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Fragmenting Fatherhoods? Fathers, Fathering and Family Diversity.

by

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Thesis submitted to City University, London, for the Degree of Doctor of

Philosophy

September 2008

Contents

CONTENTS.....	2
LIST OF TABLES	5
LIST OF FIGURES	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	7
DECLARATION.....	8
ABSTRACT	9
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	10
1.1 FATHERS, FATHERING AND FAMILY CHANGE.....	10
1.2 FATHERS, FAMILY CHANGE AND POLICY.....	13
1.3 THE FOCUS OF THIS RESEARCH.....	18
1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.....	22
1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	23
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	25
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	25
2.2 THEORISING CHANGE.....	26
2.2.1 <i>The changing contours of ‘the family’</i>	26
2.2.2 <i>Female Employment</i>	26
2.2.3 <i>Marriage, Divorce and Cohabitation</i>	27
2.2.4 <i>Different Family Structures</i>	28
2.2.5 <i>Individualisation and Family life</i>	29
2.2.6 <i>Intimacy and the self transformed</i>	30
2.2.7 <i>Forced to Choose?</i>	32
2.2.8 <i>‘The Family’ in Crisis</i>	36
2.2.9 <i>Overstating the extent of change?</i>	39
2.2.10 <i>Family Practices</i>	40
2.2.11 <i>Negotiating ‘the right thing to do’</i>	41
2.2.12 <i>The Symbolic Dimensions of Family Life</i>	41
2.3 CONTEMPORARY FATHERHOOD, FATHERING AND FATHERS.....	43
2.3.1 <i>The ‘late modern reflexive father.’</i>	44
2.3.2 <i>Involvement</i>	45
2.3.3 <i>Cultural representations</i>	46
2.3.4 <i>Attitudes</i>	46
2.3.5 <i>Childcare and Domestic Tasks</i>	47
2.3.6 <i>Employment</i>	48
2.3.7 <i>The gap between culture and conduct</i>	50
2.3.8 <i>Intimate Fatherhood</i>	50
2.4 DIVERSE FATHERHOODS?	52
2.5 FATHERS AND DIFFERENT FAMILY CONTEXTS.....	54
2.5.1 <i>Non-resident Biological Fathers</i>	55
2.5.2 <i>Stepfathers</i>	57
2.5.3 <i>Lone Fathers</i>	62
2.5.4 <i>Primary care-giver fathers</i>	64
2.5.5 <i>Multi-Father Families</i>	67

CHAPTER 3	METHODS	68
3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	68
3.2	QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH.....	69
3.3	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.	70
3.4	INTEGRATION.	71
3.5	TYPOLOGIES.....	72
3.6	DATA INTEGRATION IN THIS STUDY.	73
3.7	SECONDARY ANALYSIS.....	74
3.7.1	<i>Rationale for choosing the BHPS.</i>	74
3.7.2	<i>The BHPS.....</i>	76
3.7.3	<i>Sample Selection.</i>	77
3.7.4	<i>Limitations.</i>	78
3.7.5	<i>Under and over-reporting.....</i>	79
3.7.6	<i>Under-representation.....</i>	79
3.7.7	<i>Families, Fathers and the Dilemmas of Definition.....</i>	80
3.7.8	<i>Defining Family and Household.....</i>	81
3.7.9	<i>Defining Fathers.....</i>	82
3.7.10	<i>Definitions used in the secondary analysis.....</i>	84
3.8	ATTITUDES.....	87
3.8.1	<i>Selection of attitude statements.....</i>	87
3.8.2	<i>Sampling for the attitude statement analysis.....</i>	88
3.9	INTERVIEWS.....	89
3.9.1	<i>In-Depth Interviews.....</i>	90
3.9.2	<i>Solo or joint interviews?</i>	90
3.9.3	<i>Obtaining a sample.....</i>	91
3.9.4	<i>Fathers – a Hidden Population?.....</i>	91
3.9.5	<i>Sample Criteria.....</i>	92
3.9.6	<i>Sampling Strategy.....</i>	92
3.9.7	<i>Characteristics of the sample.....</i>	96
3.9.8	<i>Structure of the Interviews.....</i>	101
3.9.9	<i>Analysing the interview data.....</i>	102
3.10	FATHERING – A SENSITIVE TOPIC?	102
3.11	GENDER, ETHICS AND THE ‘HOW’ OF INTERVIEWING.....	104
CHAPTER 4	PATERNAL CAREERS.....	111
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	111
4.2	BECOMING A FATHER – A UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE?	112
4.3	AGE AT FIRST FATHERHOOD	115
4.4	PATERNAL CAREERS.....	118
4.5	‘TRADITIONAL’ CAREERS.....	118
4.6	DIVERSE STARTING POINTS.....	126
4.7	ALL CHANGE?.....	127
4.8	RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN.....	130
4.9	SERIAL FATHERING.....	131
4.10	THE PATERNAL CAREER OVER TIME.....	136
4.11	CHANGING ATTITUDES?.....	140
4.12	ATTITUDES TOWARDS FATHER INVOLVEMENT, GENDER ROLES AND LONE PARENT FAMILIES.....	140
4.13	CONCLUSION.....	147

CHAPTER 5	INTIMATE FATHERHOOD?	150
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	150
5.2	EXPECTATIONS OF FATHERHOOD.	152
5.3	COMPARISONS TO ‘DAD’.	154
5.4	WHEN BREADWINNING BECOMES IMPORTANT.	157
5.5	DISCLOSING INTIMACY AS A FORM OF CONTROL.	159
5.6	FATHERHOOD AS ‘CARING FOR’.	161
5.7	EMOTIONAL UNCERTAINTY.	166
5.8	CONCLUSION.....	169
CHAPTER 6	WHO’S THE DAD?	171
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	171
6.2	WHAT DO I CALL MYSELF?.....	171
6.3	WHAT’S IN A NAME?	174
6.4	PARENTING DOES NOT A PARENT MAKE.....	174
6.5	THERE IS ONLY ONE DAD.....	177
6.6	BIOLOGICAL FATHERS’ CONCERNS.....	179
6.7	MAKING SPACE FOR TWO ‘DADS’.	182
6.8	CONCLUSION.....	187
CHAPTER 7	NEGOTIATING MULTI-FATHER RELATIONSHIPS	189
7.1	INTRODUCTION.....	189
7.2	MAPPING THE FATHERS’ ‘RELATIONSHIPS’	190
7.3	FATHER’S ALLY.	195
7.4	STEPFATHER’S ALLY?.....	198
7.5	EXTENT AND TYPE OF HOSTILITY.....	200
7.6	CONFLICT RESOLUTION?	204
7.7	THE BIOLOGICAL FATHERS’ ACCOUNTS.	207
7.8	CONCLUSION.....	209
CHAPTER 8	CONCLUSION.....	211
8.1	INTRODUCTION.....	211
8.2	LAYERS OF COMPLEXITY.....	212
8.3	INVOLVEMENT, INTIMACY AND ‘GOOD’ FATHERHOOD.	213
8.4	STEPFATHERS AND THE ‘BIOLOGICAL FAMILY’.	214
8.5	DEMOCRATIC MULTI-FATHER FAMILIES?.....	217
8.6	FUTURE DIRECTIONS – WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?.....	220
APPENDIX A		224
APPENDIX B		225
APPENDIX C		226
APPENDIX D		233
BIBLIOGRAPHY		237

List of Tables

Table 3.1	Number of Men in each Birth Cohort and Age Range at Wave N	78
Table 3.2	Recruitment Methods	95
Table 3.3	Fathers' Characteristics	98
Table 4.1	Number of Biological Mothers	133
Table 4.2	Five Most Common Paternal Careers in each Cohort	139
Table 4.3	Responses of all Fathers in Wave M to the statement 'Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother' by Family Situation	144
Table 4.4	Responses of all Fathers in Wave M to the statement 'A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family' by Family Situation	146
Table 4.5	Responses of all Fathers in Wave M to the statement 'A single parent can bring up children as well as a couple' by Family Situation	147
Table 7.1	Relationships between Fathers	192
Table A.1	Attitude Questions asked in the BHPS	224
Table D.1	Percentage of men who are non-fathers and age at first Fatherhood	233
Table D.2	Fertility intentions of 1950s, 60s and 70s birth cohort 'never dads'	233
Table D.3	Number of transitions by cohort	233
Table D.4	Length of time before those starting their paternal careers as non-resident biological fathers joined their children's household	234
Table D.5	Proportion experiencing the dissolution of their first coupled Relationship	234
Table D.6	Parenting and partnering behaviours of fathers available to form a second 'family commitment'	234
Table D.7	Fathers who have experienced co-resident biological, step, non-resident and/or lone fatherhood	235
Table D.8	Percentage of fathers in each birth cohort agreeing with 'Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother' each time the statement was included	235

List of Figures

Figure 4.1	Percentage of men who are non-fathers and age at first fatherhood by cohort	113
Figure 4.2	1920s Cohort	120
Figure 4.3	1930s Cohort	121
Figure 4.4	1940s Cohort	122
Figure 4.5	1950s Cohort	123
Figure 4.6	1960s Cohort	124
Figure 4.7	1970s Cohort	125
Figure 4.8	Number of Transitions by Cohort	128
Figure 4.9	Percentage of men in each cohort who experienced the dissolution of their first coupled family situation	131
Figure 4.10	Parenting and partnering behaviour of fathers available to form a 'second family commitment'	135
Figure 4.11	Percentage of fathers who have ever experienced co-resident biological, step, non-resident or lone fatherhood	137
Figure 4.12	Percentage of fathers in each birth cohort agreeing with 'Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother' each time the statement was included	142

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Declaration

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Abstract

The central concern of this research is to explore how male parents make sense of and understand their experiences of fathering in a diverse array of family forms. It is a mixed methods study, using both quantitative and qualitative data, to explore the extent to which ‘paternal careers’ have become more diverse and complex, and the consequences of this complexity for fathers as they negotiate fathering in their everyday lives. Drawing upon data from the British Household Panel Survey it provides a quantitative exploration of the paternal careers of British fathers born between 1920 and 1979, illustrates the changes in family forms and paternal statuses of the fathers and explores attitudes towards fathering, gender roles and different family forms. Using the testimonies of twenty-five male parents this thesis explores how parenting is experienced for contemporary fathers. It illustrates the changing dynamics of families and the impact it has on the way fathers perceive and experience fatherhood. In particular, it focuses on the experiences of stepfathers in multi-father families. This thesis illustrates how stepfathers negotiate the label ‘dad’ and the extent to which the traditional notions of ‘family’ are being re-conceptualised to include recognition that children are parented by more than one ‘father’. The nature of interpersonal relationships between male parents in multi-father families is also explored.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The central concern of this research is to explore how male parents make sense of and understand their experiences of fathering in a diverse array of family forms. It is a mixed methods study, using both quantitative and qualitative data, to explore the extent to which ‘paternal careers’ have become more diverse and complex, and the consequences of this complexity for fathers as they negotiate fathering in their everyday lives. This Chapter provides an overview of recent changes to fathering and family forms, a review of social policy developments and an overview of the key theoretical paradigms in which the study is situated.

1.1 Fathers, fathering and family change.

Articles and books on fatherhood have highlighted that fathers are a ‘hot topic’ and have been the focus of policy makers for well over a decade (Dermott, 2008). The academic and political interest (and often anxiety) about fathers, the fathering they perform and the institution of fatherhood shows no sign of abating. As a result, research focussing on fathers, fathering, and fatherhood has increased enormously over the past 20 years or so (Lewis and Lamb, 2007). We certainly know more about fathers than ever before. However, commentators acknowledge that there is still much to be explored (Dermott, 2008). In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that fathers constitute a diverse group of individuals, who parent in a diverse range of circumstances. As a result, calls for research that is attentive to this ‘diversity’¹ have increased (Marsiglio *et al.*, 2000; Lewis and Lamb, 2007).

In part, these calls are due to the increasing recognition that contemporary fathers are more likely to parent in a wide range of different family situations in comparison to previous generations of fathers. Demographic changes such as increases in divorce and cohabitation, coupled with a decline in marriage, occurring in Western countries

¹ A focus on diversity could include fathers from different ethnic groups (Phoenix and Husain, 2007), fathers in prison (Katz, 2002), fathers with disabilities (Lewis and Lamb, 2007) and gay fathers (Dunne, 1999), among others. However this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

over the past 30 years have resulted in a plurality of family forms. Consequently, the ‘traditional’ nuclear family, consisting of a married heterosexual couple, co-resident with all of their biological children and headed by a sole breadwinner father, is currently only one of a number of different family forms. (Allan and Crow, 2001; Allan *et al.*, 2001) Contemporary fathers are increasingly likely to ‘parent’ in more than one family during their life course. Fathers may be married, cohabiting or single. They may be non-resident or co-resident fathers, biological or stepfathers. Fathers are increasingly likely to be parenting children who live in more than one household. Increased diversity is not only linked to demographic changes. More women entering the workforce and albeit limited advances in gender equality have provided increased opportunities for men to adopt a primary caregiver role and become ‘stay at home’ fathers (Doucet, 2006). In short, individual ‘paternal careers’ (Juby and Le Bourdais, 1998) are becoming more complex.

Alongside the recognition that contemporary fathers occupy diverse positions within different family structures, is an acknowledgement of other changes. There is something of a consensus that both fatherhood, (the social meanings, discourses, rights and responsibilities that are attached to fathers), as well as what fathers do, that is, their ‘fathering’ (Morgan, 2004) are also changing. Collier and Sheldon (2006) note how the shift to a focus on ‘involved’ fathering has occurred partly as a consequence of changes in family composition (as outlined above); ‘at the very time when fatherhood becomes less secure, then cultural, economic and legal imperatives are reframing the debate about what it means for men to become “good fathers” and more “involved” parents’ (2006:11-12).

