mentioned. Yet it may be that those who are able in the short term to envisage themselves in this duality of roles are firstly able to organise structures that will allow it, and secondly are willing to accept it. Taking this assumption a little further those that are involved in community schemes primarily for reasons other than economic gain may be displaying some of the characteristics identified by Scheirer and Carver in that comments do suggest internal conflict about what role they are willing accept.

A salient point made by Horrocks and Jackson (1972 p95) suggests that roles have their basis in the needs of an individual developed during the life course. If the role then receives approval by feedback from others it may culminate in the role being moved upward in the individual's role hierarchy. If this is so, it does provide explanation as to the influence social networks and wider society may have in establishing what role is considered to be the most important in the lives of lone parents. It may also provide an explanation of why confusion over role is evident in some of the study population. Prominence is given to the family and parenting in both policy formation and in wider social attitudes, yet individual responsibility and a retreat from welfare are heralded as positive individual characteristics.

Again, results do suggest that respondents did attempt to fulfil a role the would gain approval from others. On one hand there were those who placed themselves firmly into the parent only end of the continuum whilst others, for example Lisa, (the lone parent who stopped work because of the imposition of night shifts), started work in the first place in order not to adhere to the stereotypical image of a wholly benefit dependant lone parent. Yet another stereotypical image lone parents contend with is the inadequacy of their parenting, so for Lisa, the charge of being wholly benefit dependant is a lesser evil

than being financially independent yet being perceived to be a less than effective mother. This suggests that whilst the subjective norm is dependent upon wider social factors, the level of influence it exerts depends upon the individual circumstances the social actor may find itself in.

This may give some credence to Terry et al's (1999) assertion that the subjective norm is inconsistent in predicting behaviour since self concept may be overlooked. This point is not contested, but it must be accepted that subjective norms do have influence, and this is central to the arguments made in the seminal work by Goffman concerning the performance of roles.

Goffman (1971) use a dramaturgical approach (p13), addressing the nature of styles of presentation used by the social actor and its meaning in the wider social context. The social actor enacts a performance and that performance is designed to display attributes the social context may deem to be correct. Goffman does make the point that the actor may or may not be acting for their own benefit and uses the example of a doctor who use a placebo because their patient may consider they require more extensive treatment (p16). Thus Goffman is suggesting that our actions are not necessarily what we consider to be the most logical, but are the most socially appropriate at that time. Goffman further illustrates this providing an example of a couple running a hotel in Shetland who gradually adopt the middle class values of their customers (p17). Thus the suggestion is that our performances are context dependant and that the individual's identity is developed as a result of this interaction with others.

The process therefore of establishing a social identity becomes connected to what Goffman calls the "front" (p19) which he suggests is the part of performance that is seen by others and is relatively fixed to allow consistency in the appraisal by others. In this way social identity is projected in ways that are normatively understood and thus the duties of the social role are communicated in an equally consistent fashion. Goffman further suggests that in many instances fronts are already established for specific social roles and whether social actors want to perform the tasks associated with the role, or

whether they just want to provide the appropriate front, they are, more often than not, required to do both (p24). However fronts tend to be selected rather than created and Goffman argues problems can arise in this process of selection, and if this is the case, it perhaps sheds more light upon the role conflict identified previously.

Nevertheless, Goffman's suggestion that roles are pre-established and precede the individual is a central premise to symbolic interactionism. As suggested by Hewitt (1984 p34) if they were not, then the symbolic nature of interaction would be individual rather than social in its nature and thus the social interpretation would be lost. However another premise of symbolic interactionism is that whilst it accepts that one particular role can, and does have dominance, it also accepts that one can have a multiplicity of roles and social identities. This again may give some explanation of why role confusion was evident for those, especially, in the centre of the parent-parent/worker continuum. Horrocks and Jackson (1972 pp117-118) explain that when an individual receives positive reinforcement for a playing a particular role, if that role is not part of the individual's existing identity, an evaluation will be made about whether the role is part of the individual's value system or not. If it is not, the role will be discarded, if it is, or may be, the individual may try to impose this role within their cognitive processes. What this leads to is a state of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) whereby a state of disequalibrium is reached within the person's cognitions. Here the individual will either discount the new role or will attempt to integrate it into their existing affective processes. If we are to take the comments made by these cohorts we can see how conflicting messages from society make whatever decision is taken subject to criticism from various sources. The point is that external reinforcement has effect upon the identity hierarchy mentioned previously. It does seem reasonable to assume that the more reinforcement, the further up the hierarchy that particular identity will move. The change in the position arises out of the individual's attempting to reduce the cognitive dissonance being experienced within the framework of the value system that the individual holds. Returning again to the influence of social pressures and the way these social pressures are interpreted, it may be that many of the lone parents are attempting to reconcile the conflicting demands placed upon their value systems as to the most appropriate role. If

this is so it further demonstrates the manner in which societal expectations are manifest in the symbolic nature of the roles adopted.

The discussion so far has focused upon the nature of roles from the perspective of a self identity and how the individual constructs the self through reflection. Constantly running through this is how the self is therefore created through the social process and with reference to subjective norms. A further dimension to consider is how a behavioural response is formed. Terry et al (1999) suggest that to understand behaviour, and thus to predict behaviour, the self has to be set into the social context. With this is mind they argue that the self is constructed to include the subjective norms of individual's group membership and provide evidence that suggests behavioural intentions are moderated by the salient beliefs emanating from group identification (p238-239).

Discussion has also focused upon the development and maintenance of the self concept and its influence upon perceived role congruent behaviour. The self concept is however a cognitive appraisal of what individual's may attribute to themselves and what they believe others will attribute to them in their appraisal of observed behaviour. Enmeshed within this appraisal are self evaluative judgements over self worth and this is why much of the discussion of the self contains elements that are aimed towards evaluations of self esteem. This will be addressed in detail later, however the self concept remains a global interpretation of the self. Thus, it includes evaluations of one's global self worth, often set into the context of group referenced behaviour. This evaluation is applied in terms that include an assessment of confidence. However Bandura (2002) argues that "confidence" is a rather vague term that describes the strength of belief but does not specify what the confidence is toward. Bandura proposes we use self efficacy as an alternative assessment as this allows an individual's agentive capacity to be evaluated. In this manner one can see what the confidence is toward and can grasp the direction the confidence is going. As Bandura succinctly puts it, one can be confident one will fail. However before placing results into this context it is worthwhile to detail the properties of self efficacy which will provide a clearer context within which to place results.

At the heart of self efficacy is the assumption that humans strive to maintain control over their environment, this being done internally by the control over thoughts, actions and motivations (Bandura 1986). Part of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the self efficacy component refers to *"beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations"* (Bandura, 1997 p.2). Thus self-efficacy beliefs are aimed at the individual's perceived capabilities to attain specific results from specific tasks.

Bandura (1994 p71) argues there are four main influences upon one's self efficacy, the most important being mastery experience[21]. Here individuals assess the effects of their actions and their interpretation has effect upon their efficacy beliefs. Low self-efficacy expectations regarding a behaviour, or set of behaviours, can lead to avoidance of those behaviours, whereas increases in self-efficacy expectations should increase the frequency that the particular behaviour may be performed.

The second influence upon efficacy information is through vicarious experience. Whilst this is not as strong an influence as mastery experience, as suggested by Schunk (1987), when individuals are uncertain of their ability to perform a behaviour, or have not performed that behaviour previously, they do become more receptive to it. Significant others (or models) can help encourage beliefs that may influence observable behaviour. This of course can work in both a positive or a negative sense. The success or failure of a model is dependent upon the level of ability the model has to perform the behaviour in reference to the individual themselves. If the individual considers the model to have similar or better ability and fails then self efficacy of the observer may be influenced negatively. If the observer considers the model to have less ability, failure does not necessarily lead to a reduction of efficacy (Brown & Inouye, 1978).

The third source of efficacy beliefs are concerned with the verbal persuasion one may receive from others. Bandura (1997) does warn us that to have sustainable positive effect

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[21] It is accepted that the word "mastery" may itself be a contentious issue. However, given this is the term used by Bandura, this is the term that will be used.

these verbal persuasions have to have solid foundation and that empty praise or the encouragement for an individual to achieve something they consider unachievable will have no effect. Bandura (1986) does suggests it is easier to weaken efficacy beliefs through negative reinforcement than to strengthen beliefs through positive reinforcement.

The final source of efficacy beliefs are concerned with the psychological state of the individual. Anxiety, stress and mood all provide a reference point for the individual in the construction of beliefs, whilst in a reciprocal fashion, efficacy beliefs also have effect upon psychological states. Bandura (1997) suggested that individuals construct their own psychological state as a reaction to a specific event and that one can thus "read" oneself. Confidence toward the event or task is then gauged by the evaluation of ones affective response. Further to this, negative reactions to a task can lower efficacy beliefs further.

Self efficacy beliefs thus influence motivation to perform tasks and engage in activities in a number of ways. Most people engage in behaviours they consider they are competent in, or in tasks they consider they are able to complete. Conversely, they try to avoid behaviours and tasks they consider they are not. Levels of efficacy also influence the amount of effort one is willing to put in, and the levels of resistance to difficulties and set backs one may demonstrate.

Having established an overview of the subject, it is possible to use this construct to further build an explanation of behaviour across the three cohorts. Turning to the control group and using the component Bandura considers the most influential, mastery experience, one may begin to see why the motivation not to work yet is so prominent. It is clear the agentic properties this group may have towards facilitating a change in behaviour, that is the take up of paid work, is restricted by structural determinants. To suggest that this group are unaware of these determinants is naive, and this is supported by the comments made, thus for a specific goal to be set, the goal has to be seen to be achievable. So clearly the potential to be able to access, in this case employment, is mediated by the potential to be able to negotiate structural factors. It may be that given many subjects highlighted the difficulties of lone parenthood with respect to the amount

of effort required to be sole carer, there may be elements of a recognition of the limitations some may have with respect to the ability to combine (master) both roles. It does however have be noted that this may operate on a variety of levels. The structure of the social determinants may conspire so that no matter the level of efficacy to perform the behaviour, the desired outcome will not be achieved. Just to develop this point a little further, comments do suggest that for some, whilst they may have the necessary skills and opportunity to access employment, they choose not to because of the lack of incentives. Thus it does have to be recognised that self efficacy is not enough to explain or predict all behaviours.

Self efficacy does however appear to play a part in decisions and to return to the concept of mastery experience, we are led to address Bandura's second component, vicarious experience, insofar as why do we consider certain behaviours are beyond our mastery if we have never tried them? Whilst there is no evidence provided by this cohort of positive or negative vicarious experiences with regard to the combination of parent-worker, it would seem probable that some did exist although it would be foolish to speculate as to the extent of influence it may exert. It would however be equally naïve to suggest none had taken place. Social actors do not operate in a vacuum and, as suggested earlier, do attempt to make sense of the social world they are in. The symbolic nature of relations do precede the individual, so whilst accepting that some had taken place, it is not clear at this point the nature of its influence.

This however cannot be said for the nature of the influence of the third component; verbal persuasion. Whilst no evidence is provided of micro level verbal persuasion, evidence is provided of this operating on a much larger scale, that is by the weight of cultural and societal beliefs. We can further add to this if we are to consider that given it is easier to weaken efficacy beliefs through negative reinforcement than strengthen them through positive reinforcement (Bandura 1986), it does appear that some are persuaded by the strength of the elements of societal beliefs that role combination does have effect upon the effectiveness of the parenting role.

Bandura's fourth component, the psychological state of the individual, also appears to be a telling influence upon decisions made. Evidence regarding self esteem, stress and anxiety will be presented in a forthcoming Chapter devoted to these affective processes, therefore, suffice to say for now, the control group did appear to have more emotional issues they considered they needed to deal with before any further issues could be addressed.

In relation to the community schemes volunteer group, and the component of mastery experience, evidence gathered in this thesis suggests that attendance at such schemes had aided the efficacy in the ability to combine roles for some. It was not the case that all thought they would be completely competent in this role duality, yet it would appear that there was a move towards an acceptance that roles could be combined. It is not the case that this self efficacy is always geared toward a parent worker duality for all of this cohort. What has to be remembered is that this cohort was essentially comprised of two groups. One group attended for reasons of economics, that is to gain employment as an overriding aim, whilst the other group attended for reasons of support and/or social contact.

The group that attended to find employment could also be divided further since a number of the volunteers suggested that the reason they were able to be in the position they were was because of their attendance at schemes previously. This does suggest that the opportunity to "test the water" can have positive effect as it does give some the chance to gain a level of mastery experience to engage in activities outside the home. This is not to say that it will inevitably lead to wanting to access paid employment, but it does give some the chance to develop the sense of agency so clearly identified by community participants as a positive outcome of involvement. Bandura (1994 p78) does address this point specifically suggesting that whilst increasing numbers of mothers are joining the workforce, a cultural lag between societal practices and the shifting modes of parenthood still results in women being the main carers, thus it is still women who are more likely to have to juggle the two spheres of social action. Women with a strong sense of efficacy in

the ability to combine these roles may derive a sense of well being, whereas those who may not may be more likely to experience emotional strain.

Returning to the concept of role clarity and the ability to combine roles does give some explanation as to why some suggested they have moved nearer to a position of job readiness as a result of attendance at community schemes. The realisation that roles can be combined and that ineffective parenting does not automatically follow may allow some to consider they are able to engage in activities, in this case work, in the same manner as the majority of the working age population. This is supported as whilst mention was made of some of the by- products of work, such as social contact, equal emphasis was made of the more tangible benefits; that is, increased income.

It is clear that the influence of the second component, vicarious experience, was important for some reaching the position they may be in. Exposure to environments whereby significant models are able to achieve mastery over specific aspects of life do have effect upon the efficacy beliefs of observers. Indeed the role of the "significant other" has long been recognised as an important influence upon the manner in which both the self, and indeed self competencies, are derived. As suggested by Huitt (1999), opportunities for individuals to experience success vicariously through the success of others is important, as it can impact upon an individual's perceptions of what is possible. This vicarious experience was not necessarily focused upon the ability to find employment or to juggle roles, but appeared to be couched in terms of levels of control over specific events. Nevertheless the cumulative effect of gaining efficacy towards events that may or may not contribute towards the act of finding employment, may have the effect of raising efficacy in the ability to adjust to testing or trying circumstances. Examples are provided of significant others at schemes overcoming difficult situations appearing to give a level of confidence to some in their ability to manage similar circumstances.

Equal importance appears to rest upon the component concerning verbal persuasion. Levels of both support and encouragement do appear to have had the effect of enabling a

growing sense of global confidence and this may have influence upon efficacy towards specific actions. Results suggest that this support and/or encouragement is both valued and recognised as a factor in the development of their sense of agency and that, for some, this has helped them reconnect with wider society. This is linked with the fourth component, the psychological state, and comments suggest that one of the consequences of attendance at schemes is that social support facilitates greater efficacy in the ability to deal with challenging situations. This could have a knock on effect in that it may influence further affective processes, such anxiety and stress, and comments tend to support this position.

Those involved in NDLP appeared to have reached a point whereby the efficacy for role combination was evident. A characteristic of this group was that whereas the other cohorts, certainly the community scheme volunteers, placed some weight upon issues of personal development and an improvement of personal agency, this group were motivated primarily by finances. It is not the case that this was exclusively directed at lifestyle improvement they may achieve individually, but appeared to rest upon the improvements for themselves and their children. Other benefits were identified, such as increased social contact, but this was largely peripheral to what they expected to find if and when they were to start work.

It would appear that structural barriers to access paid employment, whether or not that employment could be found in the first place, were able to be negotiated, and that they were able to comfortably see themselves in a dual role. What appeared to emerge from the data however is that this group saw their lack of efficacy in terms of not being able to provide what they considered to be the material benefits others seemed to enjoy. Thus the predominant source for negative efficacy information may be centred around their vicarious experience and the manner in which a comparison is being made with others. This is somewhat akin to an analysis to include conspicuous consumption, but if one to accept one of the central premise's of symbolic interaction, namely that humans possess the ability to reflect upon themselves as an object, thus they see themselves as others may

see them. As suggested by Ditmarr (1992 p79) individual's do often express their identity, to both themselves and others, through the use of material possessions.

At this point one is able to construct the beginnings of a typology of involvement and start to see the motivational properties that may underpin decisions taken.

Table 10. A Typology of Involvement

	Control group	**Community schemes volunteers**	**NDLP volunteers**
Role clarity	Strong	Developing/Ambiguous	Strong
Behavioural intention	Parent	Parent and Parent/Worker	Parent/Worker
Work efficacy	Weak	Developing	Strong
Symbolic influence	Actions	Actions and Possessions	Actions and Possessions

Table 10 provides a representation of how the three groups may be classified. With respect to role clarity both the control group and the NDLP volunteers have a strong grasp of their current role, albeit at opposing ends of the parent-parent/worker continuum. Perhaps greater ambiguity was displayed by the community scheme volunteers but, for some, that ambiguity may be short lived in that an acceptance of role duality was developing for some. This is not to say that the societal prescription of parenthood will be discounted, but that that alternative modes of parental care may become satisfactory. This is of course dependant upon the development of a self concept that will allow this progression to occur and thus is dependant upon the value system one may possess.

The confusion over roles is arguably a consequence of changing societal patterns, but as suggested by Giddens (1991) in a wider sense it is the consequence of the undermining of traditional societal patterns whereby traditional order is challenged. In modern societies Giddens suggests that self role is an issue that each has to work out for themselves (1991

p70). Traditional mechanical social structures have been replaced with organic structures with greater freedom to make choices concerning self role and identity. This is regulated by the position one may be in within a social hierarchy, yet even within such constraints one has greater freedom of choice. Giddens thus suggests that the connection between individual micro level dynamics and State or Corporation macro level dynamics has to be made. In a similar vein Cushman (1990 p600) argues self identity, and thus self role, is enmeshed within the dominant ideological forces that may be at work. Therefore the growth of individualism, the virtue of self reliance and individual autonomy are driving forces that can and do impact upon behavioural intentions.

In a paradoxical fashion this may offer explanation of the dominant role experienced by the three cohorts. The autonomous family (certainly the nuclear family) with the retreat into the private sphere, away from communal involvement, is held by some as the ideal institution to socialise children. Here responsibility for both care and socialisation are placed within the boundaries of the family itself although it is accepted that communal life will be of influence (Murray (1990) makes this point implicitly within the underclass thesis), however responsibility remains "in its rightful place" (Thatcher 1987). Yet the concerted attack upon welfare recipients together with the prevalent individualistic consumer culture where success is based upon material acquisition gained through individual endeavour, and of course the lack of value placed upon unpaid caring (Duncan and Edwards 1997) had sent a clear message that the only good parenting is that which combines individual financial autonomy with individual childrearing responsibility.

This basis may give further support to the categorisation above. Confusion over role, and what that role should entail, is quite likely to be a predicate of behavioural intentions. If the lone parent considers themselves able to be a parent/worker as part of their value system within the subjective norms that may have influence[22], then they appear to be more likely to have the intention to leave the home (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). Alternatively, if lone parents see themselves as parents only, they appear more likely to be intend to stay home. This in turn could have influence upon the efficacy to find and

[22] As with Section 2.8., this obviously assumes a relative epistemology.

sustain employment. It is accepted that structural influences will have effect, however before any these issues, such as gaining skills or finding acceptable and affordable childcare will be attempted to be negotiated, it would seem that the evaluation of efficacy is if work can be compatible with effective parenting.

A further distinction that may be of influence is that of what is the symbolic influence that guides decisions. For the control group decision are taken that reflect one aspect of parenting, whereas for the NDLP a different aspect is taken. To explain further, previous discussion focused upon the symbolism of parenting and the manner in which actions are symbolic of a particular style of parenting. For the control group it would appear that at present, the style of parenting most reflective of the manner in which they consider parenting should be conducted is one based upon actions. That is to say, whilst material considerations are important they did accept financial hardship as a by-product of their lone parenthood. It would appear that financial and material gain for this group is not a motivational factor in decisions taken. One must accept that financial decisions are taken, and data supports this, but the overriding consideration is given to what they consider their children's need are in terms of emotional support. Thus their actions are focused upon some of the less observable elements of what it means to be a parent.

The NDLP volunteers did appear to place greater weight upon how effective parenting necessitates an improvement in financial circumstances so that they, and more importantly, their children will be able to enjoy a similar lifestyle to that of others. This is not to say that emotional support is less of a priority for this group, but that individual circumstances does allow this added dimension to be seen to be needed to be addressed. This was dependent upon an array of factors, such as a change in attitude for themselves or a change in the emotional needs of their children. What does have to be acknowledged is that some spoke of how this point has been reached gradually over a period of time whilst others spoke of how this had been their intention since the start of their lone parenthood. This further emphasises the dynamic and complex nature of lone parenthood in that it demonstrates the diverse nature of lone parents and the way in which subtle variations in personal circumstances can and do have effect upon behavioural intentions.

Chapter 6. The Consequences of Involvement

Having explored some ideas as to the reasons individuals may choose, or choose not, to become involved with either NDLP or community schemes, this section considers the consequences of involvement. The previous section paid attention to the notion of self efficacy within a domain specific context, that is the efficacy beliefs concerning leaving the home, yet it also pointed to underlying global evaluations of the self. The term self esteem is often used to describe the component of the self concept that is self evaluative and includes aspects of the self such as cognitive, behavioural and affective processes the individual may experience (Blaskovich and Tomaka 1991). However as pointed out by Franken (1994 p443) the notions of both self concept and self esteem can be used analogously, but the self concept is developed through contact with the environment. The self esteem component is the evaluation of that contact. There has been strong level of support for this position (Rosenberg 1965; Gergen 1971) and given that, it is this that will be accepted.

Even within this narrowed definition of self esteem, there are nuances that may be found. Korman (1979) identified three different types of self esteem that may have affect upon the self concept. Firstly, chronic self esteem, which can be defined as those dispositions that occur consistently across a variety of situations and are the result of previous experiences with particular focus upon perceived competencies. The confidence an individual may or may not have in competencies steers individuals into situations where these competencies may or may not be used. Secondly, task specific self esteem, whereby in a similar vein to that of task specific self efficacy, the individual makes an evaluation of their competence concerning a particular action based upon observations of the results of one's efforts. Finally, socially influenced self esteem, where the expectations of others will have effect upon actions and evaluations of those actions. Here self esteem is constructed from feedback from others concerning the status of one's social identity or role and the ability of the individual to meet the prescribed behaviours of such.

It is the case that some of these points have been addressed in the preceding sections yet there remains considerable scope for analysis. However self esteem has been the subject of considerable attention for a number of years and as such much as been written concerning both its formation and its content. Cooley, in his seminal work, Human Nature and Social Order (1922), established the concept of the looking glass self, whereby what we see is:

"not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind". (p184).

Cooley further adds:

"We are ashamed to seem evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one, and so on. We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind. A man will boast to one person of an action, say some sharp transaction in trade, which he would be ashamed to own to another". (pp184-185).

Thus Cooley is arguing that the construct of the self, and importantly, the evaluation of that construct, is rooted in an evaluation of the other, how the other sees the self, and a calculation as to what their impression is. That is, how we compare to the other in a given context. Whilst Cooley is in this case context specific, this notion has been expanded to suggest that the global self esteem is located in the cumulative effects of many such evaluations.

A further evaluation of self esteem can be found within Higgins's Self Discrepancy Theory (1987), whereby each has multiple representations of the self to include the actual self, (who one is), the ideal self, (who one would like to be) and the ought self, (what one considers they should be), and that discrepancies between these representations leads to affective consequences. Here self esteem is the distance between any two of the three representations. The greater the distance the lower the self esteem, the lower the distance,

the higher the self esteem. Further evaluations of self esteem, its components and influences can be found, most notably with Rosenberg (1965) and Coopersmith (1967), yet the common denominator is the affective evaluation one makes of the self that underpins all.

Given the prominence given to this self evaluation throughout the literature, this section of the study was designed to assesses the affective evaluations the study population may have about both their current position and how they may view their future. Particular focus is paid to self esteem because, as suggested by Warr (1987 p28), a strong link can be found between overall affective well-being and self esteem in particular, although other processes were examined as and when they emerged from the data.

6.1. Measures: Qualitative Data

Data were colleted in the same manner as the preceding section with both one to one interviews and group discussions. Unlike the preceding section however follow up interviews were performed with seven of the community scheme volunteers and with three who were involved in NDLP. Some lone parents who were involved in NDLP, and went on to find work, were contacted but appeared reluctant to take any further part in the study and so this avenue was not pursued. This is a limitation on the study but can be somewhat mitigated if we are to return to either Fryer's (1986) or Warr's (1987) assertions that within the overall domain of work, (whether that be paid or not) positive mental health can be maintained with an optimistic attitude.

Conversations were in the main unstructured as it was considered this would allow study participants to express their experiences as they saw fit, however, where possible conversations were guided to attempt to include the "vitamins" Warr (1987) previously identified. This, it was hoped, would allow experiences to be placed within a context with previous empirical support (De Jong and Schaufeli 1998). Warr's model is useful in that given this Chapter in part focuses upon the current position of the cohort, it provides an evaluation of their assessment of features of their environment. To recap, Warr suggests

that these nine features (vitamins) have effects upon the mental health of the individual, and that these features are common to both work and non-work environment. Data analysis was conducted in line with that described in Chapter 3.

6.2. Measures: Quantitative Data

The preceding section dealt mainly with the question of why the study volunteers chose the option they did, and in line with interpretivist methodological assumptions laid out in Chapter 2, it was considered best to allow the cohort to express their reason themselves, thus the focus upon qualitative data. This Chapter deals equally with the question of what where the consequences of those decisions, thus, adhering the methodological pragmatism previously discussed, it was considered prudent to combine both qualitative and quantitative data. Instruments have been developed that attempt to correlations within the area in question and making use of such instruments did allowed greater understanding of the cohort's experiences.

This section of the questionnaire attempted to identify the current position of the cohort in two main areas; their perceived employment prospects and aspects of their psychological well being. Given such a broad base of data was recorded with the questionnaire, and given the fact that lone parents (especially those in contact with voluntary agencies) are regularly asked to participate in studies, measurement instruments were developed and/or chosen primarily for their brevity and their ease of completion.

For this particular section two measures of psychological well being were used. The first was the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965), a 10-item scale rated on a 4 - point response format where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 4 = "strongly agree" and there is no neutral point. Scoring was as per the authors instructions, with each question having two positive and two negative responses with five of the questions being phrased negatively and scores then reversed during analysis. A scoring range of between 0 and 10 is possible with lower scores indicating lower self-esteem. Although this was originally

developed primarily for use with adolescents, it remains a widely used instrument for measuring global self-esteem with all subjects. The second measure used was the Depressive Affect Scale (Rosenberg 1965). Laid out in the same manner as the self-esteem scale, this six-item scale measures depressive affect (emotion) rather than clinical depression and as suggested by Winefield et al (1993) given its lack of items dealing with physiological functions which commonly appear in other depression scales, it may not be as intrusive or embarrassing for respondents. For this measure a score of between 0 and 6 is possible with higher scores indicating higher depressive affect.

Two hundred and fifty four questionnaires were suitable for analysis and of these 137 respondents were involved with either NDLP (n = 52) or community schemes (n = 85) with the remaining 117 still home with their children. Those involved with either initiative were asked to complete the inventories again at a later date. The length of time for those involved with community schemes was dependent upon the length of time the scheme actually runs. For example, the Parent School Partnership last as long as the school term. Liverpool and Knowsley Community College's and Hugh Baird College courses last various length of time, often throughout the whole academic year. Other small localised schemes, such as mother and toddler groups operate for different periods, some throughout the year, some only for the period of the school term. The Liverpool One Parent Family Trust operate all year but lone parents who do use the service may only do so intermittently. A decision was taken that regardless of the scheme, no follow up data would be taken before a minimum period of three months after completion of the first questionnaire. This, it was considered, may allow sufficient time for participants to develop a level of attachment to the scheme and to recognise any benefits that may have been accrued.

For the reasons previously stated no follow up data was able to be taken from those who had gone on to start work through NDLP, and only 40 respondents were both contactable and willing to participate in the study further. One of the implications is that levels of affective well being cannot be gauged against an increase in income. This may have implications in that a comparison cannot be made with lone parents whose income may

have increased. Consideration was given to providing a comparison with lone parents who may be in full time employment, but this may not describe the path taken to employment, thus, the NDLP or community scheme effect may be missing.

6.3. Quantitative Results

Table 11 below gives the results of scores for the two scales. A comparative analysis with a group of unemployed women provided by Winefield (1993) demonstrates that overall, scores were lower for this group as a whole with means for self esteem and depressive affect being 7.23 and 1.44 respectively (p168). It must be noted that Winfield's study did not include lone parents, thus the relatively low scores in this study may be reflective of the particular difficulties faced by this group.

Table 11. Self Esteem And Depressive Affect Scores.

	Minimum score	Maximum score	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self esteem Range 0-10	2	9	5.27	1.717
Depressive affect Range 0-6	0	6	3.27	1.784

An independent t-test was performed to investigate difference between participants and non-participants with the two scales and as seen in Table 12 positively significant scores were found between the two measures. This is not to say that the scores for those involved would have been significantly different if taken pre and post involvement, but as seen in Table 13 positively significant pre and post involvement scores were recorded across both scales with a paired sample.

Table 12. Comparison of Two Scales and Involvement or Non Involvement.				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Self esteem scores	.002	.66	.243	1.081
Depressive affect scores	.019	.53	.087	.964

Table 13. Paired Sample T-Test Pre And Post NDLP Or Community Scheme Involvement				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			Lower	Upper
Pair 1	**Self esteem scores**	.000	.94	1.81
Pair 2	**Depressive affect scores**	.000	.71	1.84

A further t-test was performed to determine whether those involved in NDLP scored significantly differently than those involved with community schemes although no significant difference was found across either scale ($p>0.05$).

There is a general acceptance that lack of money has a detrimental effect upon affective processes, and so comparison was made of the income of participant against non participants. Whilst there was a slightly higher level of weekly income for those involved with an initiative (£133.14) compared to the control group (£130.77), it did not prove to be significant ($p>0.05$). However levels of income might be linked to either self esteem or depressive affect and thus a simple regression technique was employed to determine if either could be predicted by income. Results suggested that for this cohort, in this context, income was not a valid predictor of levels of either. It does have to be noted that respondents reported a weekly mean after housing costs income of £132.05, and given the relatively low reported mean income this may not be the case if a comparison was made with a cohort with increased financial resources, thus these results have to be placed into that context.

Respondents were asked to rate their employment prospects ranging from very poor to very good with no neutral point. Data were collapsed to form a dichotomous categorical variable defining answers as good or poor and procedures were followed to determine the effect this may have upon the two scales. Although no correlations were found in the t-test between the self esteem or depressive affect scales and how prospects were rated ($p>0.05$), respondents were slightly more likely to view prospects as good if they were in attendance at either of the initiatives ($p>0.05$). Further, as described by Table 14, respondents were also more likely to attend such schemes as children became older, with an increase when children were attending secondary school ($p = 0.078$).

Table 14. Cross tabulation: age of youngest child at home * scheme attendance or none attendance (n=254)

Age of youngest child at home (years)	NDLP or Community scheme (frequency of responses)	Control (frequency of responses)
1-5	66 (50.0%)	66 (50.0%)
6-11	61 (55.5%)	49 (44.5%)
12+	10 (83.3%)	2 (6.7%)
df = 2; p = 0.078		

Whilst the previous question was aimed at determining perceived employment prospects, respondents were asked if they felt positive about their future or not. Just over half (53.5%) were generally not positive, but when cross tabulated with whether respondents were part of an intervention, it was found that those that were generally positive were significantly more likely to be involved with one of the initiatives (Table 15).

Table 15. Cross tabulation: Are you generally positive about your future * scheme attendance or none attendance. (n=254).

	Yes	No	Total
NDLP or Community Scheme	74	63	137
Control	44	73	117
Total	118	136	254
Df = 1; p < 0.05			

A t-test was undertaken to determine if general positiveness about the future was correlated with results from either of the scales. As seen in Table 16, significant findings were recorded with the self esteem scale although no such findings were evident when compared to the depressive affect scale.

Table16. T-test of General Positiveness Towards Future With Self Esteem and Depressive affect Scores.

	Positive about future	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self esteem scores	Yes	118	6.23*	1.31
	No	136	4.44*	1.60
Depressive affect scores	Yes	118	3.58	1.89
	No	136	3.84	1.68

* $p < 0.05$

6.4. Qualitative Results

One notable result was the manner in which attendance at either of the interventions appeared to be positively correlated with both of the scales used. Whilst, as mentioned, the recorded scores were considerably below that of another study, the fact that mean scores did rise significantly, regardless of the baseline measurements, does suggest that the support available at either type of intervention can have positive effect upon affective processes. This was supported by many conversations whereby interviewees highlighted the types of benefits they have received since attendance began. A good example of the types of benefits and the way they may impact upon lives can be seen found in the following extract from a conversation with Carol (2c), a lone parent attending one of the Parent School Partnerships.

Interviewer (I)

Many lone parents I have spoken to have said that they originally started coming to places like this mainly as a way of getting out of the house. Is that the reason you came here?

Carol (C)

Originally it was part of it. For me though it was not just about getting out, I really wanted to do something constructive.

(I) *In what way?*

(C) *Well I just felt that I was stagnating. I've worked from when I left school until I got pregnant, I wanted to stay home then for a while, but now he's older I've got a lot more time on my hands and I was just bored stiff. I just needed something to do to. I'd have went mad if I'd have stayed the way I was.*

(I) *Is that because of the routine you was in?*

(C) *That's part of it, although there is more to it than that. I'd go the school, come home, go the school, come home. I'd be there feeling like the walls were closing in on me. It was an awful feeling. It's like being trapped.*

(I) *How has your involvement helped?*

(C) *I think the main thing is that I feel a lot more confident now. I went through a really bad time after we separated. I just didn't know what to do or who to turn to. You know, you go the doctors and they want to give you anti-depressants, you talk to friends and family and they say "you need to get out more" "forget about him", stuff like that. But that's not what it's about. If you take tablets the problems don't go away, you just walk around like a zombie. And they say get out more. Where to? Who with? Until your*

in this position you just don't know how hard it is. Especially when you feel as down as I did. It just made everything worse.

(I) *You say you are more confident now, how?*

(C) *I just feel better now than I used to. I feel I'm able to stand up for myself again. It took me along time to come terms with us splitting up and that maybe it wasn't my fault. You start to think that if I've made a mess of something like my marriage then I can make a mess of anything. That makes you think that there's nothing that you're any good at.*

(I) *And you don't feel like that now?*

(C) *No I don't.*

(I) *Is that due to the passage of time or do you think that is directly due to you coming here?*

(C) *It's probably a bit of both. I mean if someone where to ask me the best way to deal with it I would say that the first thing you have got to do stay strong and that you have to find somewhere or someone that will accept you for what you are. Not for what they can get from you. After we split up I started seeing someone and I realised that I was putting a lot more into it than he was. I was on the rebound. At least here it's safe. Nobody wants anything from you. For me that made me think that if they're accepting me for what I am then maybe I'm not so bad after all. That there are things about me that others do like. Not people I've known for years, but people I've just met.*

(I) *So you feel that because of the confidence others have shown in you, you may be better equipped to handle situations you may face?*

(C) *Yes, I suppose, but to a degree. I'm not saying that I can handle any situation but at least I know I won't go to pieces over the slightest thing. There's nothing worse than feeling useless. The point is I don't feel useless any more.*

Carol's comments may shed some light upon firstly the reason why baseline measurements from the two scales may have been so low and secondly, some of the processes that attendance at a scheme has had influence upon. Carol makes the point forcibly that she was at an extremely low point in her life and that this was in part due to the fact that she felt a level of responsibility for the break up of her marriage. This appeared to have had a major impact upon her perceived global self efficacy which seemed to influence many aspects of her life and whilst Carol recognised that she may not be equipped to deal with all circumstances, she suggests she has developed a level of confidence that she may be able to deal with some of life's challenges. This may not be all due to her attendance at the scheme, but it is clear that she herself considers the scheme to have been integral to this.

This was a recurrent theme through many conversations whereby although the particular difficulties associated with lone parenthood were recognised, there was the feeling that at least some of these difficulties could be negotiated. This was not necessarily focused upon the financial benefits work may bring, although this was of course mentioned and will be addressed presently, but did seem to be located in being able to cope with the emotional demands of children and with the emotional demands of lone parenthood itself. Many conversations from those attending community schemes that did not have work as an outcome objective identified how attendance at such schemes had effect in terms of coping strategies the lone parents may adopt. These strategies ranged from seeking support to just talking to others who may have similar problems. In respect of the emotional needs of children, Leila (1c) who regularly attended the LOPFT highlighted how support from other lone parents helped her son come to terms with the break up of her marriage.

"It was really hard for him. He still sees his Dad a lot but not as much. The thing is that most of his friends have got both their Mums and Dads at home and I know he started to feel a bit different from them. It's not that they teased him or gave him a hard time, it's just the he didn't think he was the same as them because he thought he was missing out on something. I noticed a change in his behaviour where he would get broody but I never thought of it like that. One of the girls here said she went through the same thing with her kids and what she did was bring them here so that they would be around other kids who weren't different from them and she said it helped. So I did that and it did seem to help a bit. He still gets broody but not as much".

It may be the case that the progress the child has made is due to the child coming to terms with the separation in other ways, however what this does demonstrate is that if we are to accept that individuals act upon what they believe to be true, then attendance at the scheme has helped both the parent and the child. Others may not have been able to pinpoint exact instances where they have been helped, however a common theme was that a majority, especially the non economically driven participants, suggested that although they did feel better about themselves now, they can remember how they felt previously, and suggested they were now better able to recognise the signs that pressure may building. Unlike previously however, most indicated they were prepared to act upon this.

Carol commented that the scheme offered a "safe" environment. She made no suggestion of physical safety so inferences should not be drawn, however she did explicitly point to the emotional safety she identified with attendance. This point was raised by a majority of the study volunteers whereby it was suggested that they considered the environment provided by such schemes to be both unthreatening and supportive and provided a haven away from the some of the realities of everyday life. As Michelle (2c), a lone parent at one of the PSP's explained:

"People want money off you. The kids make demands all the time. Everyone wants something and some times you can do it, sometimes you can't. Nobody wants anything

here. I don't have to do anything I don't want to. It's nice when what happens to you is up to yourself".

Clear within this statement is the way Michelle considers she is able to control events within this particular environment as opposed to the environment she encounters outside the scheme. If we are to recap upon Warr's assertion that the opportunity for control is the foundation upon which positive mental health is founded (1987 p4), the value in this statement may become clearer.

With respect to the economically driven community scheme participants, it is arguably the case that different processes were at work with respect to the more positive scores across both scales. One influence may be Campbell's (1990) assertion that those with poorly defined self concepts (implicit within this is a poorly defined self role) are more likely to have low self esteem. For this group to be in an position whereby they consider they are able to at least seek paid employment in the medium term does suggest they consider they are able to negotiate some of the barriers highlighted earlier. Mruk (1999 p99) makes the point that self esteem not only rests upon feelings of worthiness, but upon perceived competencies also. Take the comments by Bridget (2c), a lone parent who at the time was at the Liverpool Community College:

"I'm not saying I'm jumping for joy all the time or that things are so much better now than they were before. I still have bills to pay and I'm still skint and it's still hard. The thing is that I just feel better about myself than I did before. I'm not saying I'm coping better now than before because I've always managed to cope. Its just that I do think that things may get better for me before they would get worse if you see what I mean".

When asked if she thought the College had any influence in this:

"Yes it has. I mean I don't know that I'm definitely going to do it, but some of those who did the course last year went on to university. The tutors seem to think that I'm quite good at this and I do enjoy it. If everything works out then I will, it would be nice to get a

job doing this, but even if I don't at least I know that I'm able to. I know it may sound a bit strange but if I don't then at least I know it won't be because of myself, it will be because of other things, money, the kids, time".

Bridget's comments do provide a good example of the contrasting dynamics of those who may have been involved for economic reasons as opposed to those who may have been looking for support only. Bridget recognises the structural factors that may impair her ability to progress to higher education, and whilst these may be beyond her control, she suggests she has been able to cope with some of the other difficulties of lone parenthood. She also suggests the only reason she may not be able to realise her ambition is because of matters that are beyond her control. Thus involvement for Bridget has increased her perceived competence in herself as an individual to achieve her ambition, but failure to reach this goal is located in factors external to her as an individual as they are structural rather than personal. Alternatively, if we recall Carol had suggested she had had a difficult time coming to terms with her lone parenthood and involvement at the PSP had enabled her to develop an increased estimated evaluation of her self worth. Carol still appears however to be struggling with the personal aspects of lone parenthood rather than attempting to negotiate structural factors.

This contrast does highlight the journey lone parents may have to undertake to be able to get to a position whereby work is a viable option for them. It also provides an example of how increased self esteem can be located in either self evaluations of worth or self evaluations of competency. Mruk (1999 p100) argues that Bandura (1997 p11) would refute this position, in that he argues perceived competence and perceived self worth are separate constructs and thus should be treated as such. Yet even accounting for the theoretical nuances that may exist, Mruk (p100) argues that the two constructs are inseparable in that both are needed to give balance to each other. Increased competency can lead to increased self worth, whilst increased self worth can lead to increased willingness to attempt to raise competencies in specific tasks.

Quantitative data demonstrated a statistical relationship between those who were involved with either type of scheme and whether respondents were generally more positive about their future or not. Some of the reasons have been touched upon but further explanation may be found within the seven follow up interviews conducted with community scheme volunteers. All of this small group suggested they did feel better about themselves as a consequence of participation, but closer examination revealed that the underlying reasons these individuals thought as such could lend support to the assertions made by Mruk (1990) above whereby this increase in affective self evaluation could be located within either an increase in self worth or an increase in competency, or as is most likely the case, an increase in both.

The first interviews with those starting to attend a scheme, as may have been expected, revealed a degree of apprehension of both starting a new chapter in their lives and with the fact of leaving the home (none of this group had left the home since the start of their lone parenthood). Of the seven, four were attending the PSP's with two attending Liverpool Community College and one Knowsley Community College. Perhaps the most notable difference between the PSP participants and the Community Colleges' participants was the manner in which those at the PSP's had yet to formulate any real aspirations as to what direction their future may take. This group suggested attendance was mainly for reasons of "just getting out of the house", which implies striving for a change of environment or for increased social contact. Those at the Community Colleges' did not suggest attendance was, at this stage, in any way aimed at fostering increased social support, however follow up interviews indicated this was something that had developed[23].

A further element to emerge was the manner in which coping strategies, with respect to role, developed. Pauline (2c), a lone parent with two children attending a PSP suggested in the first interview she was unclear about whether she would be able to meet the demands of dual role. When asked did she think she would be able to cope with the demands of parenthood and leaving the home three times per week, she suggested:

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[23] These findings are consistent with those of Merrick (1997).

"I think so, but we will have to wait and see. I mean they aren't going to make you clock on and off here but I do want to see it through. If it gets too much I can always stop. I won't have lost anything".

The follow up interview demonstrated a far more positive outlook on role duality. When asked is she had been able to cope with both roles:

"Yes I have. I know the kids haven't been put out. I'm finished here in time to pick them up so they haven't noticed any difference. I still do the same amount of work in the house and spend the same amount of time with them so I know it's been the same for them".

However, when asked if this has given her the desire to start work:

"But that's a different matter isn't it? I know I could cope myself. It would be hard work but that doesn't bother me. I suppose the problem would be if they are off school or on holidays"

As with the comments before comparing Bridget and Carol, one can see that there is an internalisation of the capacity to combine roles, but external forces still weigh heavily upon the ability to do so. Nevertheless something highlighted by this group was that the chance to "test the water" had increased their self efficacy in role combination.

A feature common to both of the community scheme participant groups was the reported growth in autonomy. Warr (1987 p30) suggests autonomy should not be viewed solely as the amount of independence an individual may enjoy, but should include the ability to determine not only actions, but opinions one may hold and goes on to suggest that good mental health is dependant upon an individual having good interdependence rather than full independence. Evidence presented above gives some indication of how greater interdependence is fostered within the setting of community schemes, but demonstrates also how opinions may be subject to greater autonomous thinking. One way this arguably manifests is the way the majority of lone parents attending the schemes suggested a

change in how they viewed the possibilities open to them. It is not the case that the original reasons for involvement (work or support) were necessarily the areas where these possibilities were seen to be extended. Some of those involved for economic reasons were able to identify other opportunities that may have opened up for them, whilst some of those involved originally for reasons of social support did consider they had moved closer to a position whereby work may be a distinct possibility if structural barriers could be negotiated. The common underpinning here is that there has been an increase in a sense of control and a sense of agency and that many suggested, albeit to different degrees, that they had begun to reclaim some level of control over their lives. The pro-activity encouraged by many of the non work-targeted initiatives and the level of social support from the work focused schemes had allowed many participants to begin to think of themselves in terms other than that of passive recipients. Sandra (3c), a lone parent attending a PSP explained:

"The other week I got on the phone to complain to the housing about one of the cupboards in my kitchen and they came out and fixed it. It just shows that if you make the effort you can get things done. It may sound stupid but it made me really think that I don't have to rely on other people to do things for me all the time. I can do it myself".

The comments made by Denise (1c), a lone parent attending Liverpool Community College support this:

"When I started here I saw the others and thought I wouldn't have a chance. There's too many people going after the same thing. I was determined to stick it out and after a while I thought that those who were here were just the same as me. To be honest I can probably cope with the course better than most of them. It just gave me a bit of belief that as long as I work hard and am prepared to put the effort in, I can get what I want as well".

These two comments provide a salient point as of the nine components Warr (1987 p4) addresses, he considers the most important to be the opportunity for control, arguing this has two essential features. Firstly, it provides the opportunity to choose a given action

and secondly, offers the potential to predict the outcome of that action. Warr starts with this component as he suggests that if this feature is addressed the remaining features of the model, such as opportunity for skill use and the opportunity to have externally generated goals may be maintained, or even improved, with greater ease. Warr here argues that externally generated goals need not necessarily be externally generated requirements. Whereas Jahoda's (1982) assertion was that work, and only work, was necessary to impose structure on the individual, Warr's point is precisely that because goals are imposed they become demands or requirements instead (p5). Goals, Warr argues, can be a label that can be applied to targets that may be voluntary or imposed. Whereas demands from an environment may lead to a specific behaviour, it is nevertheless only behaviour as a response to a specific condition. It may therefore not necessarily have meaning for the social actor. Self selected goals may be generated by the environment that imply meaning for the individual and thus may link with the development of a sense of agency and control for the individual. This feature is clearly linked to an examination of locus of control (Rotter 1966) whereby an internal locus of control can help individuals cope better with challenges, and also maintain a more positive outlook as to how they may cope with fresh challenges. Also, as suggested by McCombs (1991 pp6-7), what bolsters an internal locus of control is the concept of the self as an agent and the degree to which one may choose to act as an agent is dependant upon the level of perceived personal control. Further to this, Olton (1982), whilst not claiming a causal effect, did find a significant correlation with self esteem and the levels of internality an individual may have. A parallel to this may be found within Seligman's (1975) approach of Learned Helplessness, whereby individuals may become comfortable with their situation due to lack of confidence concerning their ability to influence events.

With respect to those involved in NDLP, a mixed bag was found in relation to self esteem, agency and perceived control. As suggested in the previous Chapter, the ability to combine roles did not appear to be an issue for this group, although there were concerns as to how they may cope, the overall feeling was that they would be able to manage. With respect to quantitative data no significant differences were found when variables were tested whilst controlling which type of initiative respondents were attending (NDLP or

community scheme), however, as will be seen, conversations did reveal subtle differences within the NDLP participants across the three constructs.

The thrust of all of the conversations with those who were attending community schemes for other than economic reasons, suggest the primary motivations for involvement was either for social support and/or contact or for reasons of variety. All of those involved with NDLP did so primarily for financial reasons, and whilst this could also be said for the economically driven community volunteers, one has to remember that the NDLP participants did not have the added bonuses highlighted above that community schemes may bring. The success of NDLP in relation to its policy aims can only be gauged from why individuals may have volunteered in the first place, and that was to find employment. Other aims were mentioned, such as increased social contact and greater independence, but the overriding motivation was to increase income.

This did appear to cause problems for some. The majority of the NDLP participants did think the scheme may eventually work for them, but there were signs that others had become frustrated with it. As suggested by Paula (1c):

"I got the letter to go and see them and it was really helpful. They told me how much I could get to top up my wages and what other help I could get. I've had three interviews up to now and they keep telling me the same thing. It's not that it's a waste of time, it's just that I thought more could have been done. They haven't told me about where to find work, just what I could get if I find it myself".

When asked if this has had any effect upon her confidence to find employment:

"I don't really know. I did feel really positive at first after I went for the first interview. I'm not saying I'm not positive now, but I guess I've realised just how hard it's going to be".

Some others however were far more scathing.

"I will go back for another interview but I'm not sure I see the point. The girl I see is OK but it's like she's reading a card. You know, giving a speech. It's not her fault, she's only doing her job. The problem is they make out like "come here and everything is going to be fine", but it doesn't mean that work is going to be easier to find. I think it's a publicity stunt". (Lynn 1c).

Whilst comments such as these were in the minority from the NDLP participants it may be still the case that for some, NDLP may have the adverse effect of moving participants further away from a position of job readiness in that even with policy backing, some difficulties may be seen to be insurmountable and again may give some explanation of why baseline self esteem scores were comparatively low. What also has to be taken into account is none of those involved with the study have yet to find paid employment, yet this is overwhelmingly what the NDLP participants are aiming for, thus this again may offer some explanation as to low measurements.

There is however another alternative explanation worthy of consideration in relation to the consistently low scores recorded. As of yet no attention has been paid to gender as a variable exerting influence, yet previous studies have found interactions between gender and self esteem (Rosenberg 1965; Epstein 1979), whereby women are drawn toward the worthiness dimension of self esteem with men being drawn toward the competence dimension. O'Brien et al (1996) (Mruk 1999 p79) argue that this is not as defined as once was due to shifting cultural expectations and this may indeed be the case, but arguably cultural expectations do still matter with relation to where self esteem is drawn from and much was made of this notion in the previous Chapter with respect to self role and its relationship with cultural expectations. Yet if it is the case that women are more likely to be drawn to the worthiness dimension we can see why so many struggled so greatly with the notion of role duality and this can be said to have occurred for two main reasons.

Firstly, Brockner et al (1993) argue that people tend to engage in behaviours and actions that allow them to feel good about themselves (p221). This self enhancement allow us maximise positive effects upon our self esteem, whilst in a somewhat similar manner, self

protection allows one to minimize threats to self esteem (pp226-227). Put simply, we engage in behaviours that enhance self esteem, and avoid behaviours that threaten self esteem. The crucial aspect is that self enhancement is a far more risky endeavour in that much greater losses of esteem may arise relative to the effort to self protect. Thus those who may have low esteem are more likely to engage in behaviours that protect rather than enhance. Arkin (1981) further argues the decision to enhance or to protect can be situational dependant with respect to whether the behaviour is in the public or the private sphere. Behaviours in the public sphere have the potential to enhance public image if successful, yet conversely, have to potential for public humiliation if unsuccessful. Thus he argues, those with an orientation toward protection are less likely to attempt enhancement in the public sphere.