Traditionally, fatherhood as a legal status was conferred through the institution of marriage. A child’s father was the man married to the child’s mother. Therefore, it was through marriage that paternity was established and fathers were afforded legal and social rights in relation to their children (Smart and Neale, 1999b). Fathering, consisted primarily of financial provision; the father’s role of breadwinner was institutionalised in the British welfare state (Williams, 1998). ‘Good’ fathers provided for their children financially. There is a popular conception that previous fathers were not significantly involved in the practical daily care of their children, and the image of the emotionally distant father is one which occurs frequently in

men's accounts of their own fathers (Dermott, 2008; Williams, 2008). Whilst these conceptions of 'traditional' fatherhood are disputed (see Coltrane, 2004) in the contemporary context, fathering, it is claimed, is no longer about breadwinning, emotional distance, discipline and moral authority (Burgess, 1997). Rather the 'new fatherhood' is about being more actively 'involved' both emotionally (Dermott, 2008), and in the practical care of children. In short, 'good fathers' are 'involved' fathers.

The timing, nature and extent of changes in fatherhood and cultural conceptions of what it means to be a 'good' father are debated, particularly the extent to which actual fathering practices match changes in cultural prescriptions (see Chapter Two and Dermott, 2008 for an in-depth discussion). The extent to which current social policies advocate and support 'involved' fatherhood is also a key area of discussion (Williams, 1998; Featherstone, 2003; Dermott, 2008). However, the discourse of 'involved' fathering is currently prominent in wider social debates, forming the basis of activism, for example by various father's rights groups. Collier and Sheldon (2006) highlight how the notion of 'involved' fathering is used by some father's rights groups in order to substantiate the claim that they are 'good' dads within disputes over divorce and child contact. Father 'involvement' is also a key concern of other organisations. Fathers Direct (renamed the Fatherhood Institute in 2008, referred to from here-on as such) was established in 1999, also campaign for and promote 'involved' fathering, although their focus is more wide ranging than that of groups such as Father4Justice. The Fatherhood Institute seeks to influence policy and practice, campaigning for 'father inclusive' services, flexible working practices and the preparation of boys for 'involved' fatherhood through education (Fatherhood Institute, 2008a and 2008b).

Whilst the Fatherhood Institute has sought to distance itself from a 'father's rights' agenda, a commonality with father's rights groups, is the linkage of father 'involvement' to child welfare and developmental outcomes. The construction of involved fathering as 'essential' to positive child outcomes, particularly in current social policy, is an important feature of the social landscape within which contemporary fathers parent (Featherstone, 2006), and as such, is important for understanding the focus of this research. What follows is a discussion of policy

developments before going on to discuss the specific aims and objectives of the thesis.

1.2 Fathers, Family Change and Policy.

The following discussion is not an exhaustive account of social policy and socio-legal developments relating to fathers, fathering and families (for more in-depth discussions see Fox-Harding, 1999, 2000; Williams, 1998, Featherstone, 2004a, 2006; Dermott, 2008; Collier and Sheldon, forthcoming). Rather the focus here is to briefly outline the broad contours of policy developments, highlighting those that have particular relevance for the concerns of this study.

The current focus on father involvement is a continuation of a shift in the way fatherhood was understood from the end of the 1980s in Britain. Fox-Harding (1999, 2000) notes that parental responsibility, rather than parental rights, became a central concern of the Conservative government. This concern developed in the context of neo-liberalism and the anxiety about the numbers of welfare dependent lone parent families, levels of state support and the ‘problem’ of ‘feckless’, and ‘irresponsible’ non-resident fathers, who did not maintain any sense of financial responsibility for their children (Westwood, 1996; Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999). Concern about the ‘costs’ of ‘family breakdown’ for children were also prominent. A growing body of research evidence demonstrated the detrimental effects of divorce and living in lone parent and stepfamilies on children’s emotional and social development (see for example, Furstenberg *et al.*, 1983). Research also found that a large proportion of non-resident fathers ceased to have any contact with their children within two years of their divorce (MacLean and Wadsworth, 1987, cited in Land, 1995). According to Smart and Neale this resulted in a ‘paradigmatic shift in psychological thinking’ (1999b: 36). Continued contact with fathers came to be viewed as essential for child welfare, and ‘fatherlessness’ or ‘absent fathers’ became a problem.

The implementation of the Children Act 1989, the Child Support Act 1991 and the Child Support Agency (CSA) in 1993, were largely based on the assumption that paternal responsibility and commitment towards children were declining, and were

attempts to reverse the 'clean break' policy that had existed prior to their implementation (Fox-Harding, 1999, 2000). The Children Act 1989 in conceptualising responsibility as 'binding (it cannot simply be relinquished)', and 'as determined by biology (with some assistance from the law in the case of unmarried fathers)' (Fox-Harding, 2000: 1) signalled the expectation that fathering would continue after the end of marriage. Whilst continued contact between father and child post divorce was regarded as important for child welfare, Fox-Harding (1999, 2000) points out that the Conservative government focussed quite specifically on the financial responsibilities of fathers, as a means to reduce the number of families dependent on the state. Therefore, non-resident biological fathers were singled out as a 'problem', and constructed as individuals who needed to be 're-attached' to families, in order to fulfil their responsibilities as financial providers.

The extent to which New Labour policy constructs fathers' responsibilities in relation to care-giving as opposed to financial provision is debated (see Featherstone, 2004a, 2006; Featherstone and Peckover, 2007; Dermott, 2008). Featherstone, for example, notes that policy towards fathers and fathering is characterised by a 'rather confused and contradictory approach.' (2006: 301). There have been some limited measures to facilitate the changes in employment practices that would allow fathers more time to participate to a greater extent in childcare, such as the introduction of Paternal Leave in 2003 (Dermott, 2008), but, a focus on fathers' financial responsibilities, particularly in the post-separation context continues as New Labour retained the troubled CSA².

Whilst the extent to which New Labour prioritise 'care' over 'cash' is debated, they are credited with taking a different approach to parental responsibility in comparison to the Conservatives. The Conservatives were primarily concerned with halting the alleged decline of parental responsibility. In contrast, New Labour has been concerned with supporting parents in order to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities (Fox-Harding, 2000; Lewis, 2002).

² After a rather troubled past, and extensive criticism (see Collier, 1994; Westwood, 1996; Lewis, 2002) the CSA was replaced by a new agency, the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (C-MEC) during 2008.

The publication of *Supporting Families: A Consultation Document* in 1998 signalled the government's intention to provide support for fathers to become more involved in their children's upbringing (Home Office, 1998). The linkage of involved fathering as important because of the impact on child outcomes is explicitly stated in a range of policy documents, such as *Every Parent Matters*, 'Fathers matter to children's development. Father-child relationships – be they positive, negative or lacking – have profound and ranging impacts on children that last a lifetime' (DfES, 2007: 6). There has been a concerted effort to ensure that a wide range of services engage with and develop 'father inclusive' practices (Featherstone, 2004a). More recently, the focus on fathers' having equal consideration in and access to services has been strengthened through the implementation of the Gender Equality Duty (Fatherhood Institute, 2007). Thus where father involvement is promoted, it is overwhelmingly in the context of ensuring positive child outcomes.

A key question however, in the current context of family diversity, is which fathers are expected to be more involved. The government has sent a clear message that non-resident biological fathers are expected to remain involved with their children. In *Parental Separation: Children's Needs and Parent's Responsibilities* (Falconer *et al.*, 2004: 2), the principle 'that both parents are equal and both should continue to have a meaningful relationship with their children after adult separation, so long as it is safe', is described as a core belief. The government has implemented a range of measures in relation to the highly political and contested issue of child contact (Collier, 1994, 2005). Some are facilitative, such as granting unmarried biological fathers automatic legal parental responsibility if they are named on the birth certificate (HMSO, 2002). Others, such as the Children and Adoption Act 2006, are coercive. The Act contains provisions to enforce contact orders. Parents who breach contact orders can be order to attend parenting classes, pay fines or perform unpaid community work (HMSO, 2006).

The responsibilities and expectations of stepfathers remain particularly ambiguous within current policy formulations. Ribbens McCarthy *et al.* characterise the position of stepfathers within policy debates as 'largely one of invisibility.' (2003: 9). This ambiguity is demonstrated in the publication *Every Parent Matters* (DfES, 2007). Whilst the document acknowledges changes in family forms, the sections focussing

on the importance of fathers do not make it clear if the term ‘father’ means *all* men who are involved in parenting the children, or if ‘father’ refers specifically to the child’s biological father. The use of the term ‘male carers’, once within the document (on page 15), gives the impression that ‘father’ refers to the biological father, although this is left unclear.

Whilst Featherstone (2004a) argues that New Labour have not explicitly advocated either one type of family or father as ‘best’ in their policies, there are indications that it is primarily biological fathers who are regarded as essential for positive child outcomes, and are the intended targets for measures aiming to promote paternal responsibilities. The recent Green Paper *Joint birth registration: promoting parental responsibility* (DCSF and DWP, 2007) and demonstrates this. The document states the government’s intention ‘to develop a culture in which the welfare of children is paramount and people are clear that fatherhood, as well as motherhood, always comes with both rights and responsibilities’ (DCSF and DWP, 2007: 3).

It goes on to state:

‘We believe that making joint registration the default position and doing more to ensure parents are aware and understand this, will publicly embed an expectation that the usual course of events is for both parents to acknowledge and be involved in the upbringing of their children. Most fathers are fully engaged in bringing up their children. For those who aren’t, we want them to realise that they do have a stake in their children’s lives and for fewer fathers to have no clear accountability or commitment to their children’ (DCSF and DWP, 2007: 3).

The summary of responses in the White Paper *Joint birth registration: recording responsibility* (DCSF and DWP, 2008) provide further indications that as far as some father’s organisations are concerned, fatherhood is grounded solely in biology. The Fatherhood Institute commented ‘registering the paternity of the child should be dependent only on biology...’ (DCSF and DWP, 2008: 21), and Families Need Fathers stated ‘We think it is important...for the birth certificate to contain the names of both parents. This would apply even if one of the parents were a rapist, or abusive. They are still part of the child’s story, even if a distressing and sometimes horrific one.’ (DCSF and DWP, 2008: 24).

Thus in the current policy context, biology has become the primary basis for allocation of rights and responsibilities to fathers. Biological fathers are also credited with enhancing the welfare or ‘outcomes’ of their children. It is unclear if stepfathers are regarded as ‘fathers’ or ‘parents’ and there are no clear messages that stepfathers are expected to become more ‘involved’.

There also seems to be little recognition that biological fathers and stepfathers may be constructing co-parental relationships. Increases in separation and re-partnering, in conjunction with a strong expectation that non-resident biological fathers will remain in ‘contact’ post-separation has resulted in an increase of ‘multi-father’ families (Marsiglio and Hinojosa, 2007). Policy has overwhelmingly focussed on the responsibilities of the biological parents in relation to the negotiation of post-separation relationships (Collier and Sheldon, 2006). This and the use of the word ‘both’ when discussing parents (see the quotes from *Parental Separation: Children's Needs and Parent's Responsibilities* (Falconer *et al.*, 2004) and *Joint birth registration: promoting parental responsibility* (DCSF and DWP, 2007) above) clearly indicates that current considerations of the negotiation of post-separation parenting do not extend beyond the confines of the original birth couple relationship.

Thus in the current social context, Neale argues that

‘the concept of the re-constituted family after divorce has gradually been eroded in favour of a new ideological construct, that of the enduring, biological family. This family derives its status not from the legitimacy of marriage, but from the preservation of biological ties between parents and their children, whether these are based on marriage, cohabitation or through co-parenting arrangements after divorce.’ (2000: 6).

As a result, the extent to which, stepfathers occupy a meaningful space as ‘parents’ within the ‘biological’ family, is currently unclear. Neale also highlights that

‘These models privilege the static, structural features of family: institutional status (legal marriage or legal/biological parenthood) and organisational structure (bounded nuclear households or cross households). They also privilege the positional status of family members, variously articulated through a discourse of rights...or the discourse of welfare which dictates that the child's needs must come first.’ (2000: 8-9)

Privileging structural institutional features of parenthood and family may be out of touch with the lived reality of 'doing' family and 'doing' fathering. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two, recent research on stepfamilies found that working class stepfathers in particular, grounded notions of fatherhood in the social relationship. Biology was irrelevant for their conceptions of being a father (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003).

The issues discussed above are important considerations addressed by this thesis. As discussed further below, a key concern of this research is to explore biological and stepfathers experiences of parenting in multi-father families.

1.3 The focus of this research.

Whilst it is generally accepted that contemporary British fatherhood is characterised by increasing complexity, to date, research focussing on fathers, fatherhood and fathering has tended to focus pre-dominantly on biological fathers residing in 'intact' nuclear families (hence the calls to focus on diversity) (Lewis and Lamb, 2007). Diversity has not been totally ignored in the British context. Non-resident biological fathers have found themselves subject to considerable public and political scrutiny (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999). As a result, research exploring non-resident biological fatherhood has grown enormously over the past 15 years or so (see for example, Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999; Wilson, 2006). There have also been studies of lone fatherhood (Hipgrave, 1982; O'Brien, 1982, 1987; Barker, 1994; Gingerbread, 2001) and stepfatherhood (within a broader focus on stepfamilies, Burgoyne and Clark, 1982; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). Whilst lone fathers are 'primary care-giving' fathers, research exploring the experiences of 'coupled' primary care-giving fathers comes pre-dominantly from Canada (Doucet, 2006) and Australia (Russell, 1987). Therefore in the current context, the experiences of stepfathers, lone fathers and primary care-giving fathers remain less well explored (Burghes *et al.*, 1997; Russell, 2001; Morgan, 2002; Lewis and Lamb, 2007).

Additionally, there are few explorations of British fatherhood using secondary analyses of existing large scale datasets, and of those that have been conducted (for

example, Clarke, 1997) the emphasis is overwhelmingly on biological fathers (with the exception of Ferri and Smith, 1998 who did focus on step-parenting).

This thesis aims to address these existing gaps in current research in two key ways. Firstly, by providing a descriptive account of the 'paternal careers' (Juby and Le Bourdais, 1998) of six cohorts of British fathers born between 1920 and 1979, mapping the transitions and movements of 2,600 men into and out of different family forms (see Chapter Four). Although there are limitations (see Chapter Three) the available data did permit identification of individuals who were/or had been stepfathers, non-resident biological fathers and lone fathers. After re-constructing the paternal careers of 2,600 fathers, it became clear that stepfatherhood is an increasingly common experience for British contemporary fathers, illustrating the importance of exploring the experience of stepfatherhood further (see Chapters Four, Six and Seven).

Secondly, in seeking male parents for the qualitative in-depth interviews, the intention was to include fathers parenting in as diverse range of family situations as possible. The majority of the twenty-five male parents interviewed either had or were currently parenting in family forms other than the 'traditional intact nuclear' family. Whilst those who either were or had been lone fathers were particularly difficult to contact (see Chapter Three), the resulting sample comprised of stepfathers, primary care-giving fathers, non-resident biological fathers and an adoptive father. Half of the sample had experienced stepfatherhood, and this enabled a focus on the experiences and perceptions of this under-researched group in particular.

In addition to 'filling' gaps in the existing knowledge base, this research seeks to engage with current debates within sociology that focus on the consequences of social processes of individualisation for the ways in which individuals 'do' family.

A growing body of sociological research has sought to explore the complexities of family relationships. The influential work of Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2001), who examine the impact of processes of individualisation on contemporary relationships and family configurations has highlighted the fluid, dynamic and often contingent nature of family ties. For Giddens (1992) processes of

de-traditionalisation are resulting in increased freedom from gendered roles, opening up new opportunities for fathers to expand their fathering beyond breadwinning and become more involved in childcare. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2001) focus on the negotiated character of contemporary family membership to a greater extent than Giddens (1992), a theme taken up in greater detail by Morgan (1996), Finch and Mason (1993) and Finch (2007, 2008). Thus these accounts go beyond a focus on changing family forms and highlight that ways in which people 'do' family and parenting is also subject to change.

Contemporary theorising conceptualises 'family' as something that is *done*, as a set of practices (Morgan, 1996), that can be carried out and performed in a multitude of ways in diverse family structures (see Chapter Two). This understanding of 'family' seeks to not only capture the increasingly complex nature of contemporary family life, but also to disrupt hitherto dominant understandings and subsequent valorisation of 'the nuclear family'. Whilst a growing body of research has utilised this theoretical framework to explore contemporary family processes (see for example, Finch and Mason, 1993; Smart and Neale, 1999b, Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003), empirical studies focussing specifically on fathers, fathering and fatherhood are thinner on the ground. Two notable exceptions are Williams (2002, 2008) and Dermott (2003a, 2003b, 2008), both of which are discussed further in Chapter Two.

The theoretical framework outlined above forms the basis of this research. A thorough empirical investigation of all aspects of the individualisation thesis is beyond the scope of this research (for a more thorough discussion and critique, see Chapter Two). Nevertheless, this thesis seeks to engage with debates about individualisation and the ways in which contemporary fathering is 'done' in several key ways. Firstly as mentioned above, this research analyses existing quantitative data, in order to explore the paternal careers of British fathers. The discussion of this analysis (see Chapter Four) engages with critiques that proponents of individualisation have over-stated the extent of change, both in relation to changing family forms and changing attitudes (Silva and Smart, 1999). Chapter Four explores this debate in more detail.

Secondly, this research engages with debates about the extent and consequences of individualisation, through an exploration of how biological and stepfathers negotiate parenting in ‘multi-father’ families (Marsiglio and Hinojosa, 2007). As noted above, there are an increasing number of ‘multi-father’ families in Britain (see Chapter Four) but this has not been explored in the British context. Therefore this thesis goes beyond existing explorations of how fathers negotiate their parenting with mothers (Backett, 1987; Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004; O’Brien, 2005) focussing on how male parents negotiate parenting with each other. The growth of multi-father families raises interesting questions about who is considered a father, the significance of biology in making claims to ‘being a father’ and the extent to which male parents accept that there can be two or more ‘fathers’. An exploration of fathering in multi-father families can tell us much about the extent to which processes of individualisation are significantly altering the way in which fathering and family is ‘done’, as well as establishing the extent to which current social policies are in line with the lived realities of contemporary fathers.

Lastly, this research focuses on how fathers parenting in diverse family situations understand involvement. Dermott (2003a, 2003b, 2008) explored the meaning of involvement in some detail, and found that the majority of her interviewees interpreted involvement to mean the development of a close, intimate father-child relationship, rather than extensive participation in routine caring activities. As a result, Dermott (2003a, 2003b, 2008) argues that a key element of being a ‘good’ father is the quality of the emotional relationship between father and child. Dermott’s (2003b) work is based on interviews with a small specific ‘group’ of fathers, who are predominantly white, middle class and fathering in dual earner biologically intact families. This thesis assesses Dermott’s (2003a, 2003b, 2008) claims using a more diverse sample of fathers. It is possible that primary care-giver fathers for example, understand ‘good’ fathering in a different way, given that they are far more likely than fathers in full time employment to be undertaking the majority of the everyday care for their children.

1.4 Aims and objectives.

This thesis is a mixed methods study that explores quantitatively, the changing patterns of diversity in fathering through the secondary analysis of the British Household Panel Survey, and the consequences and experiences of this diversity through in-depth interviews with twenty-five male parents.

A secondary analysis of the British Household Panel Survey has been conducted in order to address three objectives:

- To establish the type and number of family forms and parental roles such as step, lone and non-resident fatherhood that contemporary British men experience throughout their life course. In short the ‘paternal careers’ (Juby and Le Bourdais, 1998) of male parents.
- To examine how the paternal careers of contemporary male parents differ from those of previous generations.
- To examine the extent to which attitudes towards fathering, gender roles and different family structures vary according to paternal status.

The quantitative analysis is extended and complemented with qualitative data from in-depth interviews conducted with twenty-five male parents, exploring their experiences of parenting in different family situations. The in-depth interview data provides a lens through which to explore the following three issues:

- The extent to which male parents in different family forms view good fatherhood as ‘Intimate fatherhood’.
- Stepfathers’ understandings of the label ‘father.’
- The nature of contact and interactions between stepfathers and biological fathers parenting in multi-father families.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis.

Chapter Two provides an in-depth review of key empirical and theoretical literature. The first section provides a brief overview of some of the main demographic trends that have resulted in the growth of different family forms. I then discuss theoretical approaches to family change, the individualisation thesis (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2001), and ‘doing’ family (Morgan, 1996). The second section provides a discussion of the literature about fathers, fatherhood and fathering. I discuss the work of Dermott (2003a, 2003b, 2008) who argues that forging an intimate father-child relationship is a central component of contemporary fatherhood. The final section starts by discussing the extent of diversity within fatherhood. I review existing statistical research, highlighting that although claims are made that more men are parenting in diverse family forms in comparison to previous generations, there are few statistical analyses that have explored this in detail. I finish this section by reviewing the existing literature about non-resident fathers, stepfathers, lone fathers, primary care giving fathers and multi-father families.

Chapter Three provides a discussion of the methodological issues related to this research. The first section gives a brief overview of the philosophical underpinnings and the practicalities of quantitative and qualitative research methodology, before going on to discuss how the quantitative and qualitative findings have been integrated in this study. The second section discusses the quantitative method used in this study, a secondary analysis of the BHPS. Details about the technical and practical issues involved in conducting the statistical analysis are also provided. The final section discusses the qualitative in-depth interviews, the sampling strategies used, the characteristics of the interviewees and the structure of the interview itself. An exploration of interview dynamics and research relationships concludes the Chapter.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the secondary analysis of the paternal careers of 2,600 male BHPS sample members, in order to more fully explore the extent to which paternal careers have become more individualised. The analysis is based on that of Juby and Le Bourdais (1998), and explores the different family situations (such as stepfamilies or single parenthood) and paternal statuses (such as step, non-

resident etc) that fathers from six birth cohorts move into and out of over time. From this it is possible to determine the extent to which the paternal careers of contemporary fathers are becoming more heterogeneous and diverse in comparison to fathers in earlier cohorts. I conclude this Chapter by examining the fathers' responses to a number of attitude statements, in order to explore attitudes towards different family forms and 'involved fatherhood'.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present and discuss the findings from in-depth parenting history interviews with twenty-five fathers. Chapter Five explores the extent to which the fathers in this study regarded the development of an emotionally close father-child relationship as a core aspect of fatherhood. I use the interview data to assess Dermott's (2003b, 2008) argument about the salience of intimacy to contemporary fatherhood and fathering. Chapter Six is one of two chapters exploring how fathers in multi-father families negotiate fatherhood and fathering. The focus in this chapter is how stepfathers negotiate the label 'dad' and the extent to which the traditional notions of 'family' are being re-conceptualised to include recognition that children are parented by more than one 'father'. In Chapter Seven I discuss another aspect of parenting in multi-father families; how the male parents interact with each other and the extent to which they develop co-parental relationships with each other. I describe the amount and type of contact the male parents have with each other, before going onto explore the nature of their relationships.

Finally, Chapter Eight reviews the main findings of this study, draws out key theoretical implications and suggests directions for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction.

This Chapter is in three sections. The first section starts with a brief overview of some of the main demographic trends that have resulted in the growth of different family forms in Britain. I then discuss two contrasting approaches to family change and diversity. The individualisation theorists Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2001) take a relatively optimistic approach, and argue that family diversity is part of the process of individualisation. Family change is largely regarded as a positive development, which opens up new opportunities for forging more egalitarian and democratic relationships. Next I discuss those who take a more pessimistic approach, who interpret family change and diversity as evidence of a ‘crisis’ (Murray, 1990, 1994; Dennis and Erdos, 1992; Dench, 1994). After critiquing both of these broad positions I go on to explore recent theoretical contributions to the study of family change, which focus on the micro processes of ‘doing’ family (Morgan, 1996).

The second section discusses and reviews the literature about fathers, fatherhood and fathering. Here I start by critically discussing one of the few studies that has directly addressed the extent to which contemporary fatherhood is individualised (Williams, 2008). I then go on to explore how far empirical studies support the assertion that different aspects of fatherhood and fathering have become de-traditionalised and de-gendered. The evidence suggests that the practice of fathering remains gendered and does not match changes in fathers’ attitudes. Dermott (2003a, 2003b, 2008) has attempted to provide an answer as to why this ‘gap’ exists, arguing that notions of involved fatherhood are based on the emotional relationship between father and child, and not practical childcare.

The third and last section starts by discussing the extent of diversity within fatherhood. I review existing statistical research, highlighting that although claims are made that more men are parenting in diverse family forms in comparison to previous generations, there are few statistical analyses that have explored this in

detail. I finish this section by reviewing the existing literature about non-resident fathers, stepfathers, lone fathers and primary care giving fathers.

2.2 Theorising Change.

2.2.1 The changing contours of ‘the family’.

The contours of family life have undergone some significant changes since the 1940s and 50s. Globalisation and economic restructuring have resulted in the expansion of the service sector bringing increased employment opportunities for women (Dermott, 2008). Correspondingly, the decline of the manufacturing industry and increased male unemployment has meant that for many women paid employment has become a necessity (Dermott, 2008). Significant demographic changes have also occurred, with a decrease in the marriage rate alongside increases in the rates of cohabitation, births outside of marriage and divorce and separation (Allan and Crow, 2001). This section provides a brief overview of these demographic trends.

2.2.2 Female Employment.

The expansion of both educational opportunities and the service sector have resulted in a steady increase in female participation in the labour force. In 1951 women aged between 20 and 64 made up 30.8% of the labour force rising to 36.5% in 1971 (Elliott, 1991). In May 2008, women comprised 46% of all individuals in employment (Office for National Statistics, 2008a). The employment rates of women with dependent children has risen particularly sharply, with 66% in some form of paid employment in 2004 compared to 47% in 1973 (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005). In 1994/5 57% of couples with dependent children were both in employment whereas this figure had increased to 66% in 2005/6 (Simon and Whiting, 2007). Consequently, there has been an increase in the proportion of dual earner families and in 2001 only 17% of coupled families had a sole earner (Williams, 2004). Despite the increase in female employment levels a gendered division of earning and caring remains (Dermott, 2008) and is an issue I will return

to in more detail in Section 2.3. However, in general the key point here is that very few contemporary families conform to the ideal of the sole male breadwinner in practice.

2.2.3 Marriage, Divorce and Cohabitation.

Marriage rates have always been subject to some degree of fluctuation. In the past a key influence was the unequal proportions of males and females within the population. Mortality rates, war and emigration resulted in a higher proportion of women than men within the adult population. Marriage rates therefore were higher for men than for women for much of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, whilst the reverse is true from the 1950s onwards (Elliott, 1991). Marriage rates reached a peak in 1972 (Office for National Statistics, 2008b) with 86 out of every 1000 males, and 100 out of every 1000 females marrying (Elliott, 1991). However, the proportion of marriages declined steeply after 1972 (Elliott, 1991) dropping to 24 men and 21 women per thousand in 2005, the lowest rate since 1862 (Office for National Statistics, 2007).

The age at which individuals marry has also fluctuated over time. From the end of the 1940s to 1970, the number of men in marrying in their early twenties increased by 40%. However, the age at marriage has been steadily increasing since then and in 2005 the mean age at marriage was 36.2 years old for men and 33.6 years for women (Office for National Statistics, 2007) demonstrating a trend for individuals to postpone marriage until later ages.

Whilst marriage is in decline, divorce and cohabitation have increased. During the post war period the divorce rate was 3.7%, but this rose sharply after the Family Law Reform Act 1969, which extended the grounds upon which couples could obtain a divorce (Elliott, 1991). By the 1980s approximately a third of all marriages ended in divorce (Haskey 1989, cited in Elliott, 1991), and this figure had risen to 45% in 2005 (Wilson and Smallwood, 2008). Whilst this is obviously an enormous increase, it is worth noting that in 1896 30% of married couples experienced the end of their marriage. However, this was due to bereavement rather than divorce (Elliott, 1991).

Despite the increased propensity for marriages to end in divorce the average length of marriages has changed little since figures were first collected in 1963, decreasing only marginally from just under 12 years to 11 years in 2000 (Office for National Statistics, 2003).