Secondly, Rosenberg (1965 p43) made note of what he referred to as stratification hypothesis. Here, the self esteem of a particular social group corresponds with the self esteem of the individual members of that social group. Yet Rosenberg also suggested that a more important influence upon the individual is the influence of one's primary group, the subcultural hypothesis (p45). Thus opportunities open to one's primary group can have the effect of mitigating the stratification hypothesis simply because they are experienced more directly and reinforced more often.

If we are to take these two points we can see that firstly the decision to step into the public sphere can account for a degree of trepidation some suggested they had and/or were experiencing, and secondly, how once into the public sphere, self esteem can be enhanced to come in line with others contact may be made with. Yet this returns us to a point made earlier. That whilst this may offer some explanation as why self esteem scores were so comparatively low, it may also offer explanation as to why self esteem was for many participants increased. It may also offer explanation why for those involved in NDLP no increase in esteem was qualitatively noted, in that given the thus far isolated nature of NDLP, no new social networks were able to be made, therefore no new subcultural hypothesis was able to be developed.

There is however a further nuance to emerge. If we are to accept some of O'Brien's (1996) arguments presented above that cultural expectations do not necessarily drive men or women toward worthiness or competence based esteem as much as once was, then this could result in the confusion over role discussed previously. Much of this has been addressed earlier, however as it relates directly to self esteem, Campbell (1993) does present evidence from both the literature and from her own research that suggests poor self concept is correlated with poor self esteem.

There is an important point that does have to be acknowledged here in that whilst those who where involved for reasons of economics wanted more money, it is the consequences of having more money that was often the driving force behind their decision. This may seem a somewhat simplistic and obvious statement, but by making this distinction, an avenue is provided into a greater understanding of the decisions taken. Conversations suggested that it was the ability to make overt statements as to social status that was among the primary goals for this group.

"The kids come home from school and you hear them saying that so and so is a meff[24]*. I wouldn't put them through that"*. (Michelle 1c).

Children were quoted as being the main recipients of any increase in income, but personal benefits were also highlighted. As argued by Lynn (1c):

"It would be nice to have a few extra pound to spend and that's why I want to start work. It does get me sometimes if I'm in town and you see girls with a load of bags after they've been shopping. They're spending £40 or £50 on a top but I just can't afford to do that. You know when you hear girls say they have nothing to wear, what they really mean most of the time is that they can't decide what to put on. But I haven't got anything to wear to go out. All the cloths I buy have to be serviceable so I buy things that keep me warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Fashion doesn't come into it. It's not so much if I like it, it's if I can afford it and if it will do what I need".

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[24] A *Meff* is colloquial speech for someone who may be "scruffy".

When asked how important fashion is, Lynn suggested:

"Liverpool is a very competitive place. We all do it. If you don't have nice things you're no one. Just think about it. If you see someone who is a real scruff we make judgements about them don't we? My things may not be the most expensive but they're always clean and tidy. I would like to have more though".

The comments made by Lynn were not isolated in their sentiments nor indeed confined to items of clothing. As hinted at earlier, it was the ability to fully engage with the whole spectrum of modern consumer culture through the consumption of goods and services that were of paramount importance for some. Furthermore, not only was it the consumption of goods or services that was seen as important, but there was also a desire to be seen to be able to consume such goods and services. This was not often expressed as overtly as it was by Lynn, but Jo (1c) did seem to agree to a large extent, although perhaps in a less obvious way:

"I guess I just want to be able to do the things, and have the things, other people do. I'm not saying I want to have a big house and a big car, that wouldn't be realistic, but it would be good to have some of the things others take for granted. You know, I remember about a year ago when Jamie's bike was broke, I couldn't afford to get it fixed, so when other kids were going out on their bikes we had to say the bike had been robbed out of the yard. How would you have felt if you had to tell your mates you can't get the bike fixed because you have no money"?

Jo's comments provide an example of how the goods and services can be used to demonstrate that one may be, to use a term examined earlier, included, yet it was further suggested that such goods can be used to demonstrate one is not excluded. Jo later continued:

"When you hear about lone parents, they're always wearing tracky's, (track suits), they've got sovereigns all over them and have a ciggie hanging out of their mouth. They

mightn't be pushing a pram now, but they will soon, and pushing it on their own. I'm not like that, I never have been and never will be and I don't want people think I am".

When asked how more money will enable this:

"If you're able to afford nice things, it doesn't matter if you're a lone parent or not. You're just the same as everyone else"?

Asked if this was important to her:

"Of course it is, why wouldn't it be? Others have nice things why shouldn't we have them as well. I gave a lot up after me and my husband split up but that was something I was prepared to do. It doesn't mean I stopped wanting to have more stuff, it was just that was the decision I took and I still stand by it. It was the right thing to do. I know it might sound shallow, but if you look the part, you are the part. People just respect you more".

Both Lynn and Jo did appear to care a great deal concerning the perception others may have of them, and whilst this surfaced in conversations with others, and was indeed acknowledged by all the study participants across the three cohorts, the majority of the NDLP participants placed this on par with the utility value they may receive through more income. As suggested above, this was manifest in the identification of a wealth of goods and services they may wish to access, yet underpinning all was the desire to make choices. This did not just rest upon the type of goods and services they may be able to access, but also included where those goods and services may be obtained from. Thus the spectrum of choice was seen as being representative of both how they may see themselves and how others may see them.

The analysis of the above comments do fit neatly with a symbolic interactionist perspective, in that the view of others is taken into account in the formulation of the self and this notion in relation to materialism has been addressed in the literature, notably with Dittmar (1992). Dittmar (1992 p12-13) uses Tonnies' concepts of gemeinschaft and

gasellschaft to describe how society has moved from a mechanical to an organic entity suggesting that this change has resulted in ones social position being founded upon achievement as much as ascription. Quoting McCracken (1985) she further argues that the influx of new goods from throughout the world facilitated a new way of looking at such goods whereby the utility value of such, for both the individual and his/her family, was equalled by the symbolic properties they may have. Therefore, if this is so, and evidence presented by Dittmar supports this, identity is both created and maintained by possessions (pp14-18). This however may be construed as a separation of utilitarian and the symbolic value goods and services may possess, yet Dittmar points to the fact that not all uses of possessions are symbolic (p88), further asserting that use-related features combine both the symbolic and functional properties possessions may have. Dittmar uses the analogy of having a car, in that not only does its functional use allow the owner to drive from A to B, but also symbolises the owners ability to be able to drive from A to B. This combination of function and symbolism surfaced often in discussions with NDLP participants and was perhaps most clearly described by Lesley (2c):

"I bought a tumble drier a couple of years ago and it's the best thing I ever got. I used to load all the washing into bags and if it was too heavy put it into an old pram and take it the laundrette to dry. I hated that. I just didn't want anyone to see me going there. Apart from the fact it was inconvenient, it was, well just...horrible".

When asked why:

"I just felt I looked, well, harashed (a local term meaning fraught, worried or uptight). You know, not in control. I just pictured myself as a woman pushing an old pram with kids in tow".

Lesley clearly values the utility value of the drier but also points to the symbolic nature of what it allows her to do, but perhaps more importantly for her, what it allows her not to do. This again returns us to the point above whereby consumption preferences allow individuals to indicate group membership or, as demonstrated, non membership. This

dynamic has been addressed in great detail elsewhere (Dittmar 1992; Belk 1988; Bourdieu 1994; Douglas 1982; Gabriel and Lang 1995) with the consistent argument that consumption patterns and preferences are not just confined to meeting biological needs, but are used to symbolise both individual and collective identity. It is of course not the case that a tumble drier would have the same meaning for all and Ritson, Elliott & Eccles (1996) do address this, suggesting the meaning ascribed to products and services are not necessarily pre-determined since different individuals share the collective imagination to different degrees.

Yet it does remain that the symbolic nature of possessions and how they may infer either group inclusion and/or exclusion did surface with the lone parents on a consistent basis and whilst the symbolic nature of specific possession did vary, the symbolism of what it meant to be a lone parent, in the eyes of non-lone parents, in relation to materialistic possessions was a powerful influence upon what possessions could or could not do for them. This was as apparent in the choice of clothes identified by Lynnn, Jo being able to demonstrate she could afford to have her sons cycle repaired and Lesley not having to leave the home to dry her and her family's clothes. Perhaps the salient point here is that possessions signify both social status and social differences. Slater (1997 p153) gives attention to this and, drawing upon the earlier work of Douglas (1979), suggests goods act as a badge of membership of a particular social category, and thus goods indicate to the self, and to others, social catagorisation. Slater further agues that the distinction between mundane and prestige consumption is increasingly blurred whereby gaps between the two spheres of consumption are, to all extents and purposes, non existent (p154). This does appear to be a rational argument, certainly within the context of the comments presented above insofar as utility and symbolism are intertwined. This again returns us to Dittmar's assertion above that possession symbolises the ability to utilise and social clues are gleaned from this.

There were of course distinctions between the three different cohorts into how these social clues may be given to others. As discussed previously, for those who chose to remain at home, impression management was based upon the relational qualities they

were able to foster with their children. For the NDLP group however, whilst not downplaying their parenting qualities, immediate focus was also placed upon the desire to have increased access, in the short term, to the signs and symbols discussed above. Some explanation for this can be found in Giddens' assertion that in postmodern society (or the society of late modernity) individuals become threatened by rapid transformations in the social environment (1991) whereby ties of kinship and occupation are no longer fixed determinants of social status. The postmodernistic arguments presented above concerning the symbolic nature of consumption represent one way in which the individual is able to negotiate this and is thus able to determine and display social group membership. Thus, as suggested by Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998 p131) the self is formed, in part, through consumption. They do however make a salient point that consumption preferences are representative of individual freedom, that is, the freedom to choose, yet they also acknowledge that this is dependant upon the cultural and social experiences social actors may experience.

This may offer explanation as to why those who have chosen to stay in the home do not appear to be as driven at present to attempt to alter the display of social status in terms of material possessions. If the self efficacy to be able to combine roles of mother and worker is not present it may be that those individuals will not gauge themselves upon the possessions they may be able to acquire and display. This is not to say symbolic consumption does not have influence, but, as suggested by Wills (1981), individuals are unlikely to attempt upward social comparison if the efficacy to be seen to move up through the social strata is not achievable. Wills' argument was that when individuals perceive a threat to psychological well being, the need to enhance self esteem will take precedent over direct comparison on the construct in question. That is, if we are to take the example of two individuals raised in the same geographic area, one of whom has not travelled extensively, but has managed to acquire a degree of wealth, whilst the other has travelled extensively but is relatively not as wealthy. Wills' thesis would suggest that the former would compare themselves to the latter upon the material possessions and wealth they may have, whilst the latter would make a comparison upon life experiences and appreciation of other cultures.

6.5. Conclusion

It does seem that involvement in either type of intervention can have positive effects on those that choose to access them. Quantitative data demonstrated how those in attendance at an intervention recorded, for example, more positive self esteem and depressive affect scores than those not attending and additionally thought their work prospects were better. Data also demonstrated that scores were also improved after attendance. Correlations do not necessarily imply cause and effect, yet qualitative data did suggest that the lone parents themselves did think attendance had been a positive effect on their lives.

It is of course the case that this increased positive self evaluation was based upon a variety of factors but one does have to be aware that the lone parents attending any type of scheme were more likely to have children who were slightly older than those who were not. Regardless of the benefits the volunteers highlighted from attendance, it may be that simply because children were older, more opportunities were able to be taken. Chapter 4 provided evidence of why some of the lone parents had decided not to access an intervention due to the young age of their children. This due in many ways to their interpretation of what society deems effective parenting. Yet, with children getting older, new opportunities are opened and with it greater choice. The consequences of this are that whether the lone parent chooses to leave the home to seek support, some kind of education or training or to increase available finances, it is indeed choices that are made.

An important conclusion that may be drawn from these results is that, certainly for those involved in either type of intervention, there is a degree of increased interaction with the environment, or just as importantly, a desire to increase interaction, regardless of the initial motivation to become involved. Csikszentmihalyi (1975 p33) makes the point that positive affect can be increased with greater participation in new experiences and this in turn has effect upon the desire to actually have new experiences. Warr (1987 p31) adds that increased interaction with the environment, (implicit within this is the desire to master the environment) requires the individual to feel competent to deal with some of

the problems they may face. Goals, he continues are able to be set and thus alertness to new challenges and opportunities are established. However, we are reminded that, as was discussed on page 121, goals have to be seen to be able to be reached, but if such goals are seen to be able to be reached, aspirations may be raised. This in turn can have influence upon motivational properties, and can result in one wanting to extend oneself in ways that Warr (1987 p52) describes as *"personally significant"*.

An emergent theme of this research was that the motivational properties just mentioned are wide and varied, thus what is personally significant can be just as wide and varied. Results suggest the consequences of involvement are in the main positive, but that may be solely due to the fact that the lone parents are getting out if it what they want at this time, or consider they will get out of what they want *in* time. At its most fundamental level qualitative results earlier suggested the initial problem for the lone parents was the decision to actually leave the home, and as seen, this was often based upon both the ages and emotional requirements of children. The point here is that the alleviation of both, or either, of the structural or prescriptive barriers to wider participation for lone parents opens new opportunities and allow the lone parents to set goals that can indeed be seen to be achieved.

Chapter 7. Well-being Comparison.

Discussion earlier focused upon the manner in which the analysis of social disadvantage differs dependant upon whether one accepts such disadvantage to result in poverty or social exclusion. Whilst for all intents and purposes the experience itself of poverty and/or social exclusion may be the same, the different analytical frameworks allow different approaches to be taken. Whilst poverty is taken to be a state of being, premised upon a lack of financial resources, social exclusion, despite some of the limitations identified earlier, can be seen as a process. This process is unquestionably underpinned by a lack of financial resources, yet is does provide a framework to examine the dynamics of disadvantage and how those dynamics may interact to influence the experience one may have. For example, socio-economic status may be predicated upon financial resources, yet such status may not be able to be addressed on account of other variables that may be exerting influence, for example health, or education. Government appear to accept this and have specifically included both of the examples given as indicators of exclusion (DSS 1998).

In relation specifically to health, over twenty years ago the influential Black Report (1980) identified socio-economic circumstances as a clear barometer of the health an individual may enjoy. The study suggested external factors (housing, education, environment, culture etc) played a major role in not only directly influencing health, but also in shaping the beliefs and attitudes an individual may hold towards preventative health measures. Ten years later Blaxter (1990), expanded this theme, concluding that for many of those in troubled social circumstances and/or with low incomes, whilst accepting that health was effected by behaviour, did not feel this was applicable to them, considering health to be a by-product of the environment in which they existed and that individual modifications of behaviour would be of no long term consequence (1990 p242). Whilst public health programmes have made great strides in the eradication of illness linked with structural causes, (such as tuberculosis, although a rise in the number of cases has been reported in 2001/2002), major differences do still exist, dependant upon

economic status, with conditions that may be effected by behavioural causes (Acheson 1998).

With respect to lone mothers, a host of research over the past 30 years has suggested that they are far more likely to suffer either psychological and/or physical poor health than married or co-habiting mothers. Hunt et al (1973) found that lone mothers were significantly more likely to suffer high levels of mental distress, Barker et al's; study (1977) found lone mothers to be at greater risk of suffering depression and anxiety, whilst Macran et al; (1996) found lone mothers to have significantly higher rates of psychosocial illness. Interestingly, they also found that lone mothers in full time employment had the worst health, whilst lone mothers in part time employment were found to have the best health. Additionally, Benzalval (1998) in a recent analysis of the data provided by the British General Household Survey (1992/93 and 1994/95) found that lone parents, and in particular lone mothers, have poor health status in relation to other parents, and whilst they accept the role of economics in determination of health status, they go on to suggest that other factors do need to be considered (p1351). They conclude that to fully explain the differences found between lone and married and/or co-habiting parents, health status has to be looked at within the context of lone parenthood itself. They ask, for example, what is the affect on health of not enjoying an intimate, confiding relationship? How does the stigma attached to lone parenthood affect self perception and how may this affect health? Benzeval goes on to argue, notwithstanding the validity of quantitative research into this, benefit could be accrued by employing a qualitative methodology to allow lone parents themselves to elucidate their experiences and how such experiences may affect health.

This relates to this study in the following way. Government's rationale of NDLP and the support they advocate for community based schemes are that both, albeit not necessarily in the same way, can facilitate greater inclusion for the target population. NDLP can on one level provide greater income, whilst on another level, provide structure and social contact. Community schemes may lead to greater financial inclusion in the medium to long term, but in the short term can help foster greater community involvement for

volunteers whilst also providing some of the discipline associated with paid employment[25]. What has to be remembered is that none of the lone parents were at the time of data collection in paid employment, and given that, it would obviously not be possible to determine the effect an increase in finances would have. It is however the remit of the study to assess the benefits that may be accrued from participation in either NDLP or community schemes. The preceding section highlighted some of the benefits community scheme participants considered they have gained, (self esteem, agency and control) whilst evidence also suggests that those involved in NDLP did not consider these constructs to be of particular relevance now, but as stated, comments were made that suggested this had not been the case throughout the full term of their lone parenthood. We are reminded by Snape and Kelly (1999 p33), that mental well being is a determining factor in the decision of lone parents to want to access employment, and indeed it would not be too drastic a step to assume this is also the case in consideration of wanting to access community schemes.

Comments presented previously do nevertheless suggests there has been a movement for both community and NDLP participants in terms of the three constructs just identified either in tandem with involvement in community schemes or through other, as yet unidentified, mediating variables. This is suggestive of there being an increase in overall mental well being. This does add some weight to Snape and Kelly's assertions, but does not demonstrate where this positive effect upon mental well being emanates from nor what the nature if its influence is.

Given that, and also given the fact that Government accept well being to be an indicator of inclusion and also taking into account the gap in the literature concerning the interplay between the dynamics of lone parenthood and well-being identified by Benzeval (1998), this section is designed to look at the issue of health in terms of the latent influences that may have effect. It is not the intention if this study to identify the types of physical health the study sample may or may not enjoy, this is adequately covered in the literature already, but it is the intention of the study to establish what may influence the study

[25] Both appear to accept some of the arguments from Jahoda's Deprivation Theory discussed previously.

cohort in terms of their attitudes to health, and health related behaviours, and to set this into the context of the decisions they may take. In effect the study is attempting to answer what are the internal processes, within the context of well-being, that have to be negotiated to foster a willingness to leave the home.

7.1. Measures: Qualitative Data

As with the previous section a mixed methodology was employed and the justification for this remains as previously stated. As with the last section also follow up interviews were performed with the seven community scheme volunteers and with three NDLP volunteers who had previously been part of the control group after the three month timescale. Interviews were semi-structured (as per interview schedule Appendices 2) and were designed to attempt to address the areas primarily raised with the data which were thus far collected. That is, the issues previously discussed with respect to self esteem, control and agency came out from the data and as such informed the study as to its next direction. Thus the justification and basis to examine overall feelings of well being and control over health specifically was established. Unlike the collection of the previous data collected in this area above, given it was detailed data concerning such issues that was required, it was not thought appropriate to collect data in a completely unstructured fashion although interviewees were allowed to veer away from the direct question if it had relevance for them. Given the criteria for discussion had been pre-established, it was considered semi-structured interviews would yield most data.

Interviews were designed to operate on three separate, albeit interrelated areas. Firstly, to allow the control volunteers to express their self reported well-being and what the influences upon it may be. Secondly, to allow both NDLP and community scheme volunteers to do likewise whilst also determining if their current position had always been so, and thirdly, with follow up interviews, allow volunteers to describe if they considered change had occurred and if so, why, and what have may have been the consequences of such change.

7.2. Measures: Quantitative Data

The collection of quantitative data was informed from two main positions. Firstly, as suggested above, mental well-being is evidenced as being a major determinant of decisions taken, especially the decision of lone parents to leave the home. Secondly, Warr (1987 p4) suggested that of all the vitamins he identified, the most crucial was based upon self perceived environmental control. It did therefore seem logical to examine the level of control the study population considered they had over their health. A review of the literature suggested the instrument developed by Wallston and Wallston (1981) to be both widely used and to have validity. This Multi Dimensional Health Locus of Control Scale (MHLC) is designed to measure beliefs concerning both internal and external influences upon health simultaneously, whilst also allowing an examination of whether respondents think of health status as a matter of chance.

Emanating from Rotter's (1954) social learning theory, locus of control refers to the degree to which the individual perceives events to be a consequence of ones actions (internal) or dependent upon environmental conditions (external). As a general principle of health, locus of control may be viewed as one factor affecting behaviours that may impact upon health (Carlise-Frank, 1991). The MHLC scales consist of 18 questions making three separate sub-scales measuring internality, chance and others. Internality refers to how internal beliefs are concerning health, whilst unlike Rotter's original Locus of Control scale, externality is seen to be co-existent with internality therefore "chance" and "others" measure the extent to which health is a by product of external events or people. The authors argue strongly that a uni-dimentional construct does not fully allow the external forces that may exert influence to be recognised, and by doing so both validity and predictive power are enhanced.

Scoring is per the authors instructions with each of the scales having 6 questions allowing answers ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 6 – strongly agree. Each of the sub-scales therefore allow scores from 6 to 36 with higher scores indicating higher rating on the scale. Confusion could however arise if one considers that where-as on the internal scale

a higher score would be deemed to run in a positive direction, higher scores on the two remaining scales would indicate a negative direction. Therefore scores for both chance and others were reversed.

The authors also make the explicit point that an overall MHLC score cannot be arrived at given each scale measures different things. They do however say it is acceptable to determine the mean score and to classify respondents thus. This procedure was conducted on the three scales and respondents classified into three of six categories. High internal, low internal, low others, high others, low chance and high chance. Someone with a positive outlook to health and the level of control they may have would be predicted to be in the high internal category, whilst also being in both the low others and the low chances categories.

Variables were also include that asked direct questions concerning health. For example, respondents were asked how healthy they considered their lifestyle to be and how they rated their health at present. Questions also asked if they smoked and how often they took part in recreational exercise. It was hoped that direct questions such as these being compared to more discrete questions may give a fuller picture as to how health is not only experienced but also perceived. In addition to the 254 completed questionnaires, 40 follow up questionnaires were also collected.

7.3. Results: Quantitative Data

In general the lone parents in the study considered they were healthy at present with 190 (75%) suggesting their health was at least good at the moment. A further 76% reported they led a health lifestyle with the same number indicating they considered they were able to have adequate influence over their health. However as demonstrated by Table 17 below, less than 13% actually participated in recreational exercise on a regular basis, whilst 33% smoked regularly.

Table 17 How often do you take part in recreational exercise? (n=254)		
	Count	%
Less then once a month	156	61.4
Two or three times per month	67	26.4
Once or twice a week	26	10.2
More than three times a week	5	2

Given the relatively low number engaged in physical activities as recreation and the majority considering they led a healthy lifestyle a cross-tabulation was performed to identify if exercise was a determining factor in why lifestyle was considered to be healthy. Table 18 show that even though over 45% (n = 116) of respondents did not exercise regularly they still considered their lifestyle to be healthy ($df = 3$, $p<0.05$). It is of course the case that not exercising automatically means lifestyle is not healthy, yet a cross-tabulation of perception of lifestyle with whether respondents smoked or not produced no significant results.

Table 18: How Often Do You Engage In Recreational Exercise* Do You Lead A Healthy Lifestyle? (n=254)

	How often engage in recreational exercise (frequency of responses)				
Do you lead a healthy lifestyle	< once per month	Two or three times per month	Once or twice per week	> three times per week	
Yes	116	47	26	5	194
No	40	20	0	0	60
Total	156	67	26	5	257

This is suggestive of the perception of lifestyle not being based upon the amount of exercise taken or whether respondents smoked or not, consequently it is likely there were other unknown variables that were influencing such perceptions It may of course been that a healthy lifestyle was based upon the overall well-being they were experiencing at that time, thus t-tests were perform to determine if the lifestyle variable had any statistical relationship with levels of self esteem and depressive affect, however results show no correlation to exist with either.

Much was made of the relationship between well-being and the element of control one considers one may have over health. T-tests were performed to determine if differences existed between the categorical variable, asking if responders considered they had influence over their health, and with the three MDHL scales. As seen in Table 19, the only significant difference was be to found with respect to the level of chance respondents considered health was determined by. The differences in the mean scores were recorded in positive direction.

Table 19. T-test of perceived belief of self influence over health with MDHL scores. (n=254).

	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
internal	.625	-.840	.506
chance	.028	.089	1.578
others	.940	-.636	.589

As stated above, it has been claimed that a feeling of control is a determining factor in the decision to leave the home (Warr 1987 p4), but it could also be the case that leaving the home and becoming involved in either intervention has the effect of also improving the control one may consider one has over health. Paired sample t-tests were performed to determine if involvement in either of the interventions resulted in significantly different scores after a period of involvement and as demonstrated by Table 20, correlations were found to exist between the scores pre and post involvement. The perception of health, in its widest sense, is of course an extremely subjective judgement. Much is made in the promotion of health related behaviours of how increase levels of locus of control can contribute to an increased feeling of well-being.

Table 20. Paired Sample T-Test With MDHC Scores (n = 40).

	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Lower	Upper
Internal score	.000	-4.85	-2.80
Chance score	.000	-6.39	-4.61
Others score	.012	-2.20	-.30

This is of course tied closely with the way one considers one may live their life. If this is so, one may tentatively suggest that an increase in locus of control can be used to predict if one considers ones lifestyle is indeed healthy. A logit regression technique was therefore employed to determine if an increase across the three subscales was enough to predict good or bad impressions of the health quality of lifestyle enjoyed.