Cohabitation has become an increasingly popular option (Office for National Statistics, 2008b) and is partially responsible for the postponement of marriage. However it is difficult to establish precisely how prevalent cohabitation was in the past because data was only collected from 1979 onwards (Elliott, 1991). Ferri and Smith (2003) found that whilst a third of those born in 1958 had cohabited prior to marriage over 70% of those born in 1970 had done so. The length of cohabiting unions has also increased rising from 6.5 years in 2000 to 6.9 years in 2006, with the average length of cohabitation for couples with children higher at 8.5 years (Barlow *et al.*, 2008). The rise in cohabitation has also resulted in an increase in the number of children born outside of marriage. Historically the proportion of children born outside of marriage has remained low, with the exception of the period during the Second World War when ‘illegitimacy’ rates peaked at 10% (Elliott, 1991). However, rates began to increase from the 1960s onwards. In 1968 8.4% of children were born outside of marriage (Elliott, 1991) whereas in 2006 this figure had quadrupled rising to 43.7% (Office for National Statistics, 2008b).

2.2.4 Different Family Structures.

The demographic changes outlined above have resulted in greater diversity of family forms in Britain (Allan and Crow, 2001). Between 1972 and 2007 the proportion of children living in a two parent household declined from 92% to 76%. Therefore, the proportion of children living in a lone parent household has trebled over the same period. Since children are more likely to remain resident with their mother upon separation and divorce, the vast majority of lone parents are female. Male lone parents make up only 2% of all family types, a proportion which has remained unchanged between 1972 and 2007 (Office for National Statistics, 2008b).

However, whilst the majority of children continue to live in a two parent household, both parents are not necessarily their birth parents since the number of stepfamilies has gradually been increasing. In 2001 approximately 10% of all two parent families were stepfamilies. Although stepfamilies could not be identified from the 1991 census, it is estimated that the number of stepfamilies had increased by 3% between 1991 and 2001 (Office for National Statistics, 2004).

As a result of the above contemporary trends in earning, parenting and partnering behaviour, very few families today conform to the 'traditional family' consisting of a married couple, co-resident with all of their biological children, with a sole male breadwinner and female carer (Williams, 2004). Nevertheless, whilst some change has undoubtedly occurred, why these changes have come about, what they mean and the extent to which continuities can be observed are contested (Allan and Crow, 2001). Two broad perspectives dominate the literature and public discussion. The first (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2001) contends that changes are broadly positive and part of the process of individualisation. The second takes a more pessimistic view and contends that 'the family' is in crisis with severe consequences for wider society (Murray, 1990, 1994; Dennis and Erdos, 1992; Dench, 1994). The following section outlines these two broad perspectives starting with the individualisation theorists (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2001).

2.2.5 Individualisation and Family life.

For theorists such as Beck and Beck Gernsheim (1995; 2001) and Giddens (1992) the increased diversity of family forms, is a consequence of a process of individualisation, which is transforming the nature of intimate relationships and family life.

2.2.6 Intimacy and the self transformed.

Giddens (1992) charts changes in conjugal and interpersonal relationships, arguing that in 'late modernity' there is a shift towards what he calls the 'pure relationship'. He defines the pure relationship as:

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

He argues that a discourse of romantic love became dominant during the 19th century when individuals began to marry for love rather than out of economic necessity. The notion of romantic love was based around finding the one *person* who would be the source of satisfaction, commitment and stability. However, with the ascendancy of the pure relationship, confluent love has replaced what Giddens' terms 'the romantic love complex'. Confluent love is an 'active, contingent love, and therefore jars with the "for-ever", "one-and-only" qualities of the romantic love complex' (Giddens, 1992: 61). Thus rather than searching for the one person, individuals are now engaged in the pursuit of the one *relationship* that will provide satisfaction.

Further, the pure relationship is based on a historically new form of intimacy, one which Giddens' conceptualises as 'a matter of emotional communication, with others and with the self, in a context of interpersonal equality' (1992: 130). This form of intimacy is based on mutual self disclosure, trust, self awareness and respect for the autonomy of the partner. Giddens' (1992) argues that this transformation of intimacy has far reaching consequences for women in particular. Women are leading the changes and forging relationships based on equality in the process. Women's increased freedom to leave oppressive and/or abusive relationships 'limit the capability of the husband to impose his dominion and thereby contribute to the translation of coercive power into egalitarian communication.' (Giddens, 1992:190-1). Therefore, intimate relations, parent-child relations and other forms of close relationships such as friendship and kinship are becoming 'democratised', increasingly negotiated and egalitarian.

Thus it is argued that the pure relationship, based on negotiation and communication rather than unthinking adherence to the traditional normative expectations that structured marital relations in the past, has the potential to equalise power relations between men and women. It is inherently unstable however since it is 'constantly subject to re-evaluation' (Smart and Neale, 1999b: 8), and if the relationship is found to be unsatisfactory, individuals simply move on and find another relationship which fulfils their needs. In Giddens' (1992) estimation therefore, intimate life is increasingly characterised by 'serial monogamy'.

Giddens' theorising of intimacy (1992) developed out of his work about the self in late modernity (1991). He argues that in conditions of late modernity which is characterised by risk, uncertainty and de-traditionalisation, 'the self becomes a reflexive project.' (1991: 32). Without established norms to passively follow, individuals are faced with an array of 'lifestyle choices'. As a result individuals are continually faced with

'What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity - and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour.' (1991: 70).

Giddens eschews a notion of self identity which is fixed and stable, arguing that

'A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.' (1991: 54, italics in the original).

Intimate relationships are inextricably bound up with the 'project of the self' as individuals have to incorporate changing relationships within their personal biographies. He provides an example of stepfamilies and stepparents;

‘A child in a stepfamily may have two mothers and fathers...together with complex kin connections resulting from the multiple marriages of parents. Even the terminology is difficult: should a stepmother be called ‘mother’ by the child, or called by her name?’ (Giddens, 1991:13).

Thus Giddens (1991, 1992) places transformations of intimacy and self identity at the heart of contemporary social change. However, whilst Giddens has been applauded for placing women and women’s agency centre stage within his analysis (Smart and Neale, 1999b) his work fails to fully engage with the consequences of social change for men. Giddens claims that he feels ‘justified in offering an interpretation of the transmutation of romantic love which largely excludes men. Men are the laggards in the transitions that are now occurring’ (1992: 59). Men are laggards because they cannot ‘do’ intimacy; ‘Many men are not capable of loving others as equals, in circumstances of intimacy, but they are well able to offer love and care to those inferior in power (women, children)’ (1992: 131). Additionally, men cannot do ‘equality’; ‘the sexual division of labour remains substantially intact; at home and at work, in most contexts of modern societies, men are largely unwilling to release their grip upon the reins of power.’ (1992: 131). This is not only a rather simplistic account of male behaviour and identity, but it is an account which raises the question of how women are supposed to achieve equality, if they are embarking on the transformation of intimacy alone.

2.2.7 Forced to Choose?

Like Giddens (1991; 1992) Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2001) trace historical changes in family formations and the increasing autonomy of women. Their work is rooted in Beck’s (1992) earlier thesis ‘*Risk Society*’, in which he argued that there has been a general shift from simple modernisation to reflexive modernisation. As a consequence individuals are increasingly freed from the traditional constraints, such as gender and social class, which characterised the modern industrialised period, ‘Individualisation means that men and women are released from the gender roles prescribed by industrial society for life in the nuclear family’ (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995: 6). This process of de-traditionalisation, the weakening of

traditional normative guidelines and moral sanctions, which governed and regulated intimate relationships and family organisation, creates uncertainty, instability and new 'risks' which individuals must negotiate and manage. Women in particular, in becoming freed from the 'feudal model of gender' institutionalised within the traditional marriage contract, have greater autonomy to construct their own personal biographies. Thus, individuals are reflexively constructing their own life narratives, becoming '*actor, designer, juggler, and stage director* of his own biography, identity, social networks, commitments and convictions' (Beck, 1997: 95, italics in the original).

As a consequence, individuals are faced with a greater range of choices of how to organise their intimate relationships than in the past. Marriage becomes only one option amongst many and as a result many couples choose to cohabit instead. Further, as more women enter paid employment, they become less financially dependent on a male breadwinner, increasing both their options to end an unsatisfactory relationship and decreasing the pressure to enter into a co-residential partnership in the first place.

In the absence of traditional normative role prescriptions to fall back on, couples are forced to negotiate the allocation of childcare and paid work to a greater extent than before, 'there is no given set of obligations... no way of organizing everyday work, the relationship between men and women, and between parents and children, which can just be copied' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: 203). As more women enter paid employment, they erode fathers' claims to financial provision as their exclusive 'special' role. As the pressures of juggling the demands of paid work and caring for children increase, women increasingly expect their partners to become much more involved in the active daily care of their children. Thus, men are expected to expand their traditional breadwinning role and become more actively involved in parenting and the domestic sphere. As a result 'people are having to negotiate relationships on the basis of equality' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: 204).

Whilst Giddens (1992) views increased choice as a positive development, which will ultimately result in greater equality and democratic relations between partners, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2001) point out that increased choice and negotiation

also leads to increased conflict between couples. As couples attempt to negotiate and balance their desires for a 'life of one's own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: 26), with commitments and obligations to the family unit, tensions mount and conflicts increase. The difficulties of managing two individual biographies and family life have rendered relationships increasingly unstable and more likely to end in separation and divorce.

Paradoxically however, as relationships become more contingent, uncertain, and fragile, love and intimacy become more highly prized and individuals re-partner, remarry, and try again. This results in 'the family' being replaced by the 'negotiated family, the alternating family, the multiple family, new arrangements after divorce, remarriage, divorce again, new assortments from you, my, our children, our past and present families' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 8).

Thus according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 'Individualisation is understood as a historical process that increasingly questions and tends to break up people's traditional rhythm of life – what sociologists call the normal biography'. (2001: 88) Individuals no longer follow a normatively defined 'standard biography', which consists of getting married before living together and having children and then remaining married until 'death do us part'. Instead, marriage and or living together may occur after the birth of children, if at all. It is not simply that individuals are creating a wider range of different family forms, but that the timing and sequencing of key events such as parenthood and marriage are subject to greater individual variation. Individual biographies are increasingly characterised by transitions into and out of a variety of family forms and episodes of solo living. As individuals can no longer rely on ascribed roles as a basis on which to conduct their relationships, it is no longer clear who is regarded as 'family' in any definitive sense. A mother may no longer regard her ex husband as 'family', but the children still might, and stepparents have to negotiate some form of acceptable role and relationship with the children. Beck-Gernsheim argues that under these conditions, 'maintenance of the family tie is no longer a matter of course but a freely chosen act... it requires a greater personal contribution, more active care... conjugal succession implies greater fluidity and uncertainty in kinship relations' (2002: 35).

In contrast to Giddens (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim place more emphasis on the inescapability of choice, 'Even traditional ways of life become dependent on decisions; they have to be chosen, defended, and justified against other options' (2001: 27). Thus in this sense, individuals do not exercise 'free choice', but are rather continually forced to select from a variety of options within the constraints of managing and negotiating 'risk'.

Unlike Giddens (1992), Beck (1992) adopts a more nuanced approach to how individualisation impacts upon men's lives and identities. He argues that since men have always enjoyed greater autonomy and freedom to accede to the demands of paid employment and to live a 'life of their own' individualisation per se, does not force men to change, 'individualisation (in the sense of making a living through the mediation of the market) *strengthens* masculine role behaviour.' (Beck, 1992: 112, italics in the original). However 'essential impulses for liberation from the masculine role are not inherent, but are *externally induced* (through changes in women)' (Beck, 1992: 112, italics in the original). This partially forced liberation from the traditional male parenting role on the one hand provides men with positive new opportunities, in Beck's words 'a different type of commitment to the...family becomes possible.' (1992: 12-13). On the other hand, the fragility of intimate relationships results in parents regarding children as the ultimate source of permanent love and stability. In this 'era of the prized child', conflicts over who has 'possession' of the child arise at the point of separation and divorce. Therefore when men re-evaluate relationships with their children they arrive at the conclusion that they have lost out:

'But to the degree that economic inequality between men and women is decreased...*fathers become aware of their disadvantage*...The woman has *possession* of the child as a product of her womb...The men who free themselves from the 'fate' of a career and turn to their children come home to an empty nest.' (1992:13, italics in the original).

Thus Beck (1992) depicts men grappling with contradictory forces and competing risks, rather than simply being unable to 'do' intimacy or refusing to relinquish patriarchal control.

2.2.8 'The Family' in Crisis.

In contrast to the positive potentialities of changing personal relations espoused by Giddens (1992) and to a more limited degree Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2001), others (Murray, 1990, 1994; Dennis and Erdos, 1992; Dench, 1994) regard the increased choice and freedom associated with individualisation and the resulting diversity of family forms as evidence that both the family and fatherhood are currently in a state of crisis. Within this perspective, changing family forms are the result of a growth in 'selfish individualism' and a lack of morality, whereby individuals are placing personal satisfaction above parental obligations, leaving increased numbers of 'damaged' children in their wake. Those adopting this rather pessimistic perspective do not share a common political or theoretical stance; Murray (1990, 1994) is allied to the 'New Right' whereas Dench (1994) and Dennis and Erdos (1992) have been characterised as Ethical Socialists (Smart and Neale, 1999b). There is not the space here to discuss the differences between these different political and theoretical positions in full. Thus what follows is a brief overview of the main elements and points, and I will refer to those subscribing to the view that 'the family' is in crisis as 'pessimists' for ease and simplicity.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the British Conservative government launched a 'back to basics' campaign in an attempt to halt the growth of 'selfish individualism' and the corresponding decline of the 'traditional family' (Fox-Harding, 1999; Gillies, 2003, 2005). The growth in alternative family forms, but in particular female lone parenthood were seen as manifestations of a breakdown in the moral fabric of society and an increased willingness on the part of young mothers to rely on the welfare state for financial support.

Initially concerns centred on the levels of welfare expenditure and the poverty experienced by women and children in lone parent families. Murray (1990, 1994) joined the debate with his thesis about welfare dependency and the cultural transmission of the 'underclass', which was serialised in the Times in the early 1990s. According to Murray (1990, 1994) lone parent families were the cause of a

host of societal problems, unable to provide an adequate moral environment for the proper socialisation of children. He argued that children from fatherless families suffered from a lack of discipline and were at greater risk of indulging in delinquent behaviours such as criminal activities and drug dependency.

The Conservatives drew extensively on research, which appeared to support the claim that the nuclear family was the ideal environment for raising children. A range of studies comparing the developmental outcomes of children residing in different family structures claimed that children from lone parent and stepfamilies fared significantly worse, socially, educationally and emotionally, than their counterparts in 'biologically intact' families (Furstenberg *et al.*, 1983; Kiernan, 1992; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Zill, 1994). Although these findings are contested (Coleman 1994; Thomson, 1994; Sweeting and West, 1996; Buchanan and Ten Brinke, 1997; Cherlin 1999), the idea that divorce, fatherlessness and 'alternative' family forms were damaging to both children and wider society was promoted by the conservative government.

Men were simultaneously positioned as 'victims' and 'villains' within this debate. Some (Dennis and Erdos, 1992; Dench 1994) argued that women, with increased financial independence and influenced by feminist ideals were deliberately choosing to live and raise children without men. Without the 'civilising' influence of providing financially for a family, men were more likely to become unemployed, and engage in criminal and delinquent behaviour (Murray, 1990, 1994). The assumption therefore, was that without a clear 'role' as the main breadwinner and head of the family, men increasingly felt that they had no place within family life. Alternatively, some have argued that men are demonstrating a 'flight from commitment' (Ehrenreich, 1983; Popenoe, 1994, 1999), wilfully and selfishly abandoning fatherhood and its associated duties and obligations.

The link between diverse family forms, delinquent children, moral decay and societal breakdown is not new. Wright and Jagger (1999) point out that a very similar debate was prominent in Britain at the end of the 19th century. Moreover, this is a debate that has recently resurfaced becoming prominent within political circles and the media, both in America and in the UK. American Presidential candidate, Barrack

Obama made the headlines when in a speech³ on Fathers' Day in June 2008 he castigated African-American fathers for their 'absence'. He urged fathers to 'realise that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child – it's the courage to raise one.' He further commented that 'too many fathers are missing - missing from too many lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men'. In the UK, conservative party leader David Cameron took up Obama's proclamations, claiming in an interview with *The Guardian*, that he fully supported Obama's comments, and argued that a 'responsibility revolution' is needed in order to combat our 'broken society' (*The Guardian*, 2008). Once again the linkage of 'absent' fathers to juvenile delinquency, poor educational attainment, poor social adjustment, unemployment and poverty is very much in evidence.

Thus, two contrasting positions dominate sociological and political views of contemporary family life and fatherhood. The individualisation theorists (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 2001) contend that individuals have more freedom of choice and that this is leading to increased equality between the sexes, affording fathers greater opportunity to reformulate their role and expand their involvement with their children. Alternative family forms and lifestyles are part of the democratisation of family relationships, resulting in more rewarding and satisfying relationships. In contrast the 'pessimists' contend that the increased independence of women and the plurality of family forms are a negative and damaging development and that as a result fathers are left in crisis, with no useful role within the family (Murray, 1990, 1994; Dennis and Erdos, 1992; Dench, 1994). Both positions share common features. Both tend to focus on the individual; Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2001) present an account of rational conscious actors, actively and equitably negotiating, choosing from a range of options whilst the 'pessimists' tend to present individuals as immoral actors, making the wrong choices, engaged in the selfish pursuit of satisfaction (Neale, 2000). A further similarity is that both tend to connect women's agency to changes in contemporary families and relationships (Smart and Neale, 1999b). A final similarity is that both positions tend to implicitly assume that different family forms are resulting in changing 'family practices' (Morgan, 1996), that is assuming that the

³ The full text is available at <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/06/27/obama.fathers.ay/> last accessed 27/07/2008.

ways in which individuals 'do' family is currently changing. The pessimists tend to assume that fathers and the fathering they perform in family forms other than the married biologically intact family are different and inferior. The individualisation theorists also implicitly assume that 'alternative' family forms are different and that practices are more egalitarian and democratic.

2.2.9 Overstating the extent of change?

The argument that family life and parenting are increasingly characterised by negotiation is generally accepted. However, both the individualisation theorists and the 'pessimists' have been criticised for over-stating the extent of change and ignoring important continuities within family forms (Crow, 2002) and gendered parenting practices. Silva and Smart claim 'although family practices are changing, particularly over the life course, the amount of change within and across families is often exaggerated...' (1999: 3).

One argument is that the extent of family diversity and the extent to which a plurality of family forms is new is overstated. Stepfamilies and lone parenthood (Burgoyne and Clark, 1982), as well as cohabitation and childbirth outside of marriage were not uncommon during the 19th century (Seccombe, 1993; Wright and Jagger, 1999). Similarly, there have always been some women who remained in some form of paid employment (Lewis, 2002). Thus whilst the traditional nuclear family ideal was dominant in a normative sense in the past, the extent to which individuals and households conformed to the ideal in practice has always varied (Gillis, 1996).

A second argument is that despite some minor changes in the parenting practices of fathers, parenting remains a profoundly female activity (Dermott, 2008; Williams, 2004). I discuss this further in Section 2.3 below. A third argument focuses on the unevenness and variability of change (Williams, 2004), citing evidence which demonstrates that structural factors such as social class and ethnicity influence patterns of family formation, attitudes towards parenting and parenting behaviours (Modood *et al.*, 1997; Williams, 2004; Vinter *et al.*, 2005).

In light of these critiques, recent theorising focussing on parenting and family relationships has largely rejected the macro approach adopted by the individualisation theorists and the pessimists claiming that such an approach is unsuitable to capture the variability of different groups' experience of change (Williams, 2004). The work of Morgan (1996, 2002) and Finch and Mason (1993; Mason, 2000; Finch 2007) has become influential in recent studies of family life and parenting.

2.2.10 Family Practices.

Morgan (2002) claims that contemporary family life and fatherhood are characterised by both continuity and diversity, and that whilst there are 'competing narratives of fatherhood' (2002: 278) we must be careful not to overstate the de-traditionalisation of parental roles. He advocates a micro approach and argues that conceptualising parenting and family in terms of 'practices' has greater utility.

The notion of practices shifts attention away from the structural, institutionalised features of families and parental relationships, emphasising instead how individuals 'do' fathering. As such, focus is shifted away from notions that fatherhood is dependent on either co-residence or the presence of a genetic tie to a consideration of the fluid and dynamic process of fathering through everyday activities. The advantage of this approach is that diversity, both the continuities and changes within fatherhood can be explored and fatherhood can be understood as a fluid and negotiated set of practices rather than an institutionalised position allocated to specific individuals (Morgan, 1996). Thus, Morgan (1996, 2002) has retained and developed some of the elements, namely negotiation and fluidity contained within the individualisation thesis. In focussing on what individuals do, this allows us to move beyond simplistic judgements of the quality of parenting within different family structures (Smart and Neale, 1999b; Neale, 2000).

2.2.11 Negotiating ‘the right thing to do’.

The work of Finch and Mason (1993; Mason, 2000) has also provided a basis for recent theoretical approaches to parenting. In their study of how adults made decisions about the amount and type of support offered to older family members, they found that individuals were engaged in a process of working out ‘the proper thing to do’. Individuals did not base their decisions on the basis of a set or abstract moral principles or obligations. Instead, decisions as to the ‘right thing to do’ were arrived at through a process of negotiation and a consideration of the specific circumstances. Thus, individuals considered their relationship to that particular person and the nature and quality of past interactions for example. Finch and Mason (1993) propose the concept of ‘negotiated commitments’ to capture the variable nature of individuals’ obligations and commitments to family members. Furthermore, these negotiated commitments were not fixed, but changed over time in response to changing circumstances. Thus, according to Neale (2000), governmental attempts to impose an overarching moral framework is unlikely to succeed, and is at odds with the lived experiences of individuals. Again, the work of Finch and Mason (1993; Mason, 2000) has some similarities with the individualisation thesis, in that they highlight the negotiated character of contemporary relationships. However, their work is important in highlighting both the moral dimension of individual agency and that individuals make decisions with reference to their own situation.

2.2.12 The Symbolic Dimensions of Family Life.

Finch (2007) has recently advocated the use of the concept ‘display’ which she defines as

‘the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant others that certain of their actions do constitute ‘doing family things’ and thereby confirm that these relationships are ‘family’ relationships’. (2007: 73).

Drawing on Morgan’s (1996) point that actions can only be understood as family practices if they resonate with wider social meanings, Finch (2007) uses the example

of a separated father who participated in Smart and Neale's (1999b) study. Upon separation the father changed his parenting practices substantially in order to build a closer relationship with his children to become a 'good father', a change which elicited approving comments from other family members. Finch (2007) claims that his changed behaviour not only established that he was and intended to remain 'father-like' towards his children, but also that the other family members noticing and making positive comments on his behaviour was important in that he received recognition that his attempts to be more 'father-like' were successful. Thus the other family members were drawing on a wider set of social meanings as to what actions and behaviours constitute 'good fathering' in order to make their assessment. As Finch (2007) points out these issues bring to the fore 'the question of *whose* recognition of the family like quality of relationships is important, and *how* that recognition is conveyed'. (2007: 74, emphasis in the original).

Further, Finch (2007, 2008) argues that display can also refer to the verbal aspects of family life, especially the process of naming. Language, and in particular what family individuals call themselves and each other has been found to play an important part in identity construction within 'alternative' family forms such as; non-heterosexual 'families of choice' (Weeks *et al.*, 2001), lesbian mother families (Almack, 2002; Suter *et al.*, 2008) and stepfamilies (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003; Marsiglio, 2004b). For some, shared surnames can cement a sense of being a 'legitimate' family (Weeks, *et al.*, 2001; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003; Suter *et al.*, 2008) or alternatively, retaining one's first name and refusing to adopt a parental label such as 'mum' or 'dad' can be a way of individuals displaying a sense of respect for the biological parent's status in relation to the children (Almack, 2002; Marsiglio, 2004b).

The concept of display and a focus on language are useful theoretical tools through which we can perhaps begin to understand contemporary fatherhood and fathering in diverse family forms.

These micro level approaches which are all based on a conception of individuals situated in specific contexts, making decisions and following courses of action, which are informed by a variety of considerations, allow us to remain sensitive to the

extent that practical actions are constrained by external factors, often beyond the individual's control. As Morgan points out

‘opportunities for individual men as fathers to shape their own life trajectories are highly variable and frequently shaped by circumstances outside their immediate control... there are forces limiting, if not absolutely determining, the choices and life chances of individuals within domestic settings’ (2002: 283-4).

Whilst the structural features of various family forms may not be causally related to specific parenting practices, different family structures do provide different contexts within which male parents understand and experience fatherhood.

2.3 Contemporary fatherhood, fathering and fathers.

Whilst theories of individualisation outlined above have been particularly influential in current investigations of family life, few studies have *explicitly* applied this approach to the study of fatherhood, fathering and fathers (Williams, 2002, 2008). There has been a huge growth of studies of fatherhood since the 1980s but the literature remains dominated by a social psychology approach, which in general attempts to establish how fathers and the fathering they provide benefit child development (Dermott, 2008). This emphasis within the fatherhood literature, on what fathers are *for* and the attendant attempts to identify fathering practices which are most beneficial to children has largely shifted the focus away from an explicit consideration of gendered inequality between mothers and fathers, to a consideration of father ‘involvement’. The concept of ‘involvement’ currently dominates both policy discourse and social research, as does an orientation towards establishing if fathers are more ‘involved’ than in the past, how they are ‘involved’ with their children and how greater male ‘involvement’ in parenting can be facilitated by social policy (Dermott, 2008).

The following sections review the literature pertaining to fatherhood, fathering and fathers starting with Williams (2002, 2008) who argues that fathering has become individualised.

2.3.1 The 'late modern reflexive father.'

Williams (2002, 2008) explored contemporary fathering, interviewing 40 fathers about their experiences of being a father. Responding to the individualisation theorists' conceptualisation of 'choice' Williams (2002, 2008) argues that whilst fathers do not make 'free' choices dis-embedded from situational and structural constraints, they do adapt to the situational circumstances in which they find themselves and make 'decisions'. He claims that

'in practice, the fathering role... is in large part determined by the particular circumstances of family life. Fathers are aware of the existence of ideal types of fatherhood that inform them what they *should* do but what they *actually* do is the result of circumstances that, in many ways, they do not choose. Thus, fatherhood is increasingly individualised and, to the extent that fathers are forced to respond to situational circumstances, it is highly reflexive.'
(Williams, 2008: 490, emphasis in the original).

Although Williams (2002, 2008) does not explicitly acknowledge it, this results in an argument that contemporary fathering is both contingent and context dependent. However, whilst his focus on 'decisions' rather than 'choice' has some utility, and reduces the implication that fathers are free to choose anything they wish, there are some problems with his formulation of reflexivity.

Williams (2002, 2008) in part, bases his argument that contemporary fathers are reflexive because they contrast their own fathering practices with those of their father and have recognised and/or decided that they have to do their own fathering differently. Whilst this is reflexivity of sorts, it does not necessarily follow that the fathers in Williams (2002, 2008) study were critically interrogating their own fathering practices in the 'here and now' rather than simply drawing on inter generational comparisons. Nor does it necessarily result in a dramatic change in fathering behaviour across generations (Dermott, 2008). Men have claimed that their fathering practices are very different from that of their own fathers since the 1950s but the actual changes in fathering practices have been modest and remain gendered (Lewis, 1995).

Whilst Williams claims that we are witnessing the emergence of the 'late modern reflexive father' (Williams, 2008: 487), he fails to adequately situate the fathers in his study and their fathering within the gendered context of parenting. As a result he fails to address the question of why more radical changes have *not* occurred. Additionally he does not engage with the literature which demonstrates how in comparison to mothers, fathers still retain greater choice over their parenting both in relation to when they actually parent and which tasks they choose to fulfil or carry out (Clarke and Popay, 1998). This is an important omission, since empirical evidence strongly suggests that despite changes in men's attitudes towards fatherhood, fathering remains a gendered activity. I discuss this below.