Table 21: Logit Regression: MDHL Scales as Predictors of Impressions of Health Quality of Lifestyle

		B	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1	Internal	.034	.604	1.035
	Chance	.058	.345	1.060
	Others	-.070	.341	.932
	Constant	-1.386	.491	.250

As demonstrated above by Table 21 none of the variables in the equation were able to effectively predict views of health quality of lifestyle. This in itself may not be surprising in that impressions of lifestyle in this case may be founded upon how well respondents consider they may cope within their particular circumstances, yet circumstances may not be considered to be able to be effected. Yet, perception of control of health may be likely to have effect upon other internal processes. A multiple regression was therefore used to determine if scores across the three sub scales could predict if respondents were likely to have higher scores with either the self esteem or the depressive affect scale. As seen in Table 22 below, whilst the model can be accepted for the self esteem scale, it is the internal and chance components that are providing positive influence. The model had to be rejected for the depressive affect scale

Table 22. Regression of MDHL scales as predictors of Self Esteem

		Unstandardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
Model		B			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	4.178	3.012	.003	1.447	6.910
	internal	.213	4.625	.000	.122	.304
	chance	-.128	-3.112	.002	-.209	-.047
	others	2.418E-02	.480	.632	-.075	.123

7.4. Results: Qualitative Data

7.4.1. Non-Participant group

Quantitative data highlight that 15% (n=18) of those completing the questionnaire who were not involved in either type of scheme did suggest health was a reason why they had yet to access either of the intervention. The questionnaire did not however ask the nature of the poor health, thus the only explanations that may be found have to be taken from the qualitative data. However, of the 12 non-participant interviewees, none suggested health was the primary reason for their decision to stay home, (access to childcare and role choice were the two most often quoted reasons). The issue of health did however arise, but with only four of these interviewees, and as predicted by Benzeval (1998) did so within the context of, and as a consequence of, their lone parenthood, for example being under emotional and physical stress because of the demands of lone parenting.

All 12 suggested that the difficulties associated with being a lone parent was a major factor in the manner in which they initially perceived themselves. Again all 12 put the blame for this squarely in the hands of the media. Evidence was presented earlier of how some tried to distance themselves from their perceived stereotypical image of lone parents with the symbolic use of goods and services, yet Karly, a lone parent with two children under 8 years, gives an indication of some of the effects of such imagery:

"When they misbehave I do think "would they do that if I was still with my husband". The chances are they would, kids are kids, but you keep hearing how the those kids who are causing trouble are from broken homes and it makes you wonder"

Karly is clearly concerned about the quality of parenting she as a lone parent is able to provide, but it does appear to be in the context of the comments of others.

"There's a girl who lives opposite us and her and her husband split up about a year ago. Since then you can see the way the kids are more of a nuisance than they used to be. They

have loads of mates sitting on their path every night until fairly late and they are just dead noisy. All the neighbours are talking about it and they all make the point between her marriage failing and the way the kids are now. When they talk to me they say, Oh yours aren't like that, but I know if mine ever do do something wrong that's what they'll think".

When asked how this has effected her:

"It's just something else to worry about".

Benzeval had predicted the lack of a confiding relationship may be of some impact. Karly was asked if she ever talks to anyone about this?:

"No, never. It's like admitting I can't cope or won't be able to cope. This is all I've got at the moment. I have to do this right"

How does this make her feel?:

"It does get to me. But then again so do other things. As I said it's just one more thing to worry me".

Karly was asked if she thought this, and the other concerns she had identified throughout the interview (such as money and the quality of her accommodation) impacted directly on her health:

"No, I don't think so. I mean I get down sometimes, but we all do don't we? No, I'm as fit as I've always been".

This line of questioning was not pursued any further as Karly was appearing to become somewhat distressed. But what was arguable was that Karly was seeing health in terms of the physical condition she was in and either downplaying, or ignoring, the influence poor

mental well-being could have. This however was not the case for Sian (4c). A lone parent with three children, Sian suggested a sense of duty was the reason she had not left the home, yet she clearly recognised the impact mental health was having on her at present.

"I'm just shattered all the time. I can cope with the things I have to do, you know in the house, but it's the other stuff I have trouble with. The kids are good and they do make an effort for me. I know that. But there are times, like when they're arguing amongst themselves, when I just feel like collapsing. I just want to cry my eyes out".

When asked why:

"I guess it's that I'm tired. Not from the work I do in the house, but, you know emotionally".

Has this impacted on her physical health?

"I suppose it must have. There are times when I won't eat for a full day and it's not that we don't have anything to eat, I'm just not hungry. I get lethargic at times. That can't be good for you."

Such comments provide an obvious connection to MHLC scales in that whereas both Karly and Sian describe situations and effects of low internality, Sian further describes, and recognises, the additional impact of the role of others. Karly may of course have done likewise, but this does somewhat confirm the hypothesis of Wallston and Wallston in that health locus of control is indeed multi-dimensional and that different parts of those dimensions may be exerting the most influence at different times.

All of the control interviewees suggested that much of how they felt emotionally at that time was dependant upon a variety of factors, such as for example, whether they had any money that day, but all saw aspects of their lone parenthood itself as the overall determinant of the quality of health they may enjoy, although this was of course to

different degrees. Whereas Karly and Sian highlighted the way certain aspects of their lone parenthood made life extremely difficult for them and this then impacted upon their lived experience, Jenny (2c) suggested she had been able to negotiate such difficulties.

"It's a question of adjustment. It is very easy to let things get so out of hand that they just overwhelm you. I did at times and I'm sure that others did as well. You may have no money spare, you may need to pay a bill, the children may need something, things are terrible and just when you think things can't get any worse they do. Something else will happen. All you want to do is run and hide from everything, but the problem is you can't and that itself is the problem. There is no way out from the problems you have. But you do get used to it. You learn how to cope and do the things you never used to have to and that's when you feel better about yourself. It's not that all of a sudden things are great. It's that you are able to see that what you are doing, you are doing well".

Again, when asked how this impacted upon her in terms of health:

"It never really effected me in terms of physical health, but I could see that I certainly felt more positive".

Did she feel she had greater control over her health now than previously?

"I never really looked at it like that, but, yes, definitely".

Jenny is obviously describing a process of adaptation and reconciliation to her situation and of course there will be a countless intervening variables that will either allow or obstruct this process. One must also recognise that it may not be that all problems and situations are able to be negotiated, but it would appear that Jenny may be better equipped to deal with them than either Karly or Sian. What is noticeable is that apart from tentative remark from Sian, neither Karly, Jenny, nor any of the other control lone parents, saw an obvious connection between mental well-being and physical health. It may be that all the 12 control interviewees enjoyed good physical health, that is of course

a possibility, however it may that some did not want to admit, either overtly or not, or indeed to themselves, that the demands of lone parenthood had resulted in poorer physical health. One is drawn back to Karly's statement presented earlier:

"...It's like admitting I can't cope or won't be able to cope. This is all I've got at the moment. I have to do this right".

In relation to health related behaviours all suggested they understood the relationship between lifestyle and health and the consequences of not adhering to a health conscious lifestyle. Conversations aimed at addressing the three MHLC constructs found that, rather unsurprisingly, interviewees thought all three may be of influence. They did recognise that they themselves may be able to exert influence over health outcomes whilst also suggesting that to a large degree fate did play a part. Apart from Jenny, none thought the role of others to be an important factor, although it was recognised as a junior partner in health. All suggested diet was good, although this was tempered with the acknowledgement lack of income could have effect. Three of the control group smoked but each said this was only infrequently, whilst none engaged in regular physical activity for leisure. All suggested however lifestyle was, at the very least, fairly healthy. As will be seen presently these are fairly consistent with the responses from both the NDLP and the community scheme's participants, therefore is would seem logical to address three cohorts together. This will be done later.

7.4.2. NDLP and Community Participants.

Perhaps the most noticeable theme running through the conversations with the either the NDLP or the community scheme volunteers was that there was the recurrent suggestion that they had, at times, suffered the some of the despair described above by Karly. The underlying message was that whilst there were times when they did feel down, as in the case of Jenny they did consider they were better equipped to deal with the ups and downs they may be faced with. None thought their physical health was too poor as to make any real impression on the way they wanted to live their life, although there was admittance

from half of the cohort that their mental well-being had, at times, been an influencing factor. Indeed, Bridget (2c) suggested how she feels about herself has been, and to a degree still is, subject to fluctuating opinion:

"Things are OK now, but looking back I can see when things were not so good. I probably didn't realise it at the time, you just get on with things, but I know that I used to get upset a lot".

When asked what types of things upset her:

"It could have been anything. Absolutely anything. Even little trivial things could have kicked me off"

Are things better now:

"Oh yes. I guess I'm just more used to the situation I'm in".

Does she think this adjustment has been positive for her health:

"It's hard to say. I've always felt pretty healthy".

It would appear that as with comments presented above, the connection between good mental health and good physical health was not readily made. However, Bridget was pressed a little further about how her adjustment has impacted physically:

"I don't feel as tired as I used to. I have a bit more, you know, get up and go. I've always been an active person, but I suppose I'm more willing to be active if you know what I mean".

This was expressed over and over again. None of the NDLP or community scheme volunteers thought that at any time their health, either physical or mental, had been such

that it had seriously restricted any of the choices they may have made[26], yet with a slight majority of these two cohorts, there was an acceptance that they feet better equipped to cope and that in itself this has been a contributing factor in their decision to leave the home. Overall there was no real pattern as to whether interviewees thought involvement had any effect upon these coping strategies, yet with the seven follow up interviews with community scheme volunteers, all highlighted how just being involved had been a positive experience. With respect to health, conversations were able to triangulate with quantitative results and flesh out how involvement raised scores on the three MHLC scales. Some were quite obvious in how they suggested involvement had given them a greater feeling of control over many aspects of their lives, but Claire (2c) appeared to be slightly more subtle in how she suggested health benefits accrued:

"I don't know if I feel better about myself. I've always been quite a confident person. I suppose one of the things I get from being here is that I'm able to stay confident. Being home on your own is a terrible thing you know and it takes a lot of effort to keep positive".

Thus for Claire, the ability to keep a level of control is dependent upon her maintaining her positive outlook. When asked how this had effect upon external negative influences:

"It's like I said. If you're confident and positive about yourself you're able to deal with these things. There's obviously things we can't do anything about, but at least you can cope better".

Does this have positive effect on her health?

"It may do, but if you're going to get sick you get sick don't you"

Claire was asked directly if she thought she had control over her health:

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[26] This is not to include any illness suffered that interviewees though not as a result of their lone parenthood.

"Has anyone"?

This was indeed a common occurrence. Whilst all suggested they had developed a greater sense of control over health related matters, this was only seen in terms of "not feeling down as often", yet there remained an obvious acceptance that external factors played a major role over how health may be enjoyed. However, these external factors were not seen to be related to the environment, that is the quality of the accommodation or the neighbourhood they lived in, but it was seen to be related to the low levels of income they received. Indeed, income was seen to be the most influential factor in relation to health.

Michelle (1c) was quite pragmatic about how this lack of income may effect her health:

"It's obvious isn't it? I can remember when one time when I was full of flu and I had to borrow money off my Mother to buy some medicine".

Others offered less obvious consequences of lack of income. Much of the conversation focused upon, as discussed previously, the inability to engage in consumer culture and how this had effect upon mental well-being, yet it was the pressure of having little money to spare that was identified as the most important factor in health.

"There is nothing worse than being completely broke and then another bill comes in. I've known it when the electricity has gone and me and the kids have sat in the dark all night because I've had no money to buy an electric card. Things like that just wear you down. It's like you run out of resistance. You get, well, run down and if there's something going around you haven't got the will to fight it"

None of the NDLP or community scheme volunteers suggested the lack of a confiding relationship played a major role in health status, yet there were still odd comments about "feeling lonely" at times and having to "bottle things up", although it would appear that, as with the case of Jenny, these cohorts are better equipped to deal with such challenges.

This is not to say that they all suggested this had always been so. As was seen with Bridget, there appeared to have been a variable period of adjustment.

What has to recognised is that, albeit a minority, some of these two cohorts did strongly suggest that the transition into lone parenthood had been a positive factor with respect to health status. Tracey (2c) was asked if she considered her lone parenthood had had any effects upon her health:

*"The best thing I ever did was to get rid of him. He was a right bastard. I worked and my money went in the house and on the kids. His went on himself. So being skint is no big deal to me, I've always been skint. We were always arguing and fighting. I wouldn't know what mood he'd be in when he got home. He'd scream things at me like "you're only a c**t", and that would be in front of the kids. So if you want to know about health, I've never felt better".*

Loosely similar sentiments were expressed by Natalie (2c):

"I get on better with him now than I've ever done. When we were together we did argue a lot. It was a clash a personalities but we did both try to make it work for the kid's sake but, you get to the point where you say to yourself "is it worth it"? I suppose not having to go through the constant battle has benefited both of us"

Natalie was asked to try to explain this a little more in terms of her health status:

"I suppose you get some people who thrive on confrontation. I don't. If you're in a relationship that isn't going well you're constantly on edge, you know, no time to relax. You don't know what's coming next".

The two previous comments demonstrate how health status may be positively affected by either a growth of perceived control and a greater degree of certainty or indeed by a combination of both and comments presented earlier demonstrated how lack of, amongst

other things, these two constructs can have effect upon mental well-being. These, and other constructs, for example self efficacy, self esteem, depressive affect and role certainly, do describe specific influences upon global mental well-being. Yet the common underpinning, not discussed as yet, but mentioned by nearly all study volunteers across the three cohorts, was they had, to different degrees and at different times, and in different ways, suffered stress. Comments such as *"stressed out"*, *"really stressful"*, *"the stress of it all"*, were both commonplace and recurrent. We need to be reminded of Lazarus and Folkman's widely accepted definition of psychological stress:

"Psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the individual as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being". (1984 p19).

Thus, stress is dependant upon the subjective judgement an individual may make as to the demands of the situation and the resources to deal with it. This does provide some explanation of why not only very similar situations were described as stressful, such as not having enough money, but why such a wide range of situations were also seen as having negative effect, for example for Karly this was how others may perceive her, whilst for Natalie it was lack of certainty. It is without question that an array of conditions were viewed as stressors, whilst the end result was indeed an increase in the perceived stress experienced. It may however be that the mediating variable, that is the feeling of not be able to cope with the stressor(s) were based upon different constructs for different individuals, such as for example, lack of control, lack of self esteem, or lack of situational specific or global self efficacy.

A fuller discussion of the causes and effect of stress will be addressed within the context of results presently, yet for now, it is worth remembering that Cohen and Williamson (1988) found evidence that individuals under stress are more likely to engage in unhealthy behavioural patters than those not experiencing stress. We can return to the qualitative point made earlier that all three cohorts suggested by a considerable majority

that their lifestyle was at the least quite healthy, yet quantitative data demonstrated how nearly a quarter of respondents reported the opposite.

What became clear throughout conversations was the varied interpretations as to what a healthy lifestyle actually was. For some it was based solely upon diet, for others it was based upon whether they smoked or not, whilst others appeared to take a more generic stance and look at an integrated package of behaviours. What was noticeable was of those supplying qualitative data who did not consider lifestyle to be healthy all highlighted the point that this was only a transient issue. That there were mitigating factors at present that were exerting influence as to the choices made with the most common influence being identified as lack of money and the consequences of having little resources to spare. As Lisa (1c) suggested:

"I only smoke about 5 or 6 a day. I suppose I could stop but I'm uptight a lot anyway. If I tried to pack them in I'd probably go even worse".

When asked if she would like to stop smoking completely?

"Yes I would and I know that I will. Just not yet".

Exercise was also mentioned. Sam (3c) suggested:

"I get enough exercise looking after the kids. I'm shattered by the end of the day. Even of I could afford to go the gym, which I can't, I'd be too tired anyway"

With respect to diet Sam added:

"I get most of my stuff from that Farmfoods. The food's OK but it's not as good as say the Asda. It's just too expensive though. I try hard and I'm aware of what can happen of your diet isn't so good but it's just impossible to have a good diet on the money I get".

Lynn (1c) was broader in her analysis of how lack of money affected her ability to engage in positive health behaviours:

"You can't do anything without money. All of these things you see on the television cost money and we just can't afford them. When you've only got a little to spare you really have to prioritise. It's about actually surviving. Nobody can have a really healthy life on so little".

All three suggested that more money would allow more choices to be made, and when more money was available, more choices would be made. It was however the case that, as stated above, a vast majority of both quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated how study participants considered they did lead a healthy lifestyle. It was the case that some did engage in positive health related behaviours, such as regular exercise yet it appeared the impression of lifestyle was often viewed within the context of the lone parenthood itself and the manner in which coping strategies were seen to be effective or not. For example, Diane (3c) suggested:

"Someone who is a keep fit nut would no doubt be able to tell me where I'm going wrong, and I know everything I do isn't the most healthy, but, by and large, I would say we do the right things. There is more I'd like to do, I'd love to join a gym, but you just have to sort of make the best of what you've got"

Jane (2c) appeared to agree:

"You can only do so much unless you've got time and money to spare. I'm quite careful about what we eat and tend to walk to places if I can. I don't do any sort of exercise but I do enough in house. All in all I think I have a fairly healthy life. I'm not in the chippy all the time and I do keep quite active"

Jane's comments are representative of what many of the study participants had suggested. Things were generally good but more would have liked to have been done. However

what was noticeable throughout conversations was that there was a focus upon what was not being done as opposed what was being done. That is, the health quality of lifestyle was determined by not engaging in behaviours that were likely have negative effect upon health, rather than engaging in behaviours that actively promoted health. All of those offering qualitative data suggested they understood the link between behaviour and health status, and knew of the possible consequences of decisions that may be taken. Yet to return to the point made above, there was a general consensus suggesting that decisions that were taken were within the confines of the circumstances study participants were in. That is, within financial, emotional and practical boundaries.

7.5. Discussion

Quantitative findings proved to be mainly inconsistent. On one hand lifestyle was considered, in the main, good, but the data offered little description as to what this was based upon. This is without question a limitation of the study quite simply because the relevant questions were not asked. Quantitative data was also unable to provide any predictive data as to if the level of control one considers one has over health was enough to facilitate a favourable impression of health status. This may not be too surprising in that impression of lifestyle, as suggested, may be gauged within the confines of practical situations, and, as also suggested, may be an evaluative judgement of coping strategies. Cohen and Williamson (1988) do remind us that individuals finding difficulty dealing with life situations do tend to engage in less healthy practices, yet it may be the case that there are elements of denial in the appraisal of the health quality of lifestyle. The comments provided by Karly concerning how she had to "get this right" give some indication of the pressures lone parents are under to provide effective parenting, or in this case, to think they themselves are doing so.

The predictive power of the MHLC scales on levels of self esteem does provide evidence of how the three health constructs, especially those on the internal-external and chance dimensions interacted to influence the subjective feelings one may hold of oneself and we can note there is a general acceptance that positive attitudes toward health do influence,

and are influenced by, positive self esteem. A telling statistic also is that the positive movement across the three MHLC scales correlating with involvement in one of the community schemes. Correlations again of course do not necessarily imply cause and effect however a wealth of research has provided evidence that the one of the beneficial effects of social support is positive effects upon both mental and physical health (see Stroebe and Stroebe 1996). Indeed some other benefits have been identified previously and this does demonstrate the complex interaction between a variety of constructs how they operate to provide self health perceptions.

Qualitative data appeared to draw out three main areas for consideration. Firstly, the constant, albeit differently experienced, variety of stressors. Secondly, the variety of coping strategies used and thirdly, as is the case particularly for some at community schemes, the benefits of social support in dealing with both of the former. In dealing with these issues, it would seem reasonable to draw upon some of the data presented in previous Chapters.

To turn attention initially to the question of stress, the literature reveals the manner in which the approach to problem has changed as researchers have become more aware of the subtle ways in which stressors can be experienced. Put briefly, early research focused upon the effects of both positive and negative life experienced by the individual over a given period. Constructed as an inventory, most notably by Holmes and Rahe (1967), respondents were presented with a list of 43 critical life events, (for example, death of a spouse, divorce and marital separation being rated 1, 2 and 3 respectively) and asked if they had experienced any within the set time frame. Drawing upon the work of Selye (1956), stress was considered to be a reaction to the need to adapt to new situations and thus both positive and negative items were included. This did prove to widely used instrument yet concern was raised, by amongst others Mechanic (1978), who suggested that whilst the number of stressors could be counted, it did not address how those stressors were experienced. Further to this Kanner et al (1981) argued that whilst one obviously reacts to major life events, these are experienced infrequently, but it is the daily minor events that are experienced regularly and as such are better determinates of the

stress one may be under. With this in mind they developed the Hassles Scale including for example, *problems with children*, and *too many things to do*. This was again subject to the same criticism as the major life events scale in that *hassles* will be experienced differently by different individuals. Delongis et al (1988) therefore modified the Hassles Scale to allow respondents to rate the extent to which the *hassles* were applicable to them. Nevertheless, regardless of the methodological considerations, the common underpinning is that stress is associated with poorer health and mortality (Smith 2001).

It would appear that the approach of Delongis may be more appropriate to the study volunteers in that comments do suggest that it is indeed the daily hassles experienced that have the most effect. One must also consider that there is little doubt that major life events would have effect, yet relationship separation was seen as a positive move for some. This does demonstrate that whilst the pathways to lone parenthood may be stressful, the outcome of lone parenthood in itself is not necessarily a stressful event per se. The stressors reported by the study cohort do appear to be founded upon a mixture of the determination to adhere to societal expectations, the fear of not being able to do so, or as importantly, being seen not being able to do so, the lack of companionship, all within the context of lack of financial resources. Of course, evidence presented earlier does suggest this in itself is major contributor to the levels of stress that may be experienced. For some it was not being in position to afford basic commodities, for others it was not being able to be seen to engage within the range of consumer practices.

This does support the position of Lazarus and Folkman's definition of stress in that social actors do act upon what they believe to be true, thus stressors are not experienced in the same way by all. One possible explanation for this which does help illuminate much of the data thus far presented is provided by Taylor, Lichtman and Wood (1994), who suggested stress can be moderated by feelings of control over a given situation. This is exemplified in the contrasting statements provided by the control volunteers. Whilst one (Karly) clearly feels she is struggling to maintain control over her situation, another (Jenny) appears to have been able to gained a sense of control over some aspects of her life. Contrast Karly's comments with those made by those involved in an intervention and

one can begin to distinguish how this sense of control over environment is more developed for those who have indicated they are willing to leave the home in some way and have indeed taken steps to do so.

Arguably, the key to this sense of control returns us to many of the points made in Chapter 5 with regards to self efficacy. Cannon's (1932) seminal work describing reaction to stress as "fight or flight" does need to be seen within the context that those with high global self efficacy are more likely to persist in the face of adversity (Cervone and Peake 1986), whilst Wiedenfield et al (1990) demonstrated that high efficacy individuals are more likely to experience less anxiety in adverse situations. Evidence was also presented earlier as to how self efficacy was a key factor in the decision to leave the home and how, especially within community schemes, the ability to deal satisfactorily with a range of issues was enhanced. Quantitative and qualitative data presented here does support this but also provides evidence of how these subjective judgements over control of health can be both a precursor to, and a by-product, of community scheme involvement.

This or course is not to say that involvement in NDLP may not have the same effect or indeed be dependant upon similar evaluations. The journey to job readiness is fraught with hurdles and pitfalls and it is clear it is the ability to negotiate such problems that allow lone parents to think of themselves in the dual role discussed previously. Comments suggest that feelings of self worth, in all its manifestations, impact upon decisions, and to return to an often used phrase, social actors act upon what they believe to be true. Therefore, as suggested by some comments presented above, if evaluations of control are negative, negative consequence may follow. Karly provided a good description of an individual who, for a variety of reasons, is questioning her ability to live up to the expectations associated with one role (parent) and it is not a great leap of faith to assume she does have to come to terms with this before she may be able negotiate other barriers to work. The point in relation to health is that if Karly considers she may not have full control over the most important aspect of her life at present (parenting), she probably may not consider she is able to have control over other aspects.

This may at first glance appear somewhat speculative, yet if this is seen in the context of research inspired by Seligman's theory of Learned Helplessness (1975), it takes on a different slant. Theory of Learned Helplessness proposes that a state of pessimism can result in seeing negative events as due to a variety of attributional effects. That is, the event is due to a *stable attribution*, something that will not change over time, an *internal attribution*, something particular to the individual making the attribution, and to a *global attribution*, factors that apply to a number of situations. Bringing the three components together, experiencing a negative event, the individual make a judgement as to (a) will it always be like this, (b) is it my fault, and (c) is the helplessness just confined to this specific situation. A point has to made that this is an evaluation of a specific event at a specific time, and so evaluations can and do change both positively and negatively. Thus the individual may be able to react more positively to the same stressor at different times and this may be dependent upon affective well-being at that particular moment. However, if the individual constantly makes the attributions within the model, it can have the effect of causing cognitive and affective difficulties which can further enhance the probability of making the attributions in the first place.

It has to be recognise that within both the NDLP and the community scheme cohorts reference was often made to how they considered they had adjusted to their situation. The concerns expressed by Karly were not explicitly made by any of the other study volunteers, but this is not to say that they did not exist or if they had not existed previously. The stressors experienced by the NDLP and community scheme participants are going to be very much the same as those experienced by the control group, but evidence suggests that this process of adjustment has allowed many to be able to cope with such stressors.

This ability to cope did exert considerable influence. If one recalls reference was made above to the often used terminology of *"fight or flight"* as a reaction to stress. Physiologically, when mammals are under threat, hormones are released that cause that animal to either attack or retreat as quickly as they can (for a readable explanation see Wilding 2002). Taylor et al (2000) however point out that this is based upon clinical

experiments with rats, and for the most part, male rats. They suggest that whilst this assumption may be able to be extrapolated to the human population, it may not necessarily be able to be extrapolated to females. The reason for this is that given both childbearing and childrearing responsibilities of females, neither fight or flight may not be the best option. Thus they argue, a different method of coping with stress has evolved in females, the term being the *tend and befriend* response.