2.3.2 Involvement.

How to measure or gauge the extent of father 'involvement' has been intensely debated (see O'Brien, 2005). Within social psychology, father involvement has been conceptualised as a multi-dimensional construct with three components; engagement, availability and responsibility (Lamb *et al.*, 1987). Engagement refers to direct interactions with children, such as play, or bathing, accessibility refers to the degree to which fathers are generally available to the child, often phrased by parents in a rather vague manner as 'being there' (Simpson *et al.*, 1996). Responsibility relates to the organisational and planning aspects of parenting, such as arranging dental appointments and so on. Evidence suggests that whilst fathers have increased the amount of time spent being available to and engaging with children, the extent to which fathers take responsibility has changed more slowly and women are still overwhelmingly responsible for the organisational aspects of childcare (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004). However, as Coltrane (2004) points out, responsibility is often the least studied aspect of fathering, mainly due to the methodological difficulties involved (O'Brien, 2005). There has been some debate as to how far breadwinning should be incorporated into conceptualisations of involvement (Christiansen and Palkovitz, 2001), but breadwinning remains an activity that is considered separate from involvement at present (Dermott, 2008). In contrast sociological investigations have tended to adopt a more diverse and broader approach, considering attitudes towards gendered roles (Crompton, 2006), cultural representations of fathers and

fathering (Lloyd, 1995; Sunderland, 2000; Freeman, 2002) and the division of labour between couples (see Fisher *et al.*, 1999; Kodz, 2003, for example).

2.3.3 Cultural representations.

O'Brien argues that 'caring fathers are part of everyday culture through advertising images and depictions of sporting icons. There are regular newspaper columns on the pleasures of being a dad and coping with children' (2005: 3). As a result she claims that 'the ideal of the involved caring father is culturally embedded in Britain...this ideal is creating new benchmarks by which father involvement is judged' (2005: iii). Whilst fatherhood, fathering and fathers do make the headlines, more thorough investigations of media representations of fathers and fatherhood suggest a more complex picture. Freeman's (2002) analysis of a variety of cultural representations broadly supports O'Brien's (2005) assertion but Lloyd (1995) found that fathers were more likely to be represented in a negative light, linked to violence and irresponsibility in newspaper reports. Sunderland's (2000) analysis of parenting texts found that fathers were represented as 'bumbling', 'babysitters' and generally marginal in comparison to mothers.

2.3.4 Attitudes.

There is general agreement that attitudes towards gendered roles within the family and fatherhood have changed significantly (O'Brien, 2005; Crompton, 2006). Evidence suggests that fathers are now both expected to, and increasingly want to perform a more caring and nurturing role, and be more actively involved in the day to day care of their children (Hochschild, 1990; Moss, 1995; Speak *et al.*, 1997; O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003). In the 2001 wave of the British Household Panel Survey, 89% of men and 83% of women agreed with the statement 'children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as their mother' (Lee, 2004). According to a recent survey, 79% of fathers claimed that they would be happy to stay at home and look after the baby on their own and 61% disagreed with the statement 'Going out to work and being the breadwinner is the most important

aspect of being a father to me' (Vinter *et al.*, 2005: 61). Similarly men becoming stay at home fathers receives widespread support, only 14% agreed with the statement 'it is not good if the man stays at home and cares for the children and the woman goes out to work'. (Crompton, 2006: 54).

However, attitudes have not changed in a simplistic or uniform pattern. Two thirds of the fathers surveyed agreed that women were naturally better at caring for children and just under a half claimed that they had a supportive rather than 'hands on' role in childcare. Thus, a substantial proportion of fathers retained traditional attitudes towards the roles and capabilities of parents. This was particularly the case for those who were on low incomes, employed in manual elementary occupations, had a non working partner, or were a member of an ethnic minority group (Vinter *et al.*, 2005). Attitudes towards fatherhood and fathering therefore vary according to socio economic status and ethnicity. Fathers who are white, employed in professional or managerial occupations, and who have a partner employed full time with a similar earning capacity to their own were the most likely to exhibit egalitarian attitudes towards parenting (Vinter *et al.*, 2005).

2.3.5 Childcare and Domestic Tasks.

There is some evidence that changes have occurred on a practical level. Fathers on average currently perform approximately one third of the childcare in coupled families (Sullivan, 2000) and the time fathers spend on childcare has increased from a few minutes per day in 1961 to just under an hour per day in 1999 (Fisher *et al.*, 1999). But whilst the increase in time has resulted in some claiming that we are witnessing 'gender convergence' in relation to time spent on childcare (O'Brien, 2005), an examination of what type of childcare tasks men perform reveals a continuation of gendered parenting practices. Fathers' direct involvement with children tends to revolve around the more pleasurable aspects of childcare, such as playing together rather than the routine mundane activities such as feeding the children (Hochschild, 1990; Hatter *et al.*, 2002). Men's increased involvement is also largely restricted to childcare. Participation in housework tasks remains much lower in comparison to women. Kodz (2003) analysed the BHPS and found that amongst

dual earner couples just under 20% of men took the main responsibility for washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning and grocery shopping.

2.3.6 Employment.

Despite changing attitudes towards father involvement, it remains that upon becoming a parent, a mother's employment situation is in general affected to a far greater extent than that of the child's father. O'Brien and Shemilt (2003) found that the majority of British fathers (86%) are in full time employment, working an average of 47 hours per week. Only 3% are in part time employment. In comparison, whilst mothers' employment rates have increased to 67% in 2001, only 31% work full time, whilst 36% are in part time employment. Thus whilst 65% of fathers work 41 hours per week or more, only 14% of mothers do so. Despite a fifth of fathers making some form of alteration to their working practices⁴ to spend more time with their new baby, only 10% saw this alteration as permanent, with the majority returning to their pre fatherhood working patterns after six months (Vinter *et al.*, 2005). Thus, very few fathers permanently alter their working patterns or give up work altogether in order to raise their children (Hatter *et al.*, 2002; Crompton *et al.*, 2003; Houston and Waumsley, 2003).

Despite the introduction of policies such as Paternity Leave, uptake of these measures remain relatively low as many fear that their employers will perceive them as less committed to their job if they use them (Hatter *et al.*, 2002; Crompton *et al.*, 2003; Dex, 2003) and the statutory level of paternity leave pay⁵, renders it impractical option for many (Vinter *et al.*, 2005). Therefore in practice, many fathers are effectively 'weekend dads', largely absent during the week due to the demands of paid employment (Hatter *et al.*, 2002; O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003).

⁴ A variety of adjustments to working hours were recorded, 10% reduced their hours, 4% used flexi time, whilst the remaining 6% changed of shift patterns, leaving their job, working a condensed week, or working from home. See p17.

⁵ A maximum of £117.18 per week for two weeks, from April 2008. (See http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Moneyandworkentitlements/Parentalleaveandpay/DG_10029398).

Some have claimed that the number of men opting to ‘reverse roles’, becoming stay at home dads whilst their partners take on sole or main breadwinning responsibility has steadily increased. Drawing on Office for National Statistics data and the results of a survey conducted by YouGov, uSwitch.com (2008) claimed that the number of stay at home dads had increased by 58% since 1993. However, despite this the actual number of stay at home fathers was just under 200,000 and reliable estimates of the proportion of fathers who opt to reverse roles with their partners and become ‘stay at home dads’ is very difficult to establish ⁶. Those who do become stay at home dads tend to retain a connection to paid work, and research suggests that their partners still tend to be largely responsible for the organisational aspects of housework and childcare (Brandth and Kvande, 1998; Doucet, 2004, 2006).

Thus, there is some evidence of change, particularly at the attitudinal level and rather more modestly at the behavioural level. However, mothers on average still provide two thirds of the childcare within coupled families (Fisher *et al.*, 1999; Sullivan, 2000), and retain overall responsibility for the children, whilst fathers provide two thirds of the total income within coupled families (O’Brien and Shemilt, 2003). Thus a complementary gendered division of labour persists prompting some to argue that what we can currently observe in Britain is a one and half breadwinner, female carer arrangement (Crompton, 1999; Pfau-Effinger, 1999; Lewis, 2001). Overall then, parenting and employment practices remain structured by gender, social class and ethnicity.

The brief review of the empirical evidence above demonstrates the limits of de-traditionalised and gender neutral parenting. The broad acceptance of ‘new fatherhood’ at the attitudinal and cultural level alongside the more modest changes in actual fathering behaviour has prompted some to claim that we are witnessing a process of ‘lagged adaptation’ (Gershuny *et al.*, 1994), a ‘stalled revolution’ (Hochschild, 1990) or a gap between ‘culture and conduct’ (La Rossa, 1997). Whilst this would seem to support Giddens’ (1992) assertion that men are struggling with

⁶ Homedad UK estimated 100,000 fathers were stay at home dads (www.homedad.org.uk, accessed 12/02/2006) whilst Fathers Direct (now the Fatherhood Institute) put the Figure at approximately 45,000 (www.fathersdirect.com, accessed 12/02/2006).

the changes occurring in contemporary society, the question is *why* men are finding it difficult to bring their fathering in line with their attitudes (Dermott, 2008).

2.3.7 The gap between culture and conduct.

Factors and circumstances that act as ‘barriers’, hindering men’s involvement has been one theme of research (Featherstone, 2004b). One strand of research has focussed on employment practices and workplace cultures. Findings suggest that some employers are reluctant to grant fathers the same opportunities to fit work around childcare commitments (O’Brien and Shemilt, 2003), and that this alongside a long hours culture (Featherstone, 2004a) results in fathers’ fearing that their career prospects and earning capacity will be harmed if they alter their employment practices or hours to any significant degree. A second line of argument contends that mothers act as ‘gatekeepers’, either consciously or unwittingly preventing men from performing a more involved style of parenting, due to a lack of confidence in men’s parenting ability and/or a desire to preserve their traditional power base (Allen and Hawkins, 1999).

Whilst the ‘barriers’ approach is useful in highlighting how institutional practices and interpersonal dynamics can hinder father involvement, there is a distinct tendency within this orientation to position fathers as passive rather than active agents in their parenting practices. Dermott’s (2003a, 2003b, 2008) recent exploration of the ‘gap’ between culture and conduct (La Rossa, 1997) avoids this however.

2.3.8 Intimate Fatherhood.

Evidence from both Britain and America suggests that fathers do not necessarily have to be directly involved to any great degree or to an equal extent in comparison to mothers, in order to be considered ‘involved’. A willingness to ‘help out’ if necessary was enough (Backett, 1987; Hochschild, 1990; Dex; 2003). Findings such as these, hint that what ‘involvement’ means to fathers is a fruitful line of enquiry.

Drawing on interviews with twenty-five fathers, Dermott (2003a, 2003b, 2008) argues that whilst being 'involved' was a central element of 'good fatherhood', involvement did not include extensive participation in mundane, routine childcare activities. Rather, what the fathers were actively creating and sustaining was an 'intimate connection' with their children, and that this was the key element of being a 'good father'. The amount of time needed to facilitate this emotional connection was flexible, in that 'quality' time rather than a fixed amount of time was considered adequate, and could therefore be organised around the demands of paid work. Certain activities such as play and shared leisure pursuits were regarded as important because they facilitated the creation and maintenance of a close emotional tie. Conversations with the child were also regarded as important, allowing the fathers to get to know their children and express love and affection. Drawing on Jamieson (1998), Dermott (2008) argues that what the fathers were practising was a form of 'disclosing intimacy', which according to Jamieson is characteristic of relationships in which 'really knowing and understanding each other are the crux of the relationship rather than more practical forms of 'love and care.' (1998: 19).

Thus Dermott argues;

'Contemporary fatherhood is centred on a personal connection at the expense of participation in the work of childcare; because caring activities flow from an emotional connection rather than in themselves constituting the fathering role, the practicalities of 'intimate fatherhood' are fluid and open to negotiation.' (2008: 142).

The issue of whether there really is a gap between attitudes and behaviour is therefore questionable, since one can be a 'good father' without much alteration to time spent in paid work or on domestic tasks, and to the types of childcare activities fathers engage in.

In conceptualising contemporary fathering as 'intimate' Dermott (2003b, 2008) recognises that men are actively involved in interpreting cultural norms about fatherhood, taking us beyond simplistic notions of either men simply choosing not to change or men being prevented from changing their fathering practices. Her account also lends some support to Giddens' (1992) claim that parent-child relationships are

becoming similar to the 'pure relationship', based on intimacy and a deep emotional connection.

Dermott (2003b) acknowledges that her argument rests on interviews with a small specific 'group' of fathers, who are predominantly white, middle class and fathering in dual earner biologically intact families. In Chapter Five I explore the extent to which Dermott's (2003b, 2008) thesis is valid when father diversity is taken into account.

2.4 Diverse Fatherhoods?

Whilst it is currently recognised that both fatherhood as a concept (Lewis and Lamb, 2007) and as a lived reality is becoming more complex and diverse (Olah *et al.*, 2002), investigations of the plurality of family forms that individuals move into and out of across their life course tend to focus on the changes to women's and children's lives, with much less attention paid to the increasing complexity and diversity of contemporary fatherhood. This is due to both the methodological issues involved in obtaining reliable estimates of the prevalence of non-resident fatherhood or stepfatherhood (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999) and a concern with the 'outcomes' for children who have experienced multiple transitions into and out of different family forms (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000).

The methodological difficulties in obtaining reliable information about the different family forms that fathers have parented in over their life course is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. Obtaining precise estimates of the proportion or number of non-resident fathers is particularly problematic. Inferences could be drawn from the proportion of children living apart from their biological father; Iacovou (2005) found that the proportion of children residing with both biological parents at the age of 16 has decreased from 90% of those born in 1958 to 65% of those born in 1984-6, which suggests that around a third of fathers have at least one non-resident child. Ermisch and Francesconi (2000) found that 40% of women had experienced lone parenthood at least once during their life course. However Bradshaw *et al.* (1999) who estimate that around 2 million men are non-resident fathers warn that the

proportion of men who live apart from either some or all of their children cannot simply be 'read off' from the amount of female lone parents since some lone parents have children from more than one relationship. As a result, there may be two or more non-resident fathers for each lone parent for example.

Analyses of data collected in the British Cohort Studies⁷ and the British Household Panel Survey have provided some information about the extent of diversity amongst British fathers. Of those who had become fathers at the age of 33, 15% had at least one dependent child who did not live with them in 1991 (Ferri, 1993) and 11% were living with children to whom they were not biologically related (Ferri, 1994). A more recent analysis of the BCS found that the proportion of men born in the 1970s who were stepfathers was double that of the previous cohort, rising to 17% (Ferri, 2005). The advantages of cohort studies such as these is that a comparison can be made between different generations of fathers and from this it is evident that diversity is much more prevalent amongst the current generation of fathers.

Clarke (1997) conducted an analysis of all sample members who had become biological fathers using the retrospective relationship and fertility history data collected in the British Household Panel Survey in 1992. From this, it was estimated that 15% had at least one dependent child who did not live with them, and that 4% had not been co-resident at the time of birth. Clarke (1997) also examined the fathers' parenting and partnering histories in order to establish how many fathers had experienced more than one family situation or had complicated family histories due to movements into and out of family situations. The findings indicated that only 3% of men had complicated family histories and that 73% were still in their first family situation. 23% had parted from their 'first' family becoming 'single' parents, and 6% were lone parents. Thus the available evidence suggests that both continuity and change can be observed.

However, whilst Clarke (1997) tracked changes in patterns of residence of the fathers in relation to their biological children, it remains unclear how many had ever lived in

⁷ All sample members in the National Child Development Survey (NCDS) were born in a particular week in 1958, those in the Birth Cohort Study (BCS) were born in 1970 and in the more recent Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) the sample is based on babies born in 2000/02.

a stepfamily for example, and the different types of family situation the men moved into and out of during their life course was not explored. In addition, unlike the cohort studies, the BHPS contains a nationally representative sample, including men of all ages and Clarke (1997) did not establish if the younger fathers in the BHPS had more complicated family histories in comparison to older fathers.

Therefore, whilst it is clear from existing research that diversity is increasing across cohorts, it remains unclear just how *individualised* fatherhood has become for the current generation of British fathers. Juby and Le Bourdais (1998) conducted an analysis of the life course transitions, what they termed the ‘paternal careers’ of Canadian fathers, using longitudinal survey data to establish the family situations within which men first became parents, and then their subsequent movements into and out of different episodes of non-resident fatherhood, stepfatherhood etc. This is a useful approach to establish just how individualised fatherhood has become since as Cheal states ‘disorderly sequences of transitions have become more prevalent; ‘Parenthood may come before marriage, and individuals may cycle into and out of marriage and family formation many times, without ever completing the task of raising their children into independent adults’ (1999: 73). I address this gap in the literature in Chapter Four, where I present the findings from a secondary analysis of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS).

2.5 Fathers and Different Family Contexts.

In comparison to the literature about involved fatherhood, relatively little research has explored the subjective experiences of fathers, particularly ‘how fathers in diverse contexts perceive and construct both their identities as fathers and the nature of their involvement with their children’ (Russell, 2001: 57). Fathers also tend to be categorised and researched as specific groups, such as non-resident or lone fathers for example. The following discussion focuses on research relating to each specific group, providing a summary of research findings.

2.5.1 Non-resident Biological Fathers.

The number of men who are non-resident biological fathers is increasing. The vast majority are either divorced or separated from their partners, but there may also be increasing numbers who have never resided with their biological children (Bradshaw *et al.* 1999; Kiernan, 2005).

Although academic interest in non-resident biological fathers has increased substantially over the past decade (Bradshaw *et al.* 1999; Smart and Neale, 1999a; 1999b), issues of contact dominate the academic literature (see for example, Simpson *et al.*, 1996; Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999; Blackwell and Dawe, 2003; Dunn *et al.*, 2004). Early investigations into non-resident fatherhood relied on reports lone mothers' reports as to the levels of contact and maintenance payments. From this, it was estimated that approximately 4 out of 10 fathers had no contact with their non-resident children and resulted in widespread moral outrage (Bradshaw *et al.* 1999). However, as Bradshaw *et al.* (1999) notes⁸, this figure is most likely flawed and more recent estimates based on the reports of non-resident fathers have found that between 10%-20% have no contact at all (Blackwell and Dawe, 2003). However, non-resident fathers who have no form of contact tend to be employed in lower status occupations and are more likely to have never had a continuing relationship with the child's mother. Levels of contact also tended to decline as the length of separation increased (Blackwell and Dawe, 2003). Despite the high public profile of non-resident fathers protesting against the injustice of the legal system, the majority of couples arrange contact informally with only 15% using either the courts system or solicitors. Again social class differences were apparent here, with fathers employed in lower class occupations twice as likely to use court orders to arrange contact (Blackwell and Dawe, 2003). There is a lack of information about non-resident fathers who do not have and have never had any contact with their children, presumably because these men are less likely to agree to participate in the research process and because some may not know that they are a father. Therefore it is impossible to determine what factors have resulted in their (if paternity is known) non-contact.

⁸ See his discussion in Bradshaw *et al.*, (1999).

As public and political condemnation of non-contact has increased, some have become increasingly vocal about the restrictions and barriers they face in attempting to maintain a relationship with their children. Fathers4Justice have been instrumental in demonstrating against what they claim is bias against fathers remaining in contact within the legal system (Collier, 2005). Other 'barriers' to continued contact include, mothers acting as gatekeepers preventing contact, the costs of travelling long distances to see children, and difficulties in finding suitable accommodation to allow overnight visits (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999). Whilst the voices of fathers who want more contact have been made very public via groups such as Fathers4Justice, there is very little discussion or literature pertaining to fathers who have chosen to discontinue contact. Some fathers are happy with sporadic or lower levels of contact than they had when they were co-resident, in the research conducted by Blackwell and Dawe (2003) only half wanted to increase their levels of contact.

Payment of maintenance is another heated issue. Whilst the conservative government rather simplistically constructed non-resident fathers as 'feckless' and unwilling to shoulder their financial responsibilities (Williams, 1998; Westwood, 1996), Bradshaw *et al.* (1999) explored this issue in some depth and found that the situation was rather more complex. They found that fathers take a variety of factors into consideration. Ability to pay child support did not always result in actually paying child support and conversely some who were on very low or restricted incomes were happily paying what they could. Some regarded payment as their responsibility or duty, a way to demonstrate love, or a means to ensure contact. Others felt that their financial obligation was to their second families or that the child's new stepfather should be financially responsible, some refused to pay because their ex-wife had had an affair, and in particular some refused to pay if they could not have contact with their child. Thus, neither contact nor payments of maintenance were regarded as fixed moral obligations, but as negotiable commitments, adaptable to changing circumstances over time.

Overall, research tends to present a rather negative picture of the experience of non-resident fatherhood. Bradshaw *et al.* (1999: 225) state that non-resident fathers are 'men struggling to be the fathers of non-resident children', experiencing a deep

sense of loss, loneliness, and guilt, with many fearing that they will be forgotten by their children or replaced by a stepfather (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999; Castelain-Meunier, 2002). The transition to non-residency is often the first time that the majority of fathers are in a position where they have to form a direct relationship with their children. Smart and Neale (1999b) found that for most fathers there was simply a continuation of their previous relationship with their children, children were returned to their mother if they fell ill, or the fathers would not wash the children's clothes for example. Mothers tended to retain overall responsibility for the child, often pointing out the child's needs and still performing a 'managerial' role. Alternatively for others, albeit a minority, becoming a non-resident father presented the first opportunity to construct a direct relationship with their children and to feel and act like an involved parent for the first time. They generally reported an improvement in the quality of the relationship with their children. However, although non-residency for these fathers provided new opportunities to reformulate the nature of the paternal relationship, this was often accompanied by the emotional difficulties of adjusting to the children's absence for substantial periods of the week. Some reported a feeling of discontinuity, a kind of on/off parenting and they mentioned the difficulties in reconciling two very different lifestyles.

2.5.2 Stepfathers.

In contrast to non-resident biological fathers, there is little public discussion about stepfathers and it is generally unclear if stepfathers are regarded as 'fathers' or 'parents' in any meaningful sense at all. Researchers have commented on the lack of normative guidelines for the role of stepfather since the 1970s (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994), and it seems that despite the recent increase in the number of men becoming stepfathers (Ferri, 2005) there is still some general reluctance to publicly acknowledge their existence.

The research literature pertaining to stepfathers and stepfamilies is overwhelmingly American (Amato, 1994; Zill, 1994; Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994; Marsiglio, 1995, 2004a), tends to focus on the developmental outcomes for children and a social psychological approach predominates. To my knowledge, no qualitative study has

focussed specifically on British stepfathers to date, although notable studies of British stepfamilies include Burgoyne and Clark (1982, 1984) and Ribbens McCarthy *et al.* (2003). Ferri and Smith (1998) investigated the demographic characteristics of stepfathers using data from the National Child Development Study, but as a cohort study the sample is not representative of stepfathers of all ages and is based on data collected in 1991.

Due to findings which suggest that children raised in stepfamilies are at greater risk of a range of behavioural difficulties (see for example, McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994), the assumption is that the nature or type of parenting provided by stepparents is different to that provided by biological parents and that the structure of the stepfamily is inherently problematic. Those adopting a Neo-Darwinist approach (Daly and Wilson, 1994; Popenoe, 1994, 2005) claim that the lack of a genetic tie, renders stepfathers more likely to abuse and less likely to love their stepchildren. Thus stepfathers could never provide the same quality of parenting as biological fathers and the stepfamily is automatically and inherently problematic for child welfare (Daly and Wilson, 1994; Popenoe, 1994, 2005).

However, much of the early research about stepfamilies and step-parenting has been criticised for adopting a 'deficit approach' (Gamache, 1997) from the outset. The reliance on clinical samples resulted in biased findings and over inflated the problems reported by stepfamily members (Marsiglio, 2004b). Ganong and Coleman (2004) point out that statistical analyses are often flawed, because of the extent of diversity within the category of 'stepfamily', which results in difficulties in obtaining a large enough homogenous group to use for analysis. Gamache (1997) is particularly critical of the tendency to tally parenting 'scores' using data from large scale surveys and argues 'the step-relationship appears destined to be constructed according to the dominant cultural norm of the nuclear family, examined through the 'parental' lens, and found to be 'less than'. (Gamache, 1997:42). She points out that the assumption that stepparents should parent in the same way as biological parents obscures the wide range of relationship styles and attachments formed in stepfamilies.

The 'stepfamily' *potentially* provides a different context in which co-resident social fathers perform their role. I have emphasised *potentially* because stepfamilies vary enormously in structure. In the past the majority of stepfamilies were formed after the death of a parent (Burgoyne and Clark, 1982). This is no longer the case however, since contemporary stepfamily formation tends to follow the divorce or separation of one or both of the adults. As a result, the non-resident biological father may remain in contact with the children and the social father may have non-resident biological children as well as resident biological children. At its most complex the social family structure spans across more than one household, contains multiple 'parents', and a mixture of both co-resident biological/stepchildren and non-resident biological/stepchildren. Alternatively, however, the structure of the social family may also closely resemble that of the biologically intact family, consisting of two co-resident 'parents' and children. Thus, a common theme in the literature stresses the structural and relational diversity of stepfamilies (Allan and Crow, 2001; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003).

Evidence suggests that stepfathers vary in their understandings of their position and role in relation to the children. Burgoyne and Clark (1982, 1984) found that for the majority of the stepfathers they interviewed, the lack of a genetic tie with their stepchildren was unimportant. These stepfathers were committed to recreating an 'ordinary family' and being the children's 'real dad'. Adopting the role of breadwinner was deemed particularly important, as this was a way the stepfathers could demonstrate their commitment to the children. However, the physical or symbolic presence of the biological non-resident father did result in some feeling insecure about their relationship with their children. Recent research (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003) found that stepfathers' understanding of their position and role varied according to social class. British working class social fathers tended to adopt an inclusive perspective regarding all of their co-resident children as 'their own' regardless of a biological connection. They saw themselves as 'fathers', not 'stepfathers' and characterised their role in relation to the wide range of parenting behaviours they performed as well as financial provision for and the presence of an emotional relationship with their stepchildren. In contrast, middle class stepfathers assigned a greater importance to the genetic link between parent and child regarding this as a necessary condition for the development of an emotional connection. Middle

class social fathers tended to emphasise how they felt less close to their stepchildren, characterising social fathering as distant or disengaged.

The type of role that the social father adopts in relation to the stepchildren, however does seem to be subject to negotiation, influenced by the perceptions and actions of other family members, and in particular the continued presence of the non-resident biological father (Burgoyne and Clark, 1982). Step children may reject the social father's attempts to develop a paternal role, particularly if the non-resident biological father is still in contact (Cooney, 1994; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994; Fine *et al.*, 1999; Smart and Neale, 1999b; MacDonald and DeMaris, 2002). Smart and Neale (1999b) found that when divorced couples were committed to maintaining a co-parenting arrangement, the resident social father was not expected to adopt a paternal role or to be involved to any great degree. However, if the divorced couple had adopted a custodial parenting arrangement, where the non-resident biological father had limited contact and little parental authority, stepfathers were more likely to take on parenting responsibilities. A recent American study found that social fathers felt more 'fatherlike' and found it easier to establish a parental role if the non-resident biological father was no longer in contact (Marsiglio, 2004a). The route into stepfatherhood also seems an important factor. Burgoyne and Clark (1982) found that those who did not have biological children prior to becoming a stepfather found it difficult initially to adjust to the demands of children and felt generally unprepared.

A final issue that needs to be considered is the stereotype of the stepfather as abusive. This issue is one that tends to arise in both public discussions of stepfathers and within the academic literature. Fathers' rights groups such as Fathers4Justice have publicly condemned stepfathers. During an interview Matt O'Connor implied that stepfathers are potential serial killers, with his comment 'Mum might go out and bring back the next Ian Huntley or the next Ian Brady' (Arena Magazine, 2006). Similarly, in relation to sexual abuse, Burgess (1997) made the rather alarming claim that one in six stepfathers have sexual contact with stepdaughters compared to one in 30 biological fathers.

The extent of child abuse is notoriously difficult to establish in precise terms (Frosh, 2002; Featherstone, 2004a). Difficulties arise from problems inherent in defining

what actions or behaviours count as abuse, determining who the perpetrator is, and given the sensitive and ‘taboo’ nature of child abuse, the extent of under-reporting is largely unknown (Cawson, 2002). It is therefore unsurprising that mixed findings are reported. However despite these difficulties, recent research findings suggest that the reality is rather more complex.