This response is enmeshed with nurturing responsibilities designed to protect both the mother and their offspring (tending) and the desire to actively create social networks that provide a collective protection from possible threats (befriend). Previous evidence does suggest that women are more likely to focus attention upon social, intimate relationships than men (Caldwell and Peplau 1982), this in part being due to the different self concept's men and women may hold (Gabriel and Gardner 1999).[27] Taylor et al (2000) further argue there is a biological basis for this in that in response to stress, females produce the hormone oxytocin, which amongst other things promotes the need for affiliation with others. One must also however recognise that social prescriptions will weigh heavily upon decisions of men not to attempt to seek such intimate, non sexual relationships, thus care does have to be taken when interpreting their results.

Yet it did appear that many, especially the non economically motivated community scheme participants, suggested that it there was an element of wanting to actively seek social support and they generally appreciated what that social support gave them. Further to this, evidence earlier suggested this was also a, albeit minor, reason why some had chosen to join NDLP and both quantitative and qualitative data throughout this thesis consistently supports both these assertions. One possible explanation for this can be found within Cohen and Wills' *buffering hypothesis* (1985), where individuals only need social support under times of stress and that this helps one to interpret the threat as less stressful and, if the threat is still a major stressor, it can help one to cope. With relation to the assertions of Taylor et al above, they found that women consistently scored higher

than men on their scale, this being somewhat suggestive of women wanting to use social support as a buffer against stress on a more regular basis than men, regardless of whether this had a genetic or a societal basis.

In relation to social support and its specific impact upon health two broad concepts have been provided. Stroebe and Stroebe (1996) identified both structural and functional elements of support that may have effect upon the individual. Structural elements are concerned with the quantity of social relationships that may exist, whereas functional elements are concerned with what such relationships are able to give to the individual, that is the quality of the relationships. Stroebe and Stroebe (p582) further elaborate upon this by suggesting that the functional element can be further broken down to incorporate one or more of the following factors. It can provide emotional support, offering empathy and trust. It can provide instrumental support by giving the person in need objective physical help. It can offer informational support, given advice and information to help deal with the stressor and it can provide appraisal support. Here the individual in need is provided with information that is relevant to the persons self evaluation and in true interactionist fashion, the individual is able to compare oneself with others so as to make, hopefully, a positive appraisal of oneself. We are reminded that earlier evidence was presented that suggested many of the lone parents at community schemes did such an appraisal and did come to a positive conclusion. Indeed it would appear that at different times and by different people, all of the four functions are addressed.

Quantitative data suggested that attendance at schemes did have positive effects upon the levels of perceived control one may have over health and the discussion of qualitative data has given some indication as to why this may be so. However data also suggested that some of those who have chosen NDLP did follow a similar path in that there has been a gradual process to the position there may be in now. The point is that whilst the processes of both seeking and benefiting from social support may be applicable to all three cohorts, it is unlikely that it will be applicable all the individuals within the groups.

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[27] Somewhat anecdotally, it was noticed that during data collection at schemes not necessarily with work as an outcome, participants were predominantly women although no empirical evidence was taken to support

It has to be remembered that, as has previously been stated, lone parents are not a homogeneous group and it is most likely the case that many already have good social networks to call upon, thus, again, community schemes may not be that best option for all.

All of the evidence thus far presented with respect to all aspects of mental well- being suggests the underlying cause is stress with an influential factor being the lack of material resources. Indeed, this has been a recurrent message throughout this thesis. This is not to say that other factors do not have influence, evidence suggested they do. Yet, as was suggested some time ago by Bernard (1968) levels of emotional support can, and do, directly effect levels of self esteem, and as was described in Chapter 5, positive self esteem does appear to be the foundation upon which other aspects of mental health are built.

However, just raising self esteem and perception of control over health does not necessarily mean that behaviour will change. The efficacy to change behaviour may be there, but the determination, or indeed the will, may not. There is however another dimension to consider. Results throughout this thesis consistently highlight how more money was seen as an answer to the problems faced by many of the lone parents and that more money would be beneficial to both the lone parents themselves and to their children. Yet these benefits were often described in terms of the symbolic value being on par with the utility value they may offer. If one recalls, Benzaval (1998) provided evidence of how lone parents were more likely to suffer ill-health than other categories of parents. Additionally it was suggested that the health of lone parents should be examined as a consequence of lone parenthood itself. It may of course be the case that more money would alleviate many of the problems the study population have highlighted, and this does have to be accepted, yet one could reasonably pose the question, what type of problems may remain? This question can thus be examined from one, or both, of two general perspectives.

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this.

Firstly, Benzaval argued that the lack of a confiding relationship and the stigma of lone parenthood could influence the quality of health enjoyed, and results here do go some way to supporting this assertion, yet one may also speculate that if more money was available would behaviours change? That is behaviours that influence health. Results exemplify that few engaged in what may be termed positive health related behaviours. Would more money effect this?

Secondly, many of the study population have argued forcibly that an increase in income would have beneficial effect upon their children. This is not in question, but was often described in terms of the materialistic and psychological benefits that may be acquired. Would more money change the approach to things that are less obvious but are still able to have major effect? For example, lifestyle issues that can effect health status of children? Or is it the case that because of the particular situation this group find themselves in, they will make a choice that, even with greater resources, issues of lifestyle will be based upon the symbolic nature of parenting. If one recalls, evidence has been consistently provided that many of the decisions made are taken so as to demonstrate that the quality of parenting this group provide is equal to that of any other family group form. So is it that, again, because of the unique position of this group, decisions are taken that try to reflect not necessarily what children need, but what children want?

Chapter 8. Discussion of Objectives.

The overall aim of this research was to attempt to determine some of the reasons why the lone parents made the choices they did in terms of accessing either type of intervention or not, and to highlight some of the experiences they may have as a consequence of those choices. Before providing an overview of the study in the context of policy aims, the intention is to address each objective in relation to the findings the study has produced.

The first objective attempted to determine what are the underlying influences on the lone parents that have effect upon the decision to engage in either type of intervention or not. The constant theme running through this thesis is that the lone parents involved in the study were guided by a myriad of factors that have effect upon many aspects of their lives. Chapter 5 provides evidence of how the decisions taken by lone parents to either leave or stay home are enmeshed within cultural expectations of what parenting should entail and this in turn has effect upon the mental processes that either persuade or dissuade the lone parents to access the options available. The assumption of policy however, and its promotion, is that the an increase in income, combined with the extra provision of childcare, and greater childcare allowances through the benefits system, will have the effect of persuading a majority of lone parents to want to enter into paid employment. This clearly is not the case. What does become evident throughout is that the decisions taken are based upon what the lone parents believe is best for their children. This may have been founded upon providing parenting based upon staying in the home, or it could have been founded upon a different focus of parenting that places emphasis upon materialism and/or personal growth and the quality of parenting that may increase as a result of such.

Policy does, to a large degree, deny such disparate motivations and assumes all lone parents act within the economic rationality described previously, and this may explain why so few lone parents are actually persuaded to access either NDLP or indeed any of the community schemes that may be available. One has to bear in mind that a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) press release from September 2002, reported that since the

NDLP's start in 1998, 258,540 lone parents making a new or repeat claim, or already claiming Income Support (I.S.) have seen a personal NDLP advisor. Even with the coercive tactics employed subsequent to its instigation this represents less than one in four of the total number of lone parents claiming this benefit. The press release also reported a total of 83,740 lone parents currently participating in the scheme, representing about 8% of the total number of lone parents claiming I.S. Yet one may recall that much of the policy developed by New Labour has its philosophical roots within the doctrine of communitarianism and true to this principle, Tony Blair (1996 p59) claimed the answer to many social problems is to promote individual responsibility as a counter to moral deficiency. The role of Government, according to New Labour, is to ensure markets are not hindered, and that people and companies are equipped to operate within them (Labours Economic Policy Commission, June 1995). The concept of community is thus connected to economics, and individual responsibility is rooted in individuals accessing the opportunities Government provide. This again assumes the economic rationality that policy has put so much faith in. Furthermore, it assumes that when opportunities are available, individuals will adopt a rational stance and access such opportunities. The evidence presented here supports the claims of Duncan and Edwards (1999), that certainly for lone mothers this is just not the case. If this is so then Government, and indeed community professionals, have underestimated the complexities of lone motherhood. This thesis has shown that for a lone mother to want initially to leave the home issues such as self esteem, self efficacy, self concept and role clarity have to be addressed and once these issues have been resolved a moral decision is then taken. Yet intermingled within this are issues such as the level of social support the lone mother may have at present and the relationship they may have with their children and/or indeed their ex-partner. Finally comes the actual ability to find something that allows the lone mother to leave the home. That is, suitable paid employment, or a community intervention that has some currency. This within the context of being able to find adequate affordable childcare and then being able to navigate a course through the individual's *caringscape* (McKie 2001). It is not economic rationality that persuades lone parents to find work in the first instance. This, to a large extent, is the last issue to be addressed.

Yet it cannot be denied that the connection between morality and materialism, and thus economics, has not had influence. The fact that none of the lone parents involved in NDLP and about half of those in attendance at community schemes implied that work/training was being considered for anything but an increase in disposable income is in itself telling. Whilst some other benefits were mentioned, it was overwhelmingly extra money that was wanted, and with it the benefits this extra money would bring. Thus for some, good parenting equated with not only the care that could be provided, but with the extra material benefits that could be acquired. One may argue that, again for some, part of the morality of parenting is also entwined with the concept of economic gain and the increased social status this may ultimately bring. If this is so, and results do support this, one must accept that the arguments suggesting a connection between economic independence and morality (Letwin 1992) have, if not won the day, then certainly helped shape some behavioural intentions.

In practical terms the manifestation of this in one respect may be seen in the role conflict previously discussed. The call to work for all of working age in society, and the moral compulsion to do so encompassed within the concept of citizen/worker, ignores the dynamics of care and caring responsibilities for those who have them, and fails to recognise the gendered assumptions this is founded upon. The economic imperative itself is gender neutral, therefore the "Underclass" messages concerning role models for children in relation to socialising them to accept the values of mainstream society, (in this case, work) (Murray 1990) are proclaimed to be as applicable to lone mothers as they are to partnered fathers. Some concessions are made in NDLP, yet the fact that elements of compulsion have been introduced does suggest that a distinction between parenthood, fatherhood, motherhood and lone parenthood is not necessarily made.

Objectives Two and Three attempted to compare the current experiences and perceptions of those involved at either type of intervention against a group who accessed neither, and to determine if involvement with either type of scheme was considered to have any benefit. In addressing Objective Two first, one is initially drawn to how a majority of those involved in either, had highlighted how their individual behavioural intentions had

developed during the course of their lone parenthood. At its most fundamental level, the decision to leave the home was founded upon the ability to negotiate individual caringscapes, this clearly being founded upon the practical and emotional circumstances the lone parents, or their child(ren) may find themselves in at that time. It was also clear that those involved in community schemes had recognised some benefits as a result of attendance. Issues such as self esteem, self efficacy and agency were obvious areas identified as improving, yet the underpinning aspect appeared to be the growing sense of agency whereby the lone parents did consider there was a developing and improving sense of control.

The concept of social exclusion rather than poverty does provide a useful context to place these results into in that, as seen earlier, social exclusion refers to the processes involved rather than a state of being (Levitas 1997), and Government have accepted that psychological exclusion as a result of a lack of resources is an issue that needs to be addressed (DSS 1999). Yet a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) press release (1998), whilst accepting a sense of control was in many cases a pre-requisite to greater inclusion, also stated this control was based upon the desire to accept paid work and the resultant increased disposable income that came with it. Therefore control is aligned to economic control and greater economic independence, and psychological exclusion is twinned with economic exclusion.

The results from this study cannot confirm or deny such claims in that none of the study volunteers reported themselves as being officially in paid work at the time of data collection. Results do describe though, how, even though more money was an ultimate aim for the vast majority of those providing qualitative data, control took on a wider aspect than that identified by the DWP. Control was based upon making decisions as a result of internally generated goals rather than externally generated requirements, and this was often the result of either the changing circumstances of their lone parenthood, i.e., children becoming older, or, a re-evaluation of their own personal abilities and/or desires. So control and agency are not necessarily a result of increased income, although of course they may be, but could be said to be a predicate as having the efficacy to attempt

to increase income. The fact that the Benefits Agency want to expand NDLP to have closer links with community schemes does suggest that these processes have, to some degree, been recognised and that policy makers are prepared to act upon this.

Yet, notwithstanding the sources of the increase in agency, the most obvious difference between participants and non-participants was the immediate behavioural intentions they had. Whilst non-participants were adamant they were parents only at that particular time, participants had moved to a position whereby the role of parent/worker had become, at the very least, something they were considering. As suggested above, greater financial rewards are a motivating factor, but results do suggest that many of the lone parents involved in this study do want to distance themselves from the negative stereotypical images of lone mothers. The problem was how could this be done in the context of individual circumstances and available resources? For a majority of participants, this was done by wanting to take paid employment, for non-participants this however was done by providing a model of care that emphasised care within the home setting.

Whilst these models of care are not unique to lone mothers, one does have to recognise that this particular group of parents are perhaps under greater scrutiny than other groups. The title of Ford and Millar's paper *"Private lives and public responses: lone parenthood and future policy"* (1998) is reflective of how other forms of parenting, or to be more precise, mothering, are seen as a private and personal matters, whilst lone mothering is viewed to be an issue within the public domain. The comments made by Phillips (1996), do highlight again that the arguments critical of lone parenthood do follow Murray's analysis (1990); that is to start with economics and then widen to include lack of guidance for children and lack of positive role models. Yet evidence has been presented that charts the difficulties in achieving a level of economic independence, not only for lone mothers, but for women in general. To recap, gender discrimination in the workplace; poorly paid work; an over reliance upon part time work; the cost of caring and caring responsibilities all contribute to women earning less than men over the life course. It is therefore somewhat understandable that lone mothers who are not able to secure greater financial independence do chose to stay on benefits for their entire income.

Chapter 5 provided evidence that described how individuals usually do not attempt things they do not consider they will be able to do, instead they focus on things they feel they are able to do well. Lone mothers particularly are charged with abdicating responsibility, and this appears to motivate some to provide the model of care that they do.

Objective Three sought to provide evidence from a group of lone parents pre and post involvement in either type of scheme. Qualitative results indicate how some of those involved with NDLP, whilst remaining generally positive that the scheme will eventually work for them, were beginning to recognise some of its limitations. Although support was available from their personal advisor, some comments did suggest that this is not necessarily enough for them to maintain confidence in the scheme. The same cannot be said for community based schemes in that results suggest that attendance here can have positive emotional effect and, importantly, that this is recognised by participants. As noted previously, increased social networks may only be gained through NDLP as a results of accessing employment, whereas community schemes can provide this whether this is a target outcome or not. This dynamic had been noted elsewhere in that the Benefits Agency (2000) had previously stated that participation in community schemes can facilitate an increase of *"positive attitude"*, however, it did not define what this positive attitude is or what it is towards. Results here do go some way to shedding light on this in that the overriding benefit seen to be gained from involvement was a greater sense of empowerment.

Care has to be taken in that empowerment does not necessarily mean participants in community schemes will automatically want to start paid work as soon as possible, but it does mean here that a sense of achievement in something outside the home can be fostered and with it a feeling of a greater ability to set and reach targets. Combined with this was how participants described how internal affective processes had been positively effected. Again for example, self esteem and coping strategies were areas seen as benefiting from involvement[28].

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[28] This also relates to Objective 4.

Perhaps the one area yielding most benefit in relation to policy aims is how all of the above had conspired to influence many of the lone parents in *"personally significant ways"* (Warr 1987 p52). For many this is that community schemes were able to facilitate greater communal interaction and improve and promote social contact, this being recognised as part of the processes of social exclusion (DSS 1999). There is however here a inherent danger. As noted above, the Benefits Agency are looking to expand NDLP so as to include small scale community schemes as part of its overall package, and whilst this may be of benefit to some who do want to attended a scheme before opting for work for any of the reason discussed earlier, as seen there are lone parents who do not want to attend for anything other than reasons that are "personally significant". This unquestionably throws up issues such as target outcomes and how funding may be acquired and sustained. An example of this how the Liverpool One Parent Family Trust has had funding refused by the Liverpool City Council as of 2000 because it only offers support and advice, and it was claimed, these needs are adequately met elsewhere, predominately and somewhat ironically, through NDLP itself. The Trust now operates solely upon charitable donations. One may therefore envisage a situation whereby schemes will have to adapt to incorporate policy objectives so as to secure funding. The danger is that if policy objectives are not "personally significant", lone parents, and indeed other groups with special needs may be sceptical of attendance and therefore the social isolation that schemes can have such positive effect upon will be reinforced and left unchallenged.

The final Objective sought to determine the perceptions of the study group in terms of mental well being and health related behaviour and how this had effect upon their outlook for the future. Evidence was provided that goes some way to supporting the predictions of Benzeval (1998) in that lone parenthood in itself can offer a challenge to mental well being due to, amongst other things, a lack of a confiding relationship and the perception of public attitudes towards lone parents. Yet the message to come through was that a process of adjustment and adaptation in coming to terms with changing circumstances was needed before other issues, such as seeking paid work, could be negotiated. Lone parents involved with either of the two types of initiatives provided confirmation of how

this needed to be in place, whilst those specifically at community schemes provided further evidence of how attendance actually aided the process.

However the lone parents themselves set the specific problems into two main areas. One, how stress and the ability to cope had negative emotional effect, and two, how greater financial resources could have major impact upon the way in which these were experienced. If one recalls, one of the sources of the stressors on the participants was that not only did they want to adhere to societal expectations, they wanted to be seen to be doing so, and again for about half of those providing qualitative data, this was based upon being able to engage in overt consumption. In this case again the economic arguments hold precedent over arguments that emphasise quality of social relationships.

It would however be unfair to say that this was seen as the answer to the problems faced by all the interviewees, but it is fair to say that expectations of what motherhood entails did have effect. We are drawn back to this issue of control and the implications this may have on both current and future health status. When the lone parents were able to develop agency and control, efficacy could be developed in relation to, again, *"personally significant"* areas. This has of course to be set into the discussion above whereby, where, and in what context, can mental well being be improved? The concerted attack on lone parents by both politicians and press alike further marginalizes an already marginalized group and whilst some may be able to both develop the emotional strength and navigate their caringscapes to overcome this, many may be unable to do so and thus the cycle of marginalization continues.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

This report has provided consistent evidence of some of the reasons and dynamics that may either facilitate or hinder lone parents in their decisions to enter the workplace or not. To sum up, it is the case that regardless of the processes involved, some lone parents are ready to enter into paid work whilst some are not. It is generally accepted that a vast majority of lone parents will want to engage in paid employment at some stage, yet a perennial problem is that many who are able to negotiate the factors detailed in this study, are still not job ready. This however in itself is a problem in that how can job readiness be addressed and/or assessed.

The DSS report *"New Deal for Lone Parents: An Evaluation of the Innovative Pilots"* (Yeandle and Pearson 2001) describes how community based delivery of services that addressed issues such as confidence has had measurable success in enabling lone parents to access paid work. The concerns raised over the Benefits Agency becoming involved with community schemes are acknowledged, but one does have to recognise that if such schemes can have positive effect, there is a case to be made for their continued existence at some level.

It is no doubt the case though that small scale community based interventions are not the best option for all lone parents, but as suggested, they can be an effective staging post for some on the road to employment. However, not all lone parents are ready to immediately return to the workplace and this is where such initiatives can play a major role. If one accepts that differing levels of internality and externality can co-exist dependant upon a variety of features, then so may inclusion and exclusion exist simultaneously. One may be included in one context, but excluded in another. Such interventions may not allow financial issues to be negotiated short term, but taking a longer term view it could be argued that the benefits participants receive will have a long term effect, not only for the individuals concerned, but also in realising the policy aim of increased labour market attachment for this particular target group.

However, if we are to accept that one can have dual existence in terms of the levels of internality and externality one may have, in terms of how one may be socially excluded or included and in terms if what one may have positive attitude towards, one may also have more than one type of expectation. Yet, the term "poverty of expectation", and the context in which it is used, is clearly linked to the economic rationality that policy has places faith in. The danger is that it places too much focus upon individual characteristics and not enough upon the structural dimension of exclusion. Nevertheless, for greater inclusion to be achieved individual level dynamics do need to be addressed and results suggest community interventions may have a role to play in this in two ways.

Firstly, the way poverty of expectation is used is addressed in terms of a disconnection from the labour market. Yet, it assumes that poverty of expectation is not an issue for those in work. Results indicate that some lone parents, primarily those not involved in any intervention, were lacking clear aims as to what may happen when they feel ready to access employment. Yet in employment lone parents earned an average of £4.23 per hour with an average of 21.5 hours worked, equating to £90.94 per week (Hales at al 2000)[29]. A lone parent fitting this work profile with two children of school age would receive an additional £112.90 per week Working Families Tax Credit equating to £203.84 gross per week. For a 35 hour week this would result in £243.15 per week before stoppages. This compares to average UK female earnings of £336.70 per week (Regional Trends 2000). Moreover in 1999 over 1 in 3 earned less than the then minimum wage (£3.60) (Hales at al 2000).

This returns us to the points made earlier concerning how the dynamics of low pay may be ignored within the included (Levitas 1997; Gordon 1999; Dooley et al 2000). Previous research does suggest a majority of lone parents do want to return to work at some point and results here support this, whilst additionally giving some indication of the reasons why many are prepared to wait. Results also indicate that those who had not been involved in any type of intervention were sceptical regarding both the intervention's

motives and relevance. Nevertheless, when those lone parents are ready to return to the workplace many are no doubt going to experience difficulty accessing adequate employment due to, not only structural barriers, but also a lack of skills or a lack of a track record of employment. Small scale initiatives can help fill this gap by providing skills and training but they have to be seen as relevant by those they wish to attract. Whilst we have to accept that an economic rationality may not drive all lone parents at all times, and the points made earlier by Duncan and Edwards (1999) are taken and accepted, but results here suggest an economic rationality could drive many at some time. If this is so, then as with the compromises made by practitioners with regards to accessing funding, a similar compromise may have to made in the types of initiatives that may run. Issues of empowerment and social justice may not be the overriding motivation for those who do not wish to access community based programmes. Initiatives that are able to develop a track record in improving employability and/or income derived from work may on the other hand also increase participation. Results additionally suggest that issues from a radical perspective, such as empowerment and social network development, may thus be addressed. In this way poverty of expectation, whereby lone parents are not just prepared to accept, nor are only qualified for inadequate employment, may be seen in its widest sense. This is not to ignore structural barriers, such as the ability to navigate one's caringscape, but to allow those who are able to negotiate such barriers to realise their economic potential.

The second role community initiatives can play is the manner in which they are able to integrate themselves within wider policy aims. Woodfield and Finch (1999), in an assessment of parallel schemes set up to run in tandem with NDLP, suggest that NDLP could have greater success if such schemes offered a flexible, holistic approach, whereby individual's needs, rather than the need to find paid employment as soon as possible, are addressed. Results here do go some way to supporting this. By providing a supportive environment that is responsive to individual needs, whether that be training for work or

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[29] This figure may be higher now as a result of an increase in the minimum wage, however the Low Pay Unit (2003) estimate that lone parent's are likely to earn less than £5 per hour and are also likely to be in part time work.

not, a framework may be established that may allow participants smooth access into NDLP itself.

The comments presented earlier described how both the Benefits Agency and the DfEE are considering greater integration between small scale interventions and national level policy. However, as highlighted what may be telling is that for many of the interventions, both employment led and non-employment led, an issue of major concern may be funding. Many of those working at, and running, programmes have anecdotally described the difficulties and obstacles faced in acquiring sufficient funds, not only to initiate programmes, but also to sustain them and many were not prepared to look further than their immediate future. If increased levels of funding are to be made available, policy makers need to accept that an inclusion-exclusion dichotomy defined by labour market attachment is too simplistic a concept. This is not to diminish the importance of paid work, but rather to acknowledge that the drive toward work alone may not be sufficient to facilitate greater inclusion. Levitas (1997), argues consistently that U.K. policy has moved markedly away from a redistributive agenda and if this is so then the duty of policy makers, at all levels of government, is to put in place systems that are able to address exclusion in its broadest sense. Indeed the DSS (1999) claim to be keen to *"invest in individuals and communities to equip them to take control of their lives"*. Given adequate resources, small-scale community based intervention may well be one such method.

Concluding Remarks

The question of why NDLP, and the broader concept of communitarianism is it cloaked in, and indeed why community based schemes have not engaged this particular group of people is thus answered. Communitarianism is held up to be the answer to societal woes and the application of communitarian principles can be found not only in State policy, but also in the myriad of community schemes that receive public funding to help achieve policy aims. Dixon et al (2002) provide some explanation of this in suggesting that communitarians have developed competing philosophical views of how the world is

perceived and thus how that information is acted upon. One of these perspectives, which they term Naturalistic Agency (p10) assumes a competitive world, characterised by freedom of choice, where the individual strives towards aims that serve self interest. Here the ends of self serving actions justify the means. Community can exist, but is dependant upon the individual taking more if connected with the community than if they were not. Through rational choice the individual can be what they want to be. Social structures are of limited importance in that social roles are adopted without reference to pre-established social boundaries and the only roles one cannot adopt are those the individual chooses not to. Apathy is justified because if the individual cannot expect an increased return on investment, they have no reason to invest initially.

Alternatively, a Naturalistic-Structuralism perspective is also proposed (p11). Here freedom of choice is constrained by the social order. One's power to choose is dependant upon the position one occupies within the social hierarchy. Social status for the individual can vary over time but in essence is pre-ordained and actions and roles are thus dependant upon social structures. Community can exist, but is merely another layer within which individuals operate. Apathy is again acceptable, as individuals can only act within areas social structures allow them to, but ultimately decisions have to be made by those with expert or positional power.

Dixon et al go on to identify a further perspective they call Hermeneutic Structuralism (p12). Here, freedom of choice is neither based upon self interest nor confined by structure, but is regulated by a sense of belonging. Interaction of the actors involved is based upon shared meaning given to events and social phenomena. Community exists in a pure form and all remain committed to positive outcomes for all. Those that remain outside the community are willed to engage as apathy is not acceptable unless engagement is in support of one of the other perspectives identified.

Arguably policy has taken assumptions from the three perspectives identified and has produced a compromise that attempts to address each, yet also ignores some of the inherent weaknesses of each. Community is proposed, but on a basis of rational choice

and individual self interest. Social structures are left unchallenged and yet individuals are encouraged to operate within such structures and apathy is condemned, yet engagement is hoped will support both self interest and existent societal hierarchies.

Evidence throughout this thesis consistently points to how these contradictions have effect upon lone parents. Social structures and norms persuade many lone parents to accept a life of financial hardship as a consequence of perceived effective parenting, yet they are condemned for doing so. Rational choice is desirable, yet many are further condemned when the benefits trap, combined with the cost of adequate childcare conspire to make lone parents make a rational choice and stay on benefits. The nuclear family is held as the model most fitting with communitarian preferences of parenting (and with it explicit gendered assumptions of parenting), yet lone parents who choose to provide a model of care based upon this are charged with abdicating financial responsibility. Such contradictions place lone parents in sight of those who wish to roll back the welfare state and again, evidence provided highlights the emotional consequences of such concerted attacks.

These social structures that policy appears to want lone parents to selectively ignore also has effect upon some more tangible aspects of lone parenthood. If one takes the examples throughout this study, one can identify how practical examples of childcare are intertwined with assumptions of good parenting. For example, is good parenting equated with staying home or is it equated with going to work? Are the same conditions applied to all?

This study also supports previous research suggesting lone parents want to work, but for most this is at some point in the future (CSJ 1997) and evidence here provides examples of how that decision will be taken so as to allow greater resources to be made available to the lone parents' family. This indeed is a rational choice based upon economics, and is reflective of the dominant political and economic model at this present time. If this is so then one must question the relevance of the communitarian agenda. Communitarianism is founded upon the ideal of individual growth and improvement through collective political action. Yet the manifestation of this agenda does little to focus upon such underlying

inequalities, rather it places attention upon the economic consequences of lack of attachment to the labour market and as such condemns groups such as lone parents to face continuing discrimination and exclusion.

One final contradiction remains, one that possibly underpins all others. The central premise of communitarianism is reciprocity. Collective action for the benefit of all. The most obvious expression of this at State level is through the redistribution of resources to those who may not be able to accumulate enough independently, this being most obviously done through the welfare state. However, the concerted attack upon the welfare state and the desire to use welfare, "*...to reward and to punish...*"(Field 1996 p111) promotes individuality above community and as such goes against the spirit of communitarianism. One may therefore argue that communitarianism is not based upon a philosophical assumption of world views, but is founded upon a desired model of economics. This is a far cry from the spirit of "community"; one that engages people within the decision making process at all levels and provides opportunity to become included within society at large. Government's connection between social inclusion and financial independence provides the wrong answer to the right question. How can the excluded become included? Yet this in itself should not be surprising. If structures rather than individuals are accepted as the cause of exclusion, it is structures that will be seen to have to be changed. This is something that no political party with aspirations to govern can allow to be done and thus the tradition of blaming the victim within British social policy is continued.

The contradiction of communitarianism is perhaps and finally, best summed up by Heraud, who suggested:

"Thus the attempt to involve people in decisions occurs at a stage too far from the positions where power is actually held and that once more the appeal to the community only results in the avoidance of the real issues, that in commenting upon social situations a means is found whereby attention can be diverted from social structures".
(1970 p 94).

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APPENDICES 1

I am a research student with Liverpool John Moores University and in light of the New Deal for Lone Parents, along with the development of other, smaller, community initiatives, am presently researching the changing experiences of lone parents. I would be extremely grateful if you could spare some time to complete the following questionnaire.

It would also be extremely helpful if, at some future point, you would agree to complete a follow-up questionnaire and if possible agree to be interviewed, at your convenience, to discuss some of the points raised in the questionnaire. If so, please fill in the space at the bottom of this page.

In order to gain an accurate reflection of your experiences and views, some personal information is needed. May I stress however that regardless of whether you agree to be interviewed or not, in line with University guidelines, all responses in the questionnaire, and other communications, will be treated in the **strictest confidence** with all those taking part in any way remaining completely anonymous. If you do agree to be interviewed, you will have to right to cancel any arrangements made, **without explanation and at any time.**

Thank you very much for taking the time to help with this project.

Mark Meadows
LJMU
Tel. No. 0151 231 5329

Name:
Telephone Number:
Address (if preferred)

Would you agree to be interviewed or complete a follow up questionnaire at a later date?

(please circle) Yes No

Are you: Male [ ] Female [ ]

Divorced [ ]

Single [ ]

Separated [ ]

Widowed [ ]

How old are you?

Under 20 years [ ]

21-25 years [ ]

25-35 years [ ]

Over 35 years [ ]

How long have you been a lone parent?

How many children do you have?

What is the age of the youngest child living with you?

Under 5 [ ]

6-11 [ ]

12-16 [ ]

16+ [ ]

How often do you have access to unpaid childcare?

Whenever you want [ ]

Sometimes [ ]

Rarely [ ]

Never [ ]

At present are you:

In paid work (full time) [ ]

In paid work (part time) [ ]

In unpaid work (voluntary) [ ]

Seeking paid work [ ]

Sick or disabled [ ]

Looking after home [ ]

Attending a course/training [ ]

Other [ ]

If you are working/training/attending a course, for how long?

Do you currently receive any of the following?

Income support [ ]

Incapacity benefit [ ]

Family credit [ ]

Student grant [ ]

Other [ ]

Not applicable [ ]

If you are claiming income support, for how long have you been claiming?

Do you receive any financial help from any other source (formal or informal)?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

What would you say is your average income per week after housing costs?

Have you ever found you have to cut back on any necessities such as food, clothing, heating etc?

Never [ ]

Sometimes [ ]

Often [ ]

In the last 12 months, have you had to borrow money from family or friends to cover day to day needs?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

(f7) With regards to the income you receive, would you say you are:

Able to manage [ ]

Just about managing [ ]

Finding it difficult to manage [ ]

Finding it impossible to manage [ ]

(f8) Do you worry about money:

All the time [ ]

Often [ ]

Sometimes [ ]

Hardly at all [ ]

Would you say you have any debts that are causing you concern at the moment?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Not sure [ ]

About how much would you estimate you would need to clear the debts giving you concern?

(f28) On the whole, would you say your financial situation has:

Improved over the last couple of years	[ ]
Stayed the same	[ ]
Got worse	[ ]
Got much worse	[ ]

Do you have any of the following qualifications? Tick more then one box if necessary.

CSE's	[ ]
0' Levels/GCSE's	[ ]
A' Levels	[ ]
Further education qualification	[ ]
NVQ's	[ ]
Higher education qualification	[ ]
Recognised trade	[ ]
Other	[ ]

What would you describe as your main area of employment since leaving school?

Service sector (shop work etc)	[ ]
Skilled manual	[ ]
Unskilled manual	[ ]
Administration/office work	[ ]
Other	[ ]
Not applicable	[ ]

If you are not working at the moment, given the option would you like to:

Start/return to work as soon as possible	[ ]
Attend a course/start training as soon as possible	[ ]
Start work, training or education when the children are older	[ ]
Carry on looking after your home	[ ]
Do not know	[ ]

Have you been invited to attend, or have you attended a New Deal interview?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]
Not applicable	[ ]

What type of work, training or course would you like to do?

Are you aware of any specific courses/training/educational opportunities you would like to access?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]
Do not know/Not sure	[ ]
Not applicable	[ ]

What do you consider the main obstacles to accessing education/training/employment opportunities? Please use the space at the end of the questionnaire if necessary.

How would you describe your current employment/training prospects?

Very good	[ ]
Good	[ ]
Not sure	[ ]
Poor	[ ]
Very poor	[ ]
Not applicable	[ ]

How would you describe your own health?

Excellent	[ ]
Good	[ ]
Fair	[ ]
Poor	[ ]
Very poor	[ ]

Would you say that on the whole you lead a healthy lifestyle?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Do not know [ ]

Do you think that you are able to have adequate influence over your own health?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Do not know [ ]

If you smoke, about how many cigarettes do you smoke per day?

Less than 5 [ ]

Between 5 and 10 [ ]

Between 11 and 20 [ ]

Over 20 [ ]

Not applicable [ ]

On average, how often do you take part in sport or recreational activities that leave you breathless (e.g. aerobics, jogging etc)?

Never or less than once per month [ ]

Two or three times per month [ ]

One to three times per week [ ]

More than three times per week [ ]

Each item below is a belief statement about your medical condition with which you may agree or disagree. Beside each statement is a scale which ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). For each item we would like you to circle the number that represents the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. The more you agree with a statement, the higher will be the number you circle. The more you disagree with a statement, the lower will be the number you circle. Please make sure that you answer **EVERY ITEM** and that you circle **ONLY ONE** number per item. This is a measure of your personal beliefs; obviously, there are no right or wrong answers.

1=STRONGLY DISAGREE (SD),
2=DISAGREE (D)
3=AGREE (A)
4=STRONGLY AGREE (SA)

	SD	D	A	SA
If I get sick it is my own behaviour which determines how soon I will get well again	1	2	3	4
No matter what I do, if I am going to get sick, I will get sick	1	2	3	4
Having regular contact with my doctor is the best way for me to avoid illness	1	2	3	4
Most things that affect my health happen by accident	1	2	3	4
Whenever I don't feel well, I should consult a medically trained professional	1	2	3	4
I am in control of my health	1	2	3	4
My family has a lot to do with my becoming sick of staying healthy	1	2	3	4
When I get sick I am to blame	1	2	3	4
Luck plays a big part in determining how soon I will recover from illness	1	2	3	4
Health professional control my health	1	2	3	4
My good health is largely a matter of good fortune	1	2	3	4
The main thing which affects my health is what I do myself	1	2	3	4
If I take care of myself, I can avoid illness	1	2	3	4
Whenever I recover from an illness it is usually because other people (doctors, nurses) take good care of me	1	2	3	4
No matter what I do, I'm likely to get sick	1	2	3	4
If it's meant to be, I will stay healthy	1	2	3	4
If I take the right actions, I can stay healthy	1	2	3	4
Regarding my health, I can only do what my doctor tells me to do	1	2	3	4

How much do you spend on food in an average week?

How healthy would you say your family's diet is at the moment?

Very healthy	[ ]
Healthy	[ ]
Do not know	[ ]
Unhealthy	[ ]
Very unhealthy	[ ]

To what extent would you say diet influences health?

Has a major influence	[ ]
Has some influence	[ ]
Has a small influence	[ ]
Has no influence	[ ]
Not sure	[ ]

If you wanted to improve your diet what do you think are the main obstacles to doing so? Please tick more than one box if you think necessary

None	[ ]	
Cost	[ ]	
Limited choice locally	[ ]	
Knowledge of a healthy diet	[ ]	
Available time for preparation etc	[ ]	
Difficulty in persuading the rest of the family	[ ]	
Other	[ ]	Please stipulate

Please tick a box to answer Yes or No.

Did you at any time yesterday eat or drink any amount of any of the following:

Sweetened breakfast cereal (eg Frosties, Coco Pops)	[ ]	[ ]
Unsweetend breakfast cereal (eg Cornflakes, Rice Crispies)	[ ]	[ ]
White bread (slices or buns)	[ ]	[ ]
Brown bread any type (slices or buns)	[ ]	[ ]
Butter, Hard margarine: eg Stork, Echo	[ ]	[ ]
Low fat spread: eg Outline, Gold etc	[ ]	[ ]
Any sweet biscuits, confectionery, cakes	[ ]	[ ]
Sugar, with any drinks or foods	[ ]	[ ]
Raw or tinned fruit	[ ]	[ ]
Mashed, baked or boiled potatoes	[ ]	[ ]
Roast or chipped potatoes	[ ]	[ ]
Any salad	[ ]	[ ]
Any vegetables	[ ]	[ ]
Crisps	[ ]	[ ]
Pasta	[ ]	[ ]
Any meat products, (burgers, pies, sausages etc)	[ ]	[ ]
Fresh red meat	[ ]	[ ]
Grilled white meat	[ ]	[ ]
Fish fried in batter, fish fingers	[ ]	[ ]
Grilled, tinned or poached fish	[ ]	[ ]
Fried eggs	[ ]	[ ]
Boiled, poached or scrambled eggs	[ ]	[ ]
Hard cheese	[ ]	[ ]
Low fat cheese	[ ]	[ ]
Take away fish & chips	[ ]	[ ]
Salt on your food	[ ]	[ ]
Any sort of fizzy drink	[ ]	[ ]

Any still cordial	[ ]	[ ]
Any milk (including milk in tea, coffee on cereals etc	[ ]	[ ]
Rice	[ ]	[ ]

The following two scales and can be used to assess some of your personal beliefs and, like the previous scale there are no right or wrong answers.

Using the key below, please make sure that you answer **EVERY ITEM** and that you circle **ONLY ONE** response per item.

strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) strongly disagree (SD):

(s1) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA	A	D	SD
(s2) At times I think I am no good at all.	SA	A	D	SD
(s3) I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA	A	D	SD
(s4) I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA	A	D	SD
(s5) I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	SA	A	D	SD
(s6) I certainly feel useless at times.	SA	A	D	SD
(s7) I feel that I am a person of worth, at least the equal of others.	SA	A	D	SD
(s8) I wish I could have more respect for myself.	SA	A	D	SD
(s9) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	SA	A	D	SD
(s10) I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA	A	D	SD

For this scale, tick the answer you think best applies to you. Please try to answer each question.

On the whole, how happy would you say you are?

Very happy [ ]
Fairly happy [ ]
Not very happy [ ]
Very unhappy [ ]

On the whole, I think I am quite a happy person

Agree [ ]
Disagree [ ]

In general, how would you say you feel most of the time; in good or low spirits?

Very good spirits [ ]
Fairly good spirits [ ]
Neither good nor low spirits [ ]
Fairly low spirits [ ]
Very low spirits [ ]

I get a lot of fun out of life

Agree [ ]
Disagree [ ]

I wish I could be as happy as others seem to be

Agree [ ]
Disagree [ ]

How often do you feel downcast and dejected?

Very often [ ]
Fairly often [ ]

Occasionally	[ ]
Rarely	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Each item below is a belief statement concerned with health with which you may agree or disagree. Beside each statement is a scale which ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). For each item we would like you to circle the number that represents the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. The more you agree with a statement, the higher will be the number you circle. The more you disagree with a statement, the lower will be the number you circle. Please make sure that you answer **EVERY ITEM** and that you circle **ONLY ONE** number per item. This is a measure of your personal beliefs; obviously, there are no right or wrong answers.

1=STRONGLY DISAGREE 4=SLIGHTLY AGREE
2=MODERATELY DISAGREE 5=MODERATELY AGREE
3=SLIGHTLY DISAGREE 6=STRONGLY AGREE

1	If I get sick, it is my own behavior which determines how soon I get well again.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	No matter what I do, if I am going to get sick, I will get sick.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Having regular contact with my physician is the best way for me to avoid illness.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Most things that affect my health happen to me by accident.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Whenever I don't feel well, I should consult a medically trained professional.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I am in control of my health.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	My family has a lot to do with my becoming sick or staying healthy.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	When I get sick, I am to blame.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Luck plays a big part in determining how soon I will recover from an illness.	1	2	3	4	5	6

10	Health professionals control my health.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	My good health is largely a matter of good fortune.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	The main thing which affects my health is what I myself do.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	If I take care of myself, I can avoid illness.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	Whenever I recover from an illness, it's usually because other people (for example, doctors, nurses, family, friends) have been taking good care of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	No matter what I do, I 'm likely to get sick.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	If it's meant to be, I will stay healthy.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	If I take the right actions, I can stay healthy.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	Regarding my health, I can only do what my doctor tells me to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDICES 3. In Press, Community, Work and Family

Social and Psychological Exclusion: the value of community interventions for lone mothers.

Abstract

The New Deal for Lone Parents is one policy in the UK which aims to reduce benefit dependency and enable lone parents to opt into a scheme which offers help and advice on jobs, benefits, training and childcare with the hope of improving job readiness. In tandem with this scheme there exists a myriad of community intervention initiatives whose aim may not be as explicit, but whose value can be equally empowering in raising self awareness and self esteem. This study examines the experiences of lone parents who participate in such schemes and contrasts this with the experiences of those who do not. The study shows that community based schemes may not offer the best option for all lone mothers, but can provide an effective staging post for some towards a position of job readiness.

"Poverty and social exclusion affect many different aspects of people's lives. They exist when people are denied opportunities to work, to learn, to live healthy, active and fulfilling lives..."

Department of Social Security
September 1999 p3

New Labour New Deal

True to its pre-election manifesto, the incoming Labour government in the U.K. pledged to reform the welfare system and tackle social exclusion by way of "New Deal". Within this third way politics a new deal was to made between the State and its citizenry whereby rights and responsibilities were fundamental to both parties (Labour Part 1997). The twin planks of economic rationality and social morality were to be interwoven into a fabric that would support this new communitarianism. Given the individualistic approach seen throughout the previous 18 years of Conservative administrations, State intervention was required to ensure that values held by society were extended to those who may have chosen to ignore them. Indeed, by prescribing duties and responsibilities, the link between the two separate components may be restored.

In a speech launching the Social Exclusion Unit and the New Deal programme, Tony Blair (1997) pledge to tackle the "...underclass of people cut off from society's mainstream:, suggested that what was needed was "...sense of fairness and a balance between rights and duties", and that "we should encourage people like single mothers to get back into the labour market". He further suggested that society "saw it as an offence against decency that work should be allowed to disappear from so many areas of the country, to be replaced by an economy built on benefits, crime, petty thieving and drugs"

Thus with the New Deal the moral connection between economic rationality and social order was made. By introducing and encouraging systems and methods of intervention, whereby claimants will be required to accept work (paid or voluntary) or training, the culture of welfare dependency may be challenged, offering individuals "...a route out of poverty through employment and opportunity for all" (Harman 1998). In relation to lone parents this intervention does not constitute a complete abandonment of previous attitudes and policy, indeed, unlike other income support claimants, under the initiative lone parents (with children under the age of 16) are, at present, under no obligation to join the New Deal programme.

Under New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) claimants with children over the age of 5 years and 3 months (referred to as "target") were to be invited to participate in the programme (lone parents with children under this age (("non target") may opt in), and will be offered help and advice on jobs, benefits, training and childcare, through the provision of a designated advisor. Phase one of NDLP was piloted in eight benefits areas in July and August of 1997. In April 1998 all target new claimants were invited to join and by October 1998 the scheme was extended to all target claimants (DSS 1998).

Initial assessments in research conducted for the Benefits Agency indicate a satisfactory start for NDLP. Woodfield and Finch (1999) show that of the 3,963 lone parents participating in NDLP, 1,289 (33%) had found work, (it must however be noted that over 22,000 lone parents were originally invited), whilst in June 1998 Harriet Harman, the then Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, claimed that lone parents who had been helped into work by NDLP were £39 per week better off, and that their benefit dependency had been reduced by £42 per week. Other preliminary assessments are equally optimistic. Measuring the NDLP effect in the pilot areas against control areas, Hales, Shaw and Roth (1998) found that there had been a 4.5% move off income support in pilot areas compared to 3.1% in control areas. They add that control

area labour market conditions were more favourable so these figures may actually underestimate the New Deal effect.

Lone parent groups, such as Gingerbread have welcomed NDLP as a positive step but are somewhat cautious regarding its success. In response to New Deal legislation they recognise a whole array of factors which need to be considered if New Deal is to have lasting and measurable benefit. Gender discrimination in the workplace, deregulation and casualisation of wages and conditions of employment, the lack of an integrated national childcare strategy and regional variations in the economic environment could all potentially undermine the effect NDLP may have (Gingerbread 1998). They also stress the importance of NDLP remaining voluntary. The right of a lone parents to stay home with her/his child(ren) they believe is fundamental.

The principles underpinning NDLP have however been subject to considerable comment. For example, Levitas (1997) argues that central characteristics of the generic New Deal programme are based, not upon addressing the structural dynamics of inequality, but upon tackling the personal characteristics of the "excluded". This is perhaps exemplified by comments made by Alistair Darling (1999) who stated that "Poverty today is complex. It's not just a simple problem about money, to be solved through cash alone", and that an integral part of the problem remains "a poverty of expectation".

This is at the heart of the current approach to lone parenthood. Levitas (1997) argues that this, in part, can be traced to the writings of, amongst others, Murray (1994) and Mead (1997), who suggest that the growth of lone parenthood is both a symptom and a cause in the breakdown of the social norms valued by the rest of the society (the included?) and that the remedy for such breakdown is to be found in work. By challenging the culture of dependency, the cycle may be broken, (primarily with a re-emergence of the work ethic amongst the jobless poor), thus the next generation may be socialised into accepting the values of mainstream society (Walker and Walker 1997). Focusing on the behaviour of the individual has of course long been a feature of the discussion surrounding welfare, but for the first time insofar as welfare relates to lone parents, the neutrality of the state

towards their working has been replaced by a clear commitment to facilitate a return to the workplace for as many as possible (DSS 1999).

It has been argued that much of the rhetoric of New Labour concerning lone parenthood draws upon this assessment (Duncan and Edwards 1999), but is somewhat tempered with the acknowledgement that lone parents face specific problems in returning to the workplace, for example childcare and ability to combine the role of mother and sole provider. This is perhaps reflected in the fact that joining NDLP is at present (mostly) discretionary on the part of the claimant[30]. Nevertheless, the Governmentally defined key to social inclusion remains paid work (DSS 1999).

Whilst the focus of NDLP is one of economics, (reducing the burden to the taxpayer through paid work for the target group), even with work it may be the case that the tangible benefits for lone parents themselves may be minimal. This is a central point insofar as that by defining inclusion and exclusion within an employment-unemployment dichotomy, the dynamics of, for example low pay, remain ignored (Levitas 1997; Gordon 1999). This assessment is confirmed by Dooley et al (2000) who found that analysing employment, not as a dichotomy, but along a continuum from adequate employment to inadequate employment (involuntary part time or low wage) to unemployment, produced results suggesting that both of the latter did impact upon the quality of life (especially in terms of mental health) of their study sample.

Lone parents are however somewhat sceptical with regards to incentives to return to work (Evason and Robinson 1998). Concerns were based upon the uncertainty of regular employment, loss of some means tested benefits (housing benefit, free school meals, school uniform grants etc), childcare arrangements and other practical issues they may face. This research also demonstrated that psychological processes may be just as important in preventing lone parents from entering the workplace. Concerns over the ability to provide effective parenting were paramount in the decisions made. This,

together with the recognised psychological barriers those outside the workforce may experience in returning to work, may conspire to provide insurmountable hurdles that some of the target population of NDLP may face.

As stated above, research has demonstrated that NDLP can have positive, albeit limited effect. The assessment report of the pilot stage of NDLP suggested that whilst NDLP has had some success, this was primarily with those who were already committed to starting work in the short term, or those who may have done so in any case (Hales et al 2000). The report also suggests that greater success may have been found if the prototype had been able to develop links with other complementary services available. This is perhaps a telling point in the assessment of NDLP. The report acknowledges that one of the limitations of NDLP is that few resources are allocated in the programme itself towards building self-esteem and raising self-confidence within volunteers in their ability to find employment. Yet the report also indicates that over 25% of those finding employment through NDLP, did so, not because of NDLP identifying appropriate employment, but because the personal advisor helped to raise confidence and foster a "positive attitude" (p10). The report however fails to provide any definition of what this "positive attitude" is. This in itself is problematic insofar as it makes assumptions on two levels. Firstly, it assumes that NDLP could be made more effective by addressing individual level dynamics without substantive changes at a structural level, and secondly, it assumes a generic barrier without taking into account individual needs. That is, it does not stipulate what the "positive attitude" is toward. Does it mean a positive attitude towards being able to access employment or toward being able to secure affordable childcare? The danger is that providing such non-specific generalisations as to what the limitations are, non-specific generalised solutions may be proposed. This will be explored further presently within the context of results.

There is of course also a further element to consider. If wanting to access NDLP opportunities is considered to demonstrate a positive attitude, not wanting to access such

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[30] As of April 2000 all new or repeat lone parent claimants were required to attend at least one advisory NDLP meeting in selected pilot areas. An interview with a New Deal advisor (February 2001) revealed that

opportunities could be suggestive of a negative attitude. This could however ignore societal prescriptions as to the best method of parenting. Thus, staying home with children may be positive for one group of women, yet negative for another. So here, positive attitude is associated with the motivation to become economically independent. Duncan and Edwards (1999) pick up on this argument and suggest that the crux of government policy implies this economic rationality whereby personal financial goals are the overriding motivation for behaviour. Thus if policies are in place that allow financial improvement, and if NDLP is able to present available information as to how this financial improvement may be made, behaviour modification will follow automatically. But, they argue, what if this model of economic rationality is not how lone parents make decisions about how they will raise their children and how they will combine the role of mother and worker? Their central argument is therefore that lone parents may be guided by motivations other than that of economic rationality. They suggest that socially prescribed rules over duties as a parent and carer rather than parent and financial provider, may have more influence. In other words, a different rationality may drive lone parents insofar as a moral rationality may be of greatest concern.

Nevertheless, developing a some kind of positive attitude, however one would care to define it, is perhaps a key to success for NDLP. Recent media portrayals of lone parents (especially never married mothers) places them firmly outside mainstream society (Millar 1998) and reinforcement of such stereotypes can have damaging effect upon the self esteem of the individuals in question (Winefield et al 1992). If this is so, then the exclusion may not only be structural, but also psychological. If one accepts social exclusion to include the whole experience of the **social**, seen in terms of the lack of integration into society, Darling's comment on tackling the "poverty of expectation" takes on a somewhat clearer meaning.

Research conducted by Bryson, Ford and White (1997) found that lone mothers can be better off both materially and psychologically in work, but also found that levels of income (and if we are to accept Dooley's (2000) conclusion presented above, mental

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this may be applied to all claimants as of April 2001 with sanctions being imposed for non attendance.

well-being) were significantly affected by the qualifications individuals may or may not have. They also point to the fact that those without any qualifications were likely to continue to receive some in-work benefits whilst also being highly likely to be receiving low pay, (albeit higher than the national minimum wage)[31]. They further describe how opportunities for personal development and/or training were extremely limited for manual workers or those without prior qualifications (a majority of lone mothers), further entrenching their economic position. The report concludes that this can only be overcome by the setting of a medium term agenda that targets lone mothers specifically and provides appropriate training and education to those on the way towards being ready to enter the workplace. It does however emphasise the point that the geographical location of such initiatives is an important feature as to how successful they will be, as is the provision of adequate childcare facilities.

In summary, it can be argued that whilst NDLP is a positive step forward, both structural and psychological barriers remain. These barriers can hinder firstly the step into employment, and once there, other barriers may prevent lone parents from becoming fully self-sufficient and thus impact upon Governments' aim of further reducing the overall burden to the taxpayer.

Small Scale Community Based Interventions

Whilst NDLP is designed to operate at a macro level, running at the micro level are small scale community based initiatives. It is however problematic to attempt to provide a blanket definition as to what such schemes attempt to provide. For example, the highly successful scheme "New Opportunities for Women" based in Croydon, London, teaches basic catering, nutritional and budgetary skills alongside I.T. and job-search training (Merrick 1997). Other schemes, such as the London based "Training for Life" emphasise the importance of paid work but see this as best achieved through a combination of both skill development and personal growth (Training for Life 2002). Others schemes, such as

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[31] Average hourly pay for lone mothers is £4.23, with an average of 21.5 hours per week worked (Hales et al 2000 (b))

Liverpool One Parent Family Trust simply offer advice and support as and when required.

What is apparent is that schemes such as these can include dimensions from both a radical community work perspective with the emphasis upon equality of outcome, to a more politically expedient perspective with the focus upon equality of opportunity. This is perhaps not surprising insofar as community practitioners have had to shift focus to include aspects concerned with economic development, rather than only focus upon social justice, in order to gain funding (Ledwith 2001 p173). This is perhaps exemplified by the fact that funders for the Training for Life programme includes European, central and local government. The Liverpool One Parent Family Trust alternatively receives no government funding and is wholly reliant upon charitable donations. It is however not the case that community development is incompatible with economic development, it is just that in the application of community based programs, the boundary may become somewhat blurred.

This can be a perennial problem for those involved in assessing the effectiveness of such programs. Given that tangible objective targets may have to be set to access funds, and those objectives then met to secure additional funding, often the measure of success is dependent upon the original criteria set with other less obvious benefits either undervalued or ignored. For example, the New Opportunities for Women initiative (mentioned above) found that a spin off of the initiative was the way the women involved had developed informal networks of mutual support that went beyond the boundaries of the scheme (Merrick 1997).

If this is the case it provides an opportunity to draw together the different strands of community development and gives justification of how of how the term community initiative is used within this paper. Given some of the benefits of initiatives primarily concerned with micro economic development may be the same as those with a more radical focus, community initiatives will be taken to mean those that:

are established to address local needs;

are aimed at those in the local geographic community;

recruit participants on a voluntary basis;

regardless of the programme intentions or funding, are able to provide the opportunity to develop systems of mutual support;

(e) have at least some focus upon personal development.

The Rationale Of Small Scale Interventions

The rationale of NDLP is that improvement of income of the target population will facilitate a raising of the spectrum of indicators of inclusion. For example, self esteem, attitudes towards self-health, it may raise expectations, may combat depression, may improve motivation and may change the perception of lifestyle issues of lone parents (DSS 1999). However, given the evidence presented above by Bryson, Ford and White (1997), it may be that whilst NDLP does indeed facilitate a return to the workplace for some, many of these indictors of exclusion may remain. Small scale community initiatives on the other hand, can attempt to focus upon psychological indicators first. For some, their philosophy is that if hidden barriers to inclusion are tackled as a by product of training and education, the excluded may be able to achieve a greater level of inclusion even without the benefits of paid work. (This was a point originally raised by Townsend (1979) who suggested that the negative effects of lack of material resources were often tempered by, amongst other things, good social networks and by good mental health). This is perhaps the crux of what some community interventions are attempting to achieve. For example, the "Liverpool First" (1999) wider regeneration strategy, accepts employment as being only one of series of indicators that define the exclusion a community may face. Equal focus is placed upon spiritual, physical and mental well-being, upon the development of good social support networks, upon accessible recreational activities and upon the fostering of greater community involvement in decision making processes. The DfEE have recognised that such initiatives may have a

role to play within the "back to work" programme and did commission research into this area.

Research Aims

Given the Benefits Agency have suggested that one of the limitations of the early stages of NDLP is its somewhat isolated nature, and given the DfEE are interested in the role of complimentary services, this aim of this paper is to present the qualitative findings from research into how effective small scale community initiatives are at fostering a "positive attitude" amongst a cohort of lone parents and to attempt to establish just what this positive attitude may be. The research will also highlight some of the opinions held as to how effective they may or may not be in the improvement of inclusion indicators.

Methods

The population of interest to this study were lone parents meeting the upper limit of the NDLP original target criteria. That is lone parents who are aged 18 years or over and have at least one child who normally lives with them who is aged 16 years or under or aged 16 to 18 years and in full time education. The study was originally aimed at those lone parents meeting the lower age limit of the NDLP, that is those with children aged 5 years and three months or older, but given the target criteria for NDLP changed, it was thought prudent to change the entry criteria for the study also. Additionally, it was found that many lone parents were attending schemes with children under the original lower age limit and it was considered a limitation on the study if their experiences were not included.

Two cohorts of volunteers were recruited. Those participating in any initiative or involved with any support group (participants), and those not (non participants).[32]

[32] For the purposes of this paper the terms *participant* and *non- participant* will be used in the way they are used within the Benefits Agency reports. That is, participants are those that are involved or attend a community based scheme and consider themselves to be part of the scheme or initiative. Non participant

Participants were recruited from Liverpool Community College, the network of Parent School Partnerships, and the Liverpool One Parent Family Trust. These were chosen as they were considered to represent the full spectrum of why individuals may choose to participate in interventions. The Liverpool Community College offers a wide range of courses, many of which will allow a recognised qualification to be gained. The Parent School Partnerships offer the opportunity to engage in a range of activities most of which may be considered to be hobby based, whilst the Liverpool One Parent Family Trust operate primarily as a organisation designed to provide advice and support as and when required. Given the difficulty in contacting those who may be "behind doors", non participants were recruited using a method of snowball sampling as described by Hall and Hall (1996). Participants were asked if they would be prepared to speak to other (non participant) lone parents whom they knew to ask if they would be prepared to take part in the research. This proved to be a successful method in recruiting volunteers that may otherwise have been hidden from the study.

The data contained here is drawn form a wider study which is providing a comparative analysis evaluating the effectiveness of NDLP as compared to both small scale interventions and a control group across a range of indicators. Forty interviews took place between January 1999 and June 2001 with 17 volunteers being involved in some community initiative and 14 not involved in either NDLP nor any intervention. All of the study volunteers were in receipt of income support. Of the 31 volunteers providing information for his section of the study, 8 were divorced, 9 were separated and 14 were single. Table 1 below provides a further breakdown of the separate cohorts. The mean age of the youngest child at home varied slightly dependant upon whether the volunteer was involved in an intervention or not, being 6.8 years for those involved and 5.9 for those not. Community intervention volunteers reported a mean number of 1.9 children with control volunteers having 1.3 children. These were broadly consistent with the findings from the major study.

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are those that either do not attend a scheme or do not consider themselves to be part of one. The rationale for this is that some lone parents were contacted at such schemes who were either attending for the first time or only attended at irregular intervals. Volunteers refer to those from either cohort who were part of the study group.

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Table 1. Marital status by community initiative participation and control group		
Marital status	Involved in community intervention (n=17)	Control group (n=14)
Divorced	6	2
Separated	5	4
Single	4	8

A blend of focus groups and one to one interviews were used with participants, however the nature of the cohort of non participants only allowed interviews to be used. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured basis and were designed to focus upon indicators that may not necessarily be part of the target outcomes for the different interventions. This allowed comparable analysis across the range of initiatives. The data was subject to a process of open coding and then further collapsed into respective categories (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Primarily interviews were only conducted with participants with themes emerging from the data used as models with which to construct interviews schedules with non participants. Volunteers were asked to complete a questionnaire so as to identify demographic characteristics.

Involvement v Non Involvement

A mixed reaction was found in the discussion of interventions with interviewees tending to fall into two main categories. Those that were, or had been involved in initiatives, generally appeared to be enthusiastic about the effects they had had.

"Going to college has been really good. It gets me out of the house and not only that, I've got something to look forward to"

A further theme to emerge was that many participants spoke of how participation had given them the opportunity to set personal targets. It was not necessarily the case that those involved had set higher targets, just that participants did appear to have predetermined personal goals and were often clear how they would be able to meet their objectives. It was however also the case that many of these goals and targets were not necessarily focused on work. Some spoke of how their aim was to purely to develop a sense of agency. Issues concerned with assertiveness and self-confidence were often described as the types of objectives participants were aiming for.

Non participants however were often somewhat dismissive of interventions. Whilst they were not necessarily dismissive of what they were offering, many did not consider what they offered was particularly relevant to them. A recurrent theme with non-participants was that if they were to "leave the home", they were more interested in receiving material benefits in the short term. This was perhaps exemplified by one interviewee who, when asked whether she would consider some aspect of training or education, stated:

"I don't know, I suppose that if I'm going to do something I may as well get paid for it. I mean what's the point of learning about computers. I'm not going to get a job with that am I?"

It also appeared that, whereas many participants had begun to identify objectives in terms of work and/or personal development, non-participants, whilst not necessarily not having goals, were often more ambiguous about what their goals were.

"It's hard now, but he'll soon be old enough for me to go to work. It's not really worth it now, I could only work part time, but when he's older…"

When asked what type of work she would like to do.

"I'm not bothered. I'll do anything. The most important thing is that it's able to fit around the kids. I don't worry about that too much. Something will turn up."

Other Indicators of Success

Whilst the aim of many interventions is to eventually facilitate a return to the workplace, many participants highlighted the benefits not only in terms of the development of transferable skills that may aid employment, but also benefits that have had positive effects upon aspects of affective well-being. Some described how involvement helped develop social networks outside of that of their family, often counterbalance the feelings many had of isolation. Just "getting out of the house" was an important factor as to why participants viewed such interventions so favourably. Indeed, not only were social networks an important factor in their evaluation, but also the opportunity for social support was equally important. This was reflected by the fact that those participants in contact with agencies and/or interventions not specifically geared to employment described the same types of benefits as those involved with employment led programmes.

The Road to Employment

An important factor in increasing levels of employment amongst lone parents is enabling greater numbers to become "job ready". It is however not only the development of transferable skills that can aid employment, but a corresponding raising of the "positive attitude" previously identified by the Benefits Agency. What did become clear during data collection and analysis was that this "positive attitude" was extremely hard to define. Examples were, for some, perceived to be grounded in how they considered their employment prospects to be increased, or how they had developed wider social networks. For others it was greater freedom due to children getting older or increased levels of support with informal childcare. What was notable was that what defined this individual positiveness was the same for both participants and non-participants. However, participants often described how being involved had helped to improve their outlook from what it was pre-involvement. Some suggested that being involved had enabled them to visualise themselves moving into a position of, at the very least, partial self-

sufficiency. Many reiterated that this was not the case previously. As Trisha, a lone parent for 8 years with two children attending a local Parent/School Partnership explained:

"I've been stuck at home for 7 years now. At one stage I used to think that it would be like that for ever. I'm no better off money wise coming here, but at least I can see some light at the end of the tunnel. I don't think I'll get a job that will give us the money to get everything we want, but at least I know I can have a go. It's took me a long time to get to think like that"

When asked what she attributed this change to:

"I suppose partly its coming here. I see other people in my position and they seem to be confident enough. I suppose it rubs off".

Reclaiming Lives

What did come through with participant interviewees was that they all suggested, albeit to different degrees, that they had begun to reclaim some level of control over their lives. Many highlighted how confidence had grown in their own ability to deal with fluctuating circumstances. The pro-activity encouraged by many of the initiatives had allowed participants to begin to think of themselves in terms other than that of passive recipients. Barbara, a lone parent with one child explained:

"The other week I got on the phone to complain to the housing about one of the cupboards in my kitchen and they came out and fixed it. It just shows that if you make the effort you can get things done. It may sound stupid but it made me really think that I don't have to rely on other people to do things for me all the time. I can do it myself"

Discussion

Results do indicate that participation can have benefit upon some aspects of mental well-being of participants with the data suggesting that participants consider one of the primary benefits is a redressing of the imbalance in levels of personal control. This is perhaps a fundamental point insofar as whilst other factors can have influence upon mental well-being, if control of these other factors are able to be maintained, effects may be minimised (Peterson, Maier and Seligman 1993). The basis of this is the amount of, and opportunities for, decision making an individual may have, and the certainty to predict the outcome of those decisions. Nevertheless, it appears that participation does facilitate a greater degree of motivation to develop the skills and/or confidence to accept an increase in levels of personal responsibilities. At first glance this may be interpreted as being somewhat aligned to a populist assessment of lone parenthood within the context of the underclass thesis, however it does have to be recognised that responsibility can be defined in a wider context than that of individual financial and moral responsibility. Indeed data suggests that participation does facilitate increased responsibility, but in terms of the internal setting of personal goals and targets. Participants describe developing skills in the face of new stimuli, not as a reaction to demands or requirements, but as a response to internally generated motivations.

Whilst the data indicated interventions are able to provide a welcome variation to the regularity of both activity and location, they further offered increased opportunity for social contact, but moreover, they gave the reassurance of a level of social support. This is an important factor in the evaluation of interventions insofar as increased social isolation has been found to be correlated with increased levels of mental illness, with increased social support having the opposite effect (Lin and Ensel 1984). A question that does have to addressed at this point is can, given U.K. policy aimed at addressing social exclusion is centred around the benefits of work and thus increased financial resources, can some of the more latent consequences of exclusion can be addressed without paid employment. Whilst accepting the comments presented earlier by Townsend, it has been argued that whilst finances are of course the prominent feature of paid employment, other

more hidden elements of paid employment are as important and thus work itself is the key to psychological well-being.

In support of this position, Jahoda (1982) suggests that work has five underlying functions that bind the actor with reality. It imposes time structure, provides social contact with those outside the family, gives common purpose, it gives an individual identity and it enforces activity. Jahoda (p61) further asserts that these latent functions cannot be reproduced by anything other than work and therefore any work is better than no work at all. This theory has been criticised, not least by Fryer (1986), who suggested that its basis is one of control. It assumes that people are intrinsically dependent upon outside forces to give purpose and definition to existence. Alternatively, Fryer proposed Agency Theory, starting from the assumption that people are agents who attempt to assert themselves, who are motivated and independent. Fryer suggests that whilst the economic consequences of non-employment may impair agency, this can be moderated by maintaining an optimistic outlook as to what the future may hold.

Whilst these two views provide somewhat of a bi-polar assessment, perhaps a more relevant framework of analysis can be found within Warr's Vitamin Model. Amalgamating elements of both arguments, Warr used this model to pay particular attention to the settings of paid work and unemployment and suggests that their features may be studied in a variety of environments (1987 p1). The vitamin model identifies a range of nine environmental features that appear to have a curvilinear relationship with mental health. Just as vitamins effect physical health, Warr maintains that these components affect mental health in a similar manner. Warr, unlike Jahoda, recognises the distinction between good and bad employment but further draws no definitive distinction between employment and unemployment. Just as some work based environments may either benefit or hinder, so may some non work based. This model has been tested empirically (De Jonge and Schaufeli 1998), and results do offer support for its assertions.

Of the nine components Warr addresses, he considers the most important to be the opportunity for control (p4) arguing this has two essential features. Firstly it provides the

opportunity to choose a given action and secondly is offers the potential to predict the outcome of that action. Warr starts with this component as he suggests that if this feature is addressed the remaining features of the model, such as opportunity for skill use and the opportunity to have externally generated goals may be maintained, or even improved, with greater ease. Warr here make the point that externally generated goals need not necessarily be externally generated requirements. Whereas Jahoda's (1982) assertion was that work was necessary to impose structure on the individual, Warr's point is precisely that because they are imposed they become demands or requirements instead (p5). Goals, Warr argues, can be a label that can be applied to targets that may be both voluntary or imposed. The point here may be made that whereas demands from an environment may lead to a specific behaviour, it is nevertheless only behaviour as a response to a specific condition. It may therefore not necessarily have meaning for the social actor. Self selected goals however may be generated by the environment that imply meaning for the individual and thus may link onto a development of a sense of agency and control for the individual. This feature is clearly linked to an examination of locus of control (Rotter 1966) whereby an internal locus of control can not only help individuals cope better with challenges, but also maintain a more positive outlook as to how they may cope with fresh challenges. A parallel to this may be found within Seligman's (1975) approach of Learned Helplessness, whereby individuals may become trapped by their situation due to lack of confidence concerning their ability to influence events.

It would appear that the opportunity for control in the terms laid out by Warr is provided by community initiatives. What is perhaps less clear is whether one can locate the study sample within either Johoda's or Fryer's assessment. Whilst these were described as bi-polar explanations previously, it may be more beneficial to describe them as complimentary, primarily because results suggest that the study cohort can be located in both. It was not the case that participants and non-participants were homogenous in the levels of pro-activity or re-activity displayed and one does have to consider that different environmental features and situations may dictate the levels of internality and externality displayed. However it was the case that internality and pro-activity were considered by participants to have been increased due to participation. No qualitative data was collected

before participants actually participated, therefore it is difficult to estimate to what extent these levels of internality have increased, but it is clear that some increase had occurred. Whilst this is not to say that levels of externality have automatically decreased[33], it does give some pointers as to what "positive attitude" may be founded on. It could be argued that increased levels of internality, whilst not displacing externality, may mitigate some of its effects.

Positive attitude

It appears that participation does indeed facilitate an increase of "positive attitude", however, as suggested, it remains difficult to actually define what this positive attitude is. What we may begin to see however is what this positive attitude is toward. It is no doubt the case that small scale community based interventions are not the best option for all lone parents, but they do appear to be an effective staging post for some on the road to employment. However, not all lone parents are ready to return to the workplace and this is where such initiatives can play a major role. If one accepts that differing levels of internality and externality can co-exist dependant upon a variety of features, so may inclusion and exclusion exist simultaneous. One may be included in one context, but excluded in another. Such interventions may not allow financial issues to be negotiated short term, but taking a longer term view it could be argued that the benefits participants receive will have long term effect, not only for the individuals concerned, but also in realising policy aim of increased labour market attachment for this particular target group.

However, what has to noted is that if we are to accept that one can have dual existence in terms of the levels of internality and externality one may have, in terms of how one may be socially excluded or included and in terms if what one may have positive attitude towards, one may also have more than one type of expectation. Yet, the term "poverty of

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[33] Wallston (1978) describes how internal and external loci of control should be considered independent of each other and that one can be both internal and external simultaneously.

expectation", and the context in which it is used, is clearly linked to economic rationality that policy has placed so much faith in. The danger is of course that it possibly places too much focus upon individual characteristics and not enough upon the structural dimension of exclusion. Nevertheless, it would appear that for greater inclusion to be achieved individual level dynamics do need to be addressed and results suggest community interventions may have role to play in this in two ways.

Firstly, the way poverty of expectation is used is addressed in terms of a disconnection from the labour market. Yet, it assumes that poverty of expectation is not an issue for those in work. Results indicate that some lone parents, primarily those not involved in any intervention, were lacking clear aims as to what may happen when they feel ready to access employment. That something will turn up. Yet in employment lone parents earn an average of £4.23 per hour with an average of 21.5 hours worked, equating to £90.94 per week (Hales at al 2000). A lone parent fitting this work profile with two children of school age would receive an additional £112.90 per week Working Families Tax Credit equating to £203.84 gross per week. For 35 hour week this would result in £243.15 per week before stoppages. This in comparison to UK average female earnings of £336.70 (Regional Trends 2000). Moreover in 1999 over 1 in 3 earned less than the minimum wage (£3.60) (Hales at al 2000).

This returns us to the points made earlier concerning how the dynamics of low pay may be ignored within the included (Levitas 1997; Gordon 1999; Dooley et al 2000). Previous research does suggest a majority of lone parents do want to return to work at some point and comments here do give some indication of the reasons why many are prepared to wait. Results also indicate that those who had not been involved in any type of intervention were sceptical regarding both their motives and their relevance. Nevertheless, when those lone parents are ready to return to the workplace many are no doubt going to experience difficulty accessing adequate employment due to not only structural barriers, but also lack of skills or a lack of a track record of employment. Small scale initiatives can help fill this gap by providing skills and training but they have to be seen as relevant by those they wish to attract. Whilst we have to accept that an economic

rationality may not drive all lone parents at all times, and the points made earlier by Duncan and Edwards (1999) are taken and accepted, but comments here suggest an economic rationality could drive many at some time. If this is so, then as with the compromises made by practitioners with regards to accessing funding, a similar compromise may have to made in the types of initiatives that may run. Issues of empowerment and social justice may not be the overriding motivation for those who do not wish to access community based programmes. Initiative that are able to develop a track record in improving employability and/or income derived from work may on the other hand increase participation. Results additionally suggest that issues from a radical perspective, such as empowerment and social network development, may thus be addressed. In this way poverty of expectation, whereby lone parents are not just prepared to accept, nor are only qualified for inadequate employment, may be seen in its widest sense. This is not to ignore structural barriers such as the ability to organise or afford adequate childcare, but to allow those who are able to negotiate such barriers to realise their economic potential.

The second role community initiatives can play is the manner in which they are able to integrate themselves within wider policy aims. Woodfield and Finch (1999), in an assessment of parallel schemes set up to run in tandem with NDLP, suggest that NDLP could have greater success if such schemes offered a flexible, holistic approach, whereby individual's needs, rather than the need to find paid employment as soon as possible, are addressed. Results here do go some way to supporting this. By providing a supportive environment that is responsive to individual needs, whether that be training for work or not, a framework may be established that may allow participants smooth access into NDLP itself.

Conclusion

The comments presented earlier by the both the Benefits Agency and the DfEE suggest that policy makers are considering greater integration between small scale interventions and national level policy. However, what was notable was that for many of the

interventions, both employment led and non-employment led, an issue of major concern was funding. Many of those working at and running programmes described the difficulties and obstacles faced in acquiring sufficient funds, not only to initiate programmes, but also to sustain them and many were not prepared to look further than their immediate future. If greater levels of funding are to be made available, policy makers firstly need to accept that an inclusion-exclusion dichotomy defined by labour market attachment is too simplistic a concept. This is not to diminish the importance of paid work, but rather to acknowledge that the drive toward work alone may not be sufficient to facilitate greater inclusion. Levitas (1997), argues consistently that U.K. policy has moved markedly away from a redistributive agenda. If this is so then the duty of policy makers, at all levels of government, is to put in place systems that are able to address exclusion in its broadest sense. Indeed the DSS (1999) claim to be keen to "invest in individuals and communities to equip them to take control of their lives". Given adequate resources, small-scale community based intervention may well be one such method.

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APPENDICES 4

Speech given at I.F.H.E. International Conference, Accra, Ghana, July 1999

The Work of the Home Economist in Community Intervention Strategies

The tendency to focus upon individual traits has historically been a predominant feature of poverty research. From the Orthodox Economic Theory, which implicates the individual for failing to improve his skills, to the Minority Group Theory which looks at the `traits' of the poor, and by a reversal process defines the traits as the causes. What these theories failed to address was that individuals rarely exist in isolation. They form a part of a family or household and they are members of the wider community. For such households and communities to exist and perpetuate from generation to generation implies a, *'pathological model of poverty creation and recreation'* (Alcock p 29, 1993). Such households and communities have long attracted the interest of researchers and educators in the quest to understand the culture of poverty and indeed to question whether the culture of poverty truly exists. The pioneers of such research and education acknowledged urban poverty as being a consequence of industrial progress, but tempered this acknowledgement with moralistic judgements as to the behaviour and the motivation of the poor to improve their circumstance. As such responses were developed which adopted a prescriptive approach to poverty alleviation based upon the perceived inadequacies of the poor to embrace behaviouristic changes. It has to be recognised that the desired behaviour alluded to was based upon middle class values, often taking little account of the social and psychological processes affecting poor communities.

These theories were originally developed against the backdrop of a changing social and economic system and in response to the increase of poverty of the urban poor in newly industrialised counties. Absolute poverty is however no longer a realistic threat for a vast majority of the population in the UK and as such the language and metaphors now used to describe societal inequalities have evolved in an attempt to better reflect the experiences of those on the margins of the economy. The term social exclusion being one

such example. However as we shall discuss presently it does not necessarily follow that a change in description facilitates a change in experience.

Social exclusion is a relatively new discourse originating from mainland Europe and widens the debate surrounding material deprivation by developing the social aspect of experiences faced by those living on the margins of the economy. This in itself is not a new phenomenon. Townsend (1979) identified social deprivation as an integral factor in the lives of low income groups but came to the conclusion that the solution for such problems lay in tackling societal structures via resource redistribution. However, the dominant definition of social exclusion, certainly that favoured by government, has tended to define the exclusion in terms of the social, and in turn has provided an arbitrary definition as to what the social constitutes (Gordon 1998). For Gordon the social exclusion debate is no longer defined by the consequences of social injustice, but has become redefined to include the threat posed to social order and social cohesion. The danger for Gordon is that this redefinition (taking on much that is suggested by commentators such as Murray (1990); Dennis and Erdos (1993); Mead (1998), weak labour market attachment and benefit dependency as a primary feature of social exclusion, narrows the debate insofar as employment becomes the overriding objective for policy direction and in doing so ignores other fundamental obstacles the socially excluded may face.

Levitas (1998) concurs with Gordon, arguing that the current policy approach to social exclusion has at its core two basic principles, each fashioned by a definition of what the social actually constitutes:

The social defined as paid income (work).
The social defined by the moral behaviour of the individual and the fit with perceived societal norms and customs.

In addressing these principles Levitas suggests that the central assumption of this response is that mainstream society itself is considered benign, however various social

and economic dynamics of the "included" (the employed), for example low pay, remain underestimated (p 26). Furthermore, the behaviourist position may not take fully into account the effects of the macro economic conditions that may exist for example long term unemployment, whilst at the same time contributing to the stigma associated with variant lifestyle choices, for example lone parenthood (p 21).

The change from a passive to an active (DSS 1998) welfare system, ensures that those who are excluded have a responsibility to become included through the compulsory welfare to work programmes, whilst the re-emergence of the behaviourist assessment of welfare receipt, leaves the excluded as writers of their own destiny.

Is assessing the concept of social exclusion, both Levitas and Gordon provide lucid accounts of what they consider the key to the gateway of governmentally defined inclusion to be, but they also acknowledge that social exclusion is not static, but rather a fluid entity. That whereas one may be classified as receiving low pay if one has an income of, for example, half average male earnings, or any other arbitrary definition one may care to use, one may be social excluded across a range of indicators. If one is living in poor housing and is on a low income, but is healthy, able to participate in leisure activities, is one socially excluded? This poses a particular problem for the scientific community insofar as given social exclusion is so wide ranging, the definitions can be equally diverse.

In addressing this problem, Judge (1995) stated that the issues of exclusion will not be tackled until it is recognised that:

"...social exclusion takes many forms whose value is often systematically reinforced as an indicator of success and well-being".

This may be a more easily manipulated definition as one can identify with what the indicators of success and well being are. High income is an indicator of success. Material well-being is an indicator of success. Conspicuous consumption is an indicator of

success. In Western society success and well being are totally and inextricably linked with income, spending power and consumption. To this end, during the past 20 years almost every aspect of western life has become commodified. Certainly in the U.K., areas that were previously deemed to be subject to collective provision such as housing and healthcare have been turned into commodities that are able to be bought and sold like any other. Some may argue that this is a consequence of, and/or a submission to capitalism, whilst some may argue that it is a redefinition of citizenship, returning responsibility to its rightful place, with the individual. Whatever the causes, the consequences are the same. That those on the margins of the economy, (the excluded) are still unable to achieve what those within the economy (the included) can (Grant & Maxwell, 1999).

An area where this shift has become apparent is health and lifestyle choices. Proper diet and adequate recreational exercise are no longer discussed in terms of being a lifestyle choice, they are discussed as being a necessity for lifestyle improvement and as such a market for lifestyle improvement has emerged. Where the market can extract a profit, the market will. This in itself may not be a completely negative aspect, indeed the advertising campaigns associated with such commodities and services may help to promote positive choices, but, the marketing of lifestyle products and services equates healthy lifestyles with the success and well-being just discussed. If one has success and well-being, one can have health. It is a commodity like any other, it can be bought, sold, it can be reduced in times of hardship and expanded in times of plenty.

Judge (1995) somewhat expands upon this theme by arguing that it is in the interest of producers and service suppliers alike to promote lifestyles in this manner. Healthy lifestyles are portrayed in such as way as to become a characteristic of desirable lifestyle choices and by redefining them from luxuries to necessities, those who do not possess them may strive to consume what they perceive to be a symbol of social status. But, returning to the previous point, if it is a commodity, how can those who are financially excluded from the consumption of such, be included.

The most obvious answer is a redistribution of wealth through both the tax and welfare systems. However all but the most ambitious would agree that this argument has lost mainstream political credibility, moreover, would this not reinforce the perception of healthy lifestyles as only achievable through greater financial outlay? The challenge has to be to persuade those who are unable to achieve this aim through convention financial methods that health conscious lifestyles are achievable on limited income. This challenge however can only be met if two fundamental hurdles are negotiated.

Firstly, evidence exists that in countries where food skills are an integral part of school curricular e.g. Finland and Iceland, better diets are recorded regardless of socio-economic status (Stitt et al 1997). Countries such as the U.K. where food skills are considered peripheral to curricular activity have seen dramatic increases in the use of convenience and processed products, with a corresponding decrease in the use of fresh produce (NFA 1993). Schools are increasingly placing focus upon pastoral care for pupils, and in the U.K., lessons in responsible citizenship have been proposed (a traditional area within Home Economics education in the UK). It does seem reasonable that the issue of food and health, so fundamental to human well being should be given equal if not more prominence. Whilst this may appear a simplistic proposal, it is nevertheless one that may prove effective.

The second hurdle is somewhat more complex and needs to be tackled on two fronts. Those on low incomes need to be aware that health and diet need not be equated with income. This is not to dismiss the well documented difficulties in attaining adequate diet on low income, but a separation needs to be made, divorcing the perception of lifestyle issues from the previously noted definitions of success. Adequate exercise can be achieved without joining an expensive health club. Diet can be improved without doubling ones' income. This however, and perhaps fundamentally, can only be achieved if policy makers and more importantly, professional working in the field, are able to convince the excluded that they are indeed excluded in this particular area. This is perhaps the key to greater inclusion. Whilst the population is more knowledgeable about diet related issues than ever before, what is the extent of that knowledge? Consumers

may be aware that one particular product is more healthy than another, but to what extent are they aware when considering a range of products together? Is there an assumption that those with poor diets know they have nutritionally poor diets and they are all desperate to change for the better? Is it the case that those with poor diets have poor diets because of lack of knowledge, and if this is so, why would they want to change if they do not consider their diet is indeed poor? Are some reluctant to admit that they do not eat healthily as this would be an admission that they have failed to achieve the previously defined success and well-being so sought after? Is it that resources are so low that food is considered only as fulfilling a primary function of not being hungry and the strain is such that all energy is devoted to making ends meet?

The diet of those living on low-income in the U.K. is causing disquiet and Government has expressed concern about current trends. State sponsored initiatives are due to start sometime this years in areas of the country with a high density of low-income households aimed at teaching basic cooking skills to adults and children. Whilst these schemes should be applauded, they may only scratch the surface of what is an extremely large problem. These trials are to be closely monitored by the U.K.'s social exclusion unit. But if we are to accept, even in some small part, the previously discussed definitions of social exclusion, by focusing on patterns of behaviour, the structures that influence such behaviour remain largely unchallenged.

Writing in the late 19C Helen H Richards acknowledged as one of the founders of home economics argued that it should advocate as an ideal home life for today unhampered by the traditions of the past. She also suggested that material possessions, are to an extent, a shallow distraction from the deeper innate needs of the individual the family and the community (Blankenship and Moerchen 1979). This poses somewhat of an anomaly for the Home Economist of today. We have to accept that society today is fundamentally different to the society in which Helen Richards lived. This is not to say that her assessments are invalid or redundant, indeed they can be as applicable now as they were then. However contemporary western society is arguably driven by material gain and a symbol of material gain is greater consumer choice and sophistication. Such choices

reflect individual priorities and are influenced by internal desires and aspirations to be 'included' in whatever their particular society defines 'included' as.

Home Economists working in the UK have started to recognise that desire for material gain can be a prime motivator for involvement in community interventions. Projects are currently running combining both education designed to build upon the knowledge of the participant in areas of expertise of the home economist such as diet and nutrition, whilst also teaching practical job search training and personal marketability skills. These interventions are proving to be extremely popular with participants and potential participants whilst also being held up as models of good practice by policy makers and educators. Not only do these interventions improve the lifestyle choices of the participant they also provide evidence of knowledge levels of the "excluded" (Meadows and Grant 2000). Furthermore research we are currently conduction suggests that involvement in such schemes has a positive influence on self-esteem, whilst also encouraging participants to set and achieve personal goals and targets. For many, these schemes have proved, and are proving to be, the first step on the ladder to improving life chances in areas of employment and education thereby working towards the ultimate goal of social inclusion.

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APPENDICES 5. Transcript examples

Interviewee: Anna. NDLP. 2 children aged 10 and 8Data: May 2001

Why did you first get involved in the New Deal?

It seemed like a good idea at the time. I wasn't doing anything if you see what I mean and I thought why not.
You say a good idea at the time, how do you feel about it now.

It's OK. They've given me some ideas about what I could do, how much I'm can make and stuff like that.

Do you think you are any nearer find work

Difficult to say really. I have a better idea about what I could do and what I can't. I don't think I'm nearer to getting work but at least I've got more of an idea.

I want to go back to what you said about it being a good idea at the time. Where there any other reasons, like getting out of the house, having more money, things like that.

Oh yes. Both of those things.

Which is the most important

More money definitely.

Why is that?

Well you need money for everything don't you? You get nothing for nothing.

How would more money make a difference to you? What would you be able to do then that you can't now

More or less everything.

Can you think of a few specific examples.

Well for one I would love to take the kids away on holiday. That's something I've always wanted to do. Nothing mad, just Benidorm or somewhere like that. Or even Alton Towers would do. We do get out in the summer but we go to the Albert Dock or get the ferry and walk along the prom to New Brighton and the kids go on the little fair there. Sometimes we make some sandwiches and go to Croxteth Park and have a little picnic. I'd love to do more things like that but it's just hard.

Are there any other things you would like to do for the kids

Yes, lots of things. They're young and they don't understand when you have to say no when they want something. I'm not saying they're greedy, they're not, but they see other

kids with things, like Play Stations, and its hard for them to understand why they can't have them. All they know is that they can't have them.

Yes it can be hard for kids to understand when their friends may have something and they don't.

That's the point. They're not concerned about how much the food or the gas is or how much you have to pay for a pair of shoes. All they know is, as you said, their mates have something and they don't.
Yes and kids can be really competitive

Not half. Last Christmas our Daniel was going on he wanted a Lacoste track suit. All his mates were getting one and it would have been the end of the world if he didn't have one. He's only ten and it cost me £100 to buy him one.

That's a lot of money

I know. What else could I do. I couldn't have him being the odd one out. He's a good kid you know.

Yes. It really hard to keep saying no.

I know. But what can you do. You have to give in to them sometimes, even if it's against your better judgement.

If we can just change the subject for a while. Many of the women I've spoken to said they would like to go to work but they think it's important to stay home with their children a the moment. What do you think of that?

Well that's up to them isn't it. I think you just think about the situation you're in a make a decision then. Are the kids going to be OK, yes. Can I sort out someone to watch over

them when I'm out, yes. It's not the same for everyone. Some people can do it, some can't.

What about how hard it will be for you. As you know it's hard work bringing kids up and you'd be doing two jobs.

That doesn't bother me. Really it doesn't. It's like I said you get nothing for nothing and if you want things you have to work for them.

What about the emotional demands that'll be place on you. How do you think you'll cope with them.

That's the easy bit.

In what way

Well if you think about it, I'm not going to get a job as a brain surgeon. The type of work I'll probably get will be some sort of manual work like I've done before so how emotional can you get with that?

I see your point, but what about the fact that you're actually going to work and leaving your home so to speak. Is the fact that you're a lone parent going to effect you in any way.

No. Look, the way I see it is that just say for instance a child is in school and they get sick, who do the school contact? The mother. Who goes to the school to pick them up? The mother. It won't make any difference that I'm a lone parent. I've go help off my Mam and Dad and my sister so to be honest it'll probably be less of an issue for me than it will be for some of the girls I know who are still married.

Would you be able to go to work without this support you get from your family

No, not yet. When the kids are older it won't effect me as much though. But then again, even if you're married, when your kids are young, unless you've got really boss jobs and can afford childminders who can go to work without some help? It's no different for me than anyone else.

Interviewee: Jackie. Control group. One child aged 5

Date: December 2000

At the moment are you thinking of starting work or training or such soon.

I want to go to work but not yet. When my daughter is a bit older. She's just started school and she's home for half three so it's not really worth it yet.

Have you considered maybe doing some sort of training why she's at school. A lot of the things available do fit around school hours.

No not really.

Is there any reason for that. Have you ever considered it.

I've thought about it but what's the point.

Well if you get some qualifications or some training behind you it may make it easier to get a job.

It might, but to be honest I don't think it will. I mean, one girl I know is doing a course learning Spanish. What's the point. She's not going to get a job with that. It's OK if your going on holiday but not much use for anything else.

I understand your point with that, but there are other things available to do. I.T., for instance.

Yes I know, but I don't think it's worth it. I know that if I could sort someone to look after Ashley, I could start work tomorrow. Do you know Macintyre and King?

There. I know a few girls who work there and they could get me in so it's not that I can't find a job. It's just having someone to look after Ashley.

The social have said that they would help towards childcare costs. Have you thought of that.

They say that, but let's be honest, they don't make it worthwhile. The money you'd get off them would be nowhere near enough what you would need. Who'd pick her up from school, who'd take her?

What about part time work

Well again, it just wouldn't be worth while. Apart from that to be really honest I don't want to go back to work yet. Look, the thing is even if I work we're not going to be any better off. Anyway, It's hard enough on her as it is without me not being around when she wants me. She only sees her dad once a week so she needs to have one of her parents there all the time. If that means me not working, so be it.

I can understand the reasons why you don't want to go to work yet. You've mentioned not much, if any more money, and the fact that Ashley needs you at home at the moment. Which is the most important?

Without a doubt, Ashley needing me. Look, it doesn't matter if could get someone to watch her or not. as long as I think I should stay home with her I will. Even when she's older and she is able to see herself home. If I think I should stay home I will. No matter what. Even if it means I won't be able to things I want to because I've no money. That doesn't matter to me. My daughter is the most important thing. Nothing else matters.

Interviewee: Marie. Mother and Toddler Group, Walton. One child aged 3.

Date: April 2000

I'm interested in the reason you decided to bring your daughter here.

I think its good for kids to be able to get used to what school would be like. I'm terrified that I'll take her to school next year and that she'll be hysterical.

So you think that this may help to prepare her for school.

Yes. One of my friends came here last year and her son loved it. You know it's good that they have the chance to play with other kids. It also as I say gets them used to what it may be like in school. I know I don't leave her here on her own, but she seems to be getting used to this place so maybe her going to school, where I won't be, will be easier for her to handle.

Do you enjoy coming here as well.

Yes I do. Me and a couple of other Mums try as much as possible to leave the kids to play on there own. We keep an eye on them but we try to leave them as much as we can. It gives us the chance to have a gab.

So you enjoy the company here.

Yes. It's good to have the chance to get out, even for a couple of hours, and see other people.

Don't you get the chance that often.

I never get the chance to do anything. I don't really bother with any of my neighbours, and most of my friends are married so they've got their own life. I still see them but not that much. I'm at home day and night. I go and seem my Mam, but I don't want to be at hers' every day. I know it's only two mornings a week but I do look forward to seeing the girls here.

Have you noticed any change in your daughter since you started bringing her here.

She seems to be a bit more confident. She plays well with the other kids and seems to get on with them. Since me and her Dad split up she's been really clingy but this seems to have brought her out of herself a bit. She seems really happy here with kids.

I know these groups are set up primarily for the kids, but do you think that they are beneficial for the Mums as well.

Yes. As I said it gives us the chance to get out. I know the others think the same as me. There are three of us that are own our own and we were talking about it the other day. It really hard to do things on your own. There's no-one to have them of a day so you have to take them with you were-ever you go. I don't like leaving her with anyone of a night so it's just as hard. Apart from that you never have the money to do anything anyway. No, it's a bit of a godsend really to have somewhere to go and spend some time with others.

Do you think that being able to get out and spend time with others has any other benefits.

I think it has. Me and her Dad split up in January and I just felt that my life was, not over, but sort of mapped out. That I would stay home, look after Faye, and that would be that. I did find it difficult to adjust but I think that part of the problem is that you just don't know what to do. I'm not talking about looking after your children, I'm talking

about what do in general. When I was with Paul that was never a problem. But when you are on your own it's totally different. It's up to you to sort out babysitters. To sort out everything. You kind of forget that there's another world outside your house.

So maybe coming here has let you realise that there are possibilities for you, as a lone parent.

Yes in a way. I know that things are not going to be different as far as the standard of living we can have but at least I know that there are things you can do. You're life doesn't have to end. I don't know if that's because I'm beginning to get used to being on my own or because I've started coming here. It's probably a mixture of both.

These possibilities, would you say that they include the possibility of work or training in the future.

I want to go to work and as soon as I can I will. That has nothing to do with this place though.

So you view this in a social way. As part of your social life.

Yes that's all. Maybe because that's what I need now. When I think I'm able to go to work I'll think about that than. At the moment I know that's not possible so there's no point even thinking about it. I know that right now I need to get out of the house a bit more so that's what I'm doing now. It's good for me and it's good for her.

Interviewee: Shelly. Community scheme participant. Knowsley Community College

2 children. Aged 8 and 5

Date: November 2000

How long have you been coming here?

For about two months

What was it that made you want to come in the first place

Just to get started with something. I was a bored at home the kids are in school all day now and I figured that I may as well start to use my time towards something.

What is it you are aiming for?

I haven't really made up my mind yet. I've been at home for ages with the kids and just wanted to do something. Every time you turn the telly on they are going on about computers so I though that I might as well have a go myself. I don't really know if it will benefit me directly but he said he was going to get the kids one at Xmas so I thought that if I knew a little I might be able to help the them if they need it.

So you don't see this course as being a start toward the type of work you want to do.

No its not that. (pause) I suppose that it may help if I want to get some types of jobs. I mean loads of those call centres are opening and I know that some of the jobs there are able to work around the kids and to do that you will have to be able to use a

computer, so it may lead on to something eventually, but at the moment I'm just still learning. We'll have to see.

General discussion about the different usage of IT

In terms of work, when you think of the future, after this has finished, do you think you will have a wider choice in the type of direction you may go as opposed to what it would be like if you have never have started.

That's hard to say. I suppose anything that makes you more qualified is a bonus. I'll be honest, I imagined that I may be able to get a job in a shop or something like that, and I'm not saying that things are any better now but I'm doing OK with it up to now, you know picking it up OK, so who knows.

But after even these couple of months have you thought of any types of work now you hadn't even considered before.

Oh, definitely. There's one girl here who is determined she is going to get a job doing wages. She only started the same time as me. She's with someone so it's a bit different but we were talking and it did make me think about what I would like to do. You know, work in an office or something like that.

And you hadn't thought about this type of work before

To be honest I hadn't though much about the type of job I would want. There's no point dreaming. You just get yourself depressed. I thought I would get a little job for a few extra pound and that would do me. The thing is you think you are the only one who's looking to do something and than you see others and think well….Sometimes though I see the likes of these here and I think that there's too many going after the same things and that sometimes make me think I might be wasting my time, aiming too high. You know, the competition. That's why I'm just going to learn the basics of computers to be

able to help the kids. If things take off from there then all the better. If they don't then I've lost nothing.

Not talking about computers specifically, how did you generally feel about the actual task of learning a new skill. Was you nervous about it or did you think you would be able to learn it OK.

I'm not really nervous about learning new things. I've always been able to pick things up fairly quickly. Two months ago I didn't even know how to turn one of these things on, I'm no expert but I've got a little bit of an idea. (pause) When I was a kid I was always trying to make things and I always enjoyed that. (pause) No, I suppose I quite enjoy new things and trying new things. Sometimes you have to have a go even to see if you're no good at them. Like on a karaoke.

You say you quite enjoy trying new things. When people talk about personal development, is this the type if new things you enjoy. Learning new skills and such.

Pause. I hadn't really thought about it like that but I suppose you could call it that. It is nice though that after ages of doing things for others, him and the kids. Not that I begrudge doing them, but its nice to do something for myself for a change. The thing is that it's good to have somewhere to go where you don't have to worry about anything else. Its not just for myself that I'm here, its hopefully to be able to help the kids, but its still nice to be able to have somewhere, or do something that's can also help me I suppose. If you think about it if it helps me it also helps them doesn't it?

So you are actually looking at what might happen if you are able to develop new skills.

In a way but as I said before, its not just about what I manage to do as far as work is concerned. I'm more concerned with being able to help the kids. If anything happens to come of it for me then so much the better. As I said we'll just have to wait and see.

You mentioned a minute ago that its nice to do something for yourself, rather than for someone else. In what way.

I don't have to be here or do this, I choose to. That's the difference. Its like the difference between a hobby and a job isn't it? He's on the building and wouldn't do nothing in the house. Half the time we'd pay fella's to do things when he was able to do them himself. His argument was that he's doing it all day and he didn't want to do it when he got home. Yet you get fella's who will have ago at anything. You know DIY. If you've **got** to do something you won't like doing it as much as if you **choose** to do something.

Just thinking about this idea of doing things you choose, do you think that if you weren't a lone parent you would either have done something like this before or done more things that you were interested in personally.

No. I don't think that being on my own has had anything to do with that. The kids didn't ask to be born and I think that if you have them you should look after them. Even if I was still married I would probably just have stayed home with them anyway. Now they're in school I have a bit more time and that would be the same if I was married or not.

So you don't think being a lone parent has hindered this idea of personal development any.

No not really. Who knows though. I've tried to bring the kids up exactly the same after me and him split up as before we split up. As I said I would have stayed home anyway. I do think that in one way it may benefit me because I'm determined that I'm going to do **my** best.

You do seem quite determined

Of course I am. I mean as I said, I know your interested in why I come here, but its not just about me coming to a place like this and learning computer stuff. You have got to do your best for your kids no matter what. I suppose that being on you own just means that you've got to that bit more. I've never really looked at it like that anyway. Have you got kids? You know then that you look after them without really thinking about it. Its just something you do. I'll always do my best for them and if I think that me staying home is the best then that is what I'll do. If I think that me doing something else is the best I'll do that. They'll always come first. As I said before I am learning about computers for their benefit. If it benefits me eventually fine. As long as it benefits them that's all I care about.

I do appreciate the way that you are looking at the needs of the kids as a reason for you coming here, but I'd like to talk a little about what you think you are getting yourself out if this if that's OK.

Yes, that's OK

What do think you are getting from attending, apart from the skills you are developing with the computer. You as a person.

It's good to get out of the house. I think its also good to be able to have something you can look forward to, something a little different. I mean, it's OK to be at home all day if that's what you want to do but I just fancied something a little different. I know some of the girls here don't really get the chance to get out much but that's never been a problem for me. The kids go up to my mothers or his mothers most week-ends so its not as if I don't get the chance to get out if I want to. He's still good with them as well. I don't go out all the time but most week-ends either I'll go to one of my friends houses or they'll come to mine. (pause) Its hard to explain but I do feel good to think that I'm putting my time to some use. You can only clean the house so much and then you end up

looking for something else to do and then you end up watching the telly all day or something like that. No, I suppose that it just gives you something to do.

I can appreciate that, that it helps fill your time, but do you think that it has made you feel more positive about yourself, or about the future.

I know what you mean, but to be honest I've always felt positive. More some days than others, but on the whole as I say……(pause) I'll tell you the main thing that I like about here is that I feel I'm involved with something. The teachers are really good, they don't push you or make you feel that you have got to go at their pace. Everyone can go as fast or slow as they want. That's one of the best things. Because you can have like a say in what you do its like they're involving you right in it. I thought that it would be like school or something but its not. There's no one telling you what to do, but they help you with what **you** want to do.

I can appreciate that you feel you have an element of control over what you do here, but are there any other benefits you think your involvement here has brought.

(pause) I suppose the main thing is that I don't think of myself as just a parent any more. It's like if someone asks me what I do I don't say that I'm at home with the kids, I say I'm doing a course with computers. Its not that I'm ashamed of not working or that, its just that, I'm quite….well….proud of what I'm doing. That I'm doing something.

Do you think this sense of pride would be the same if you weren't a lone parent.

Probably not. What I'm doing I'm doing on my own. It would be easier if I was still with someone but that makes me more determined.

Has this determination got anything to do with the way people sometimes think of lone parents. The way they are often described in some of the newspapers and television and such. Are you determined to prove them wrong.

In a way I suppose. It does get on my nerves when the only time you see girls on their own with kids on the telly they're always about 17 with two or three kids with different fathers. I was with him for 9 years and yet I know there are some people who would think of me like that. Well **I'm** not like that. Most of the girls I know who are on their own are not like that. Like the girls here. My kids aren't roaming the streets at night or ever go hungry, yet I know kids who are and they've got both their mother and father at home. I'm a good parent and I've got good kids.

Does coming here fit into that at all, you being a good parent.

Well I suppose that if you look at it that way it must do. As I said before, I'm here mainly for the benefit of the kids.

What I'm trying to get at is do you think these stereotypes of lone parents would still be held by some if they could see what you and some of the other lone parents are doing here.

You can bet that the people who talk about lone parents in that way have never been lone parents themselves. I don't think it would matter if they saw us or not, their minds are made up already aren't they?

Maybe, but surely you and the others here are proof that all lone parents are not like the stereotypes you described before and if more people knew what you and the others were doing possibly these stereotypes could be challenged.

I suppose they could. (Pause) I can't really answer for others but myself, as I said, I do take some satisfaction that in spite of everything I'm still having a go.

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