Evidence from a survey carried out by the NSPCC (Cawson *et al.*, 2000, Cawson, 2002) suggests that stepfathers are not significantly more likely to be violent or sexually abusive than biological fathers. Whilst respondents were less likely to report that they regarded their stepfather as a source of positive support in comparison to their biological father, both step and biological fathers were equally likely to be named as the perpetrators of violence and sexual abuse. Additionally, biological and stepfathers were almost equally as likely to be named as someone the respondent was ‘sometimes really afraid of’ (18% and 21% respectively). The survey also highlighted the extent to which sexual abuse in particular is often carried out by family members other than fathers or father figures. There is a growing awareness of the extent to which child sexual abuse is often perpetrated by siblings or adolescent family members in particular (Frosh, 2002). Cawson *et al.* (2000) confirmed this, finding that 43% of respondents named a sibling (birth and/or step) as perpetrators. Therefore, as Cawson states ‘It would be clearly inappropriate to regard stepfathers as a high risk group for child maltreatment’ (2002:11). Public discourse positioning stepfathers as the main perpetrators of child abuse masks the extent to which other males (either family members or males known to the family) are abusive towards children.

However, despite evidence to suggest that stepfathers are no more likely to abusive than biological fathers (or other males within or known to the family) Ian Duncan Smith recently linked stepfathers to abusive behaviour during debates over the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill.

‘We also know about the problems surrounding those whom are loosely described as stepfathers, but whom we might call “friendly father arrivals”. Such men are not related to or involved with the child, and levels of abuse can follow – not sexual abuse necessarily, but

violence, possibly against the mother' (Hansard, 2008 columns 166-168).

Therefore, despite evidence to the contrary, stepfathers still tend to be publicly linked to child abuse and violence to a greater extent than other fathers.

2.5.3 Lone Fathers.

Lone fathers occupy a similar position to stepfathers in public discourse and academic research, in that they are notable by their absence (O'Brien 1982, Gingerbread 2001, Russell, 2001). A few studies were conducted in the 1970s and 1980s (Hipgrave, 1982; O'Brien, 1982, 1987), and one PhD thesis was published in 1994 (Barker, 1994), with the most recent study conducted by the single parent charity Gingerbread (2001).

What is striking is that in some respects very little seems to have changed for contemporary lone fathers in comparison to those interviewed during the 1970s. The Gingerbread (2001) study found that 61.7% of lone fathers felt that society held negative attitudes towards them and only 14% felt they were viewed positively (2001: 5). Similarly, O'Brien (1987, 1982) and Hipgrave (1982) found that lone fathers are subject to complex and contradictory responses from others, which included both support and suspicion. Thus despite a shift in attitudes favouring involved fatherhood, it seems current attitudes do not extend to acknowledging fathers can be sole carers (Burghes *et al.*, 1997). Some lone fathers claim that negative attitudes can lead to an increased sense of isolation and a reduction in their self-esteem. In the Gingerbread study, an overall feeling of being invisible was articulated, as was anger at being implicated in negative assumptions about lone parenthood and being seen as a 'problem'. In contrast, the 14% who felt they were viewed positively reported an increase in self-esteem and generally felt better about their role as a lone father. This highlights the degree to which social attitudes and interactions can impact on how fathers make the transition into lone parenthood and cope with the demands of everyday life (Gingerbread, 2001).

As with stepfathers, the different routes men take into lone fatherhood and social class may affect the subsequent experience of lone parenthood. O'Brien (1982) interviewed 59 lone fathers in London categorising the fathers into three groups, conciliatory negotiators, hostile seekers and passive acceptors, according to their experiences.

Conciliatory negotiators tended to deal with any problems of single parenthood more easily and had a more positive outlook. O'Brien (1982) connected this to the way their marriage ended, their fathering role prior to divorce and their material circumstances. Those in this category had some degree of control over custody of the children and were mainly employed full time in professional occupations. Their marriages had ended through mutual agreement, the couple had adopted an egalitarian approach to parenting before separation and they tended to enjoy a more amicable relationship with their ex-partner after separation.

Hostile seekers were a more complex group, who tended to become more insecure about their masculinity post divorce. There was extensive hostility towards their ex-partners and some had fought for custody of the children in order to punish their wives for leaving or having an affair. However, despite different reasons to the conciliatory negotiators for the pursuit of custody, this group also had a more positive experience of lone parenthood.

Passive acceptors tended to have problems in adjusting to the demands of single parenthood. All fathers in this category had been deserted by their wives, they worked in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations, had larger families and experienced greater housing, money and health problems than the men in the other two groups. This group were also the most likely to express negative feelings towards their status as lone parents. O'Brien's (1982) study thus highlights that men who 'choose' to become lone fathers tend to have access to more material resources and that social class influences the experience of lone fatherhood.

Barker (1994) focussed on the gendered aspects of lone fatherhood, arguing that 'two forms of patriarchal masculinities were being practised' (1994: 237). Those he categorised as 'traditional patriarchs' retained the belief that childcare and domestic

responsibilities were the responsibility of women and were more likely to report problems with childcare (particularly the parenting of daughters), and as a result tended to rely on female assistance in relation to their parenting activities. The second group Barker (1994) labelled 'gender pioneers'. These lone fathers reported fewer difficulties, prioritised childcare and did not regard parenting as a mother's responsibility. Barker (1994) concludes that since both groups of men were much more involved as parents in comparison to when they were still married, that 'in certain circumstances 'men can mother' (1994: 238).

Thus findings suggest that the routes into lone fatherhood, the wider social context, social class and gender all influence the experience of lone parenthood for men.

2.5.4 Primary care-giver fathers.

The final 'group' of fathers that has received attention from both academics and the media are 'stay at home' (Doucet, 2006) or 'primary care giver' (Russell, 1987) fathers. Defining who is a 'primary care giving' or 'stay at home' father is a complex task (Doucet, 2006). Lone fathers are 'primary care giving' fathers by default, but they may or may not be 'stay at home' fathers depending on the extent to which they have retained involvement in paid employment. Some non-resident fathers may also be 'primary care giving' fathers albeit for limited periods of time. Early studies (Russell, 1987) tended to focus only on coupled primary care giving fathers who were solely responsible for childcare for at least twenty six hours per week. It is therefore difficult to establish exactly where the boundary should be drawn. In order to obtain as broad a sample as possible, Doucet (2006) relied on respondents' self definition recruiting fathers who identified as either single fathers (lone or non-resident fathers with joint custody), stay at home fathers or primary care giving fathers and who had spent at least one year as a primary care giver.

Russell's (1987) study of 37 Australian 'primary caregiver' fathers found that a substantial proportion of men experienced difficulties in adjusting to the role reversal, citing the tedious nature of housework and the constant demands of children as particularly problematic. Two fifths cited their loss of status as a breadwinner as

problematic, and some men found it difficult to cope with disparaging reactions from male friends and work colleagues. As a result only 6 out of the 37 were still primary caregivers two years after the initial study. Not all fathers found the experience negative however. Two fifths welcomed the opportunity to look after children claiming that they had benefited from the reduction in their breadwinning responsibilities, and women tended to be very supportive about primary care giving fathers.

Switching back to a more traditional gendered parenting arrangement was therefore the predominant pattern, particularly for those fathers who were younger, felt that circumstances had 'forced' them into becoming the primary care giver and had no paid employment whatsoever. However, all fathers who had rejected the primary caregiver role retained high levels of participation in childcare at the two year follow up interview.

The question of whether men can 'mother' has recently been explored by Doucet (2006) who spent three years recruiting a large sample (118) of Canadian primary care giving fathers. Focussing on three dimensions of responsibility; emotional, which relates to how the fathers nurture their children, community which relates to how and the extent to which fathers facilitate children's social activities, networks and growth and moral, which is conceptualised as 'the should's and ought's of what it currently means to be...a good father or a responsible father.' (Doucet, 2006: 219), Doucet arrives at the conclusion that in general primary care giving fathers are not mothers, nor do they provide mothering.

Doucet (2006) is not arguing that men cannot 'mother', but that primary care giving fathers in general do not perceive themselves as mothers, and that in many respects the fathers she interviewed were keen to point out the masculine aspects of the parenting they provided. There were differences (as well as some similarities) between the style of parenting the fathers provided in comparison to the children's mothers, and fathers were acutely aware of these. Doucet states

'Men view themselves as fathers, and their fathering practices and identities evolve in relation to those enacted by mothers. Thus, whilst

it is not always clear what the essence of fathering *is*, what is certain for men is that it *is not* mothering.’ (2006: 217, italics in the original).

Commenting on Connell’s (1995; 2000) theorisation of masculinities, Doucet rejects the conceptualisation of four key masculinities (hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalized) arguing that as primary care giver fathers ‘move between femininities and masculinities, between achieving some version of equality or symmetry with women while emphasising masculine differences...*men are, in fact, radically revisioning caring work, masculine conceptions of care, and ultimately our understandings of masculinities.*’ (2006: 238, italics in the original). Thus, according to Doucet primary care giving fathers do not ‘fit’ into any of these categorisations but rather ‘move constantly between them (2006: 238).

Thus, fathers are parenting in a gendered context and as a result, Doucet (2006) is critical of the tendency to ‘measure’ fathering in relation to mothering. Firstly, because mothering itself is a varied activity and experience. In short, there is no ‘ideal’ mother to compare fathers to. Her second objection is that viewing fathers through a ‘maternal lens’ tends to obscure and render invisible aspects of fathering which are important, such as the tendency for fathers to promote independence and playfulness for example.

Further, whilst Doucet argues that there are gendered differences in parenting, she claims ‘*differences do not always lead to disadvantages and difference does not always mean unequal.*’ (2006: 233, italics in the original). Given this, Doucet argues that establishing what an ‘equal’ division of labour would look like is extremely difficult and that perhaps a more fruitful approach is to consider how ‘one’s participation in domestic life allows for personal, social, economic, and political opportunities outside the home’ and that ‘what should be emphasised is gender *symmetry* rather than gender equality.’ (2006: 233, italics in the original).

2.5.5 Multi-Father Families.

Having explored literature pertaining to fathers in different family situations, there is one final and much neglected issue to be discussed. One consequence of family diversity is that children are far more likely to have two male parents, a biological father and a stepfather. To date research has largely ignored the extent to which fathers parenting in 'multi-father' families (Marsiglio and Hinojosa, 2007) interact, negotiate and co-operate in relation to their parenting practices. This is an area about which very little is known.

Marsiglio's (2004b) study of American stepfathers did explore this issue. He argues that one of the overlooked aspects of stepfathering is the extent to which they act as what he calls 'father ally.' He claims that the concept of 'father ally' refers to the wide range of different behaviours that stepfathers engage in which support the relationship between non-resident biological father and child. He reports that some stepfathers actively promoted the father-child relationship by smoothing over difficulties between the birth parents, taking the biological father's side and putting forward his position, saying positive things about the biological father to the child, making sure the biological father is included and is informed of events in the child life and so. However, Marsiglio (2004b) also includes inaction, in the sense that he claims stepfathers are acting as father ally in more indirect ways, such as not making negative comments about him to the children, or maintaining distance when the biological father comes round for contact visits. I assess Marsiglio's (2004b) concept of 'father ally' in Chapter Seven, where I explore how fathers in multi-father families interact and negotiate a co-parental relationship with each other.

Chapter 3 Methods

3.1 Introduction.

This Chapter provides a discussion of the methodological issues related to this research. In Chapter Two I argued that although increased diversity within fatherhood is recognised, there remains a dearth of statistical data upon which to establish just how many fathers are following individualised ‘non-traditional’ paternal careers. Further, I argued that the subjective experiences of fathers in different family situations, has not been adequately explored. Therefore, in order to fulfil the research aims and objectives of this study a mixed methods approach has been adopted. First, a secondary analysis of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) has been undertaken in order to compare the parenting and partnering behaviours of six cohorts of British fathers. Secondly, this quantitative analysis is complemented and extended with qualitative data from in-depth interviews conducted with twenty-five male parents, which explore the subjective experiences of fathers in a diverse array of family situations.

The Chapter is in three broad sections. The first section gives a brief overview of the philosophical underpinnings and the practicalities of quantitative and qualitative research methodology, before going on to discuss how the quantitative and qualitative findings have been integrated in this study. The aim in this section is not to provide an exhaustive discussion of the ‘paradigm wars’ during which some argued that qualitative and quantitative methods could not and should not be combined in one study, since these debates are discussed in detail elsewhere (Bryman, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). A pragmatic approach has become more accepted and widespread, whereby different methods are used to answer different research questions (Bryman, 1992; Silverman, 2005), and this is the approach taken in this research. The debate about mixed methods studies has therefore moved onto discussions of the technical aspects of integration (Bryman, 2006; 2007).

The second section discusses the quantitative method used in this study, a secondary analysis of the BHPS. After providing a rationale for the selection of the BHPS, the discussion moves onto providing details about the technical and practical issues involved in conducting the statistical analysis. The third and final section of this Chapter, discusses the qualitative in-depth interviews, the sampling strategies used, the characteristics of the interviewees and the structure of the interview itself. An exploration of interview dynamics and research relationships concludes the Chapter.

3.2 Quantitative Research.

Quantitative methods such as surveys and experiments have traditionally been associated with positivism. Positivists argue that the social sciences should adopt methods of enquiry that closely resemble the natural science model. One of the central assumptions of positivism is that social reality has an objective and independent existence, external to the individual. Given this ontological assumption, it then follows that social scientists can, through the use of particular research methods uncover 'objective truths' about social phenomena. In order for objective and hence valid data to be generated, the researcher must strive to eliminate all potential sources of bias, including that of their own values and interpretations (Payne and Payne, 2004). Often enquiry is focussed on hypothesis testing and the establishment of causal relationships between one or more variables (Bryman, 1992). Hence much quantitative research is based on deductive reasoning. Hypotheses or theories are generated about the social phenomenon under investigation and then empirical data is collected against which theories are tested in order to corroborate, refute or establish patterns of regularities (Payne and Payne, 2004).

Surveys are widely used within sociology by those advocating adherence to the natural science model because of their 'capacity for generating quantifiable data on large numbers of people who are known to be representative of a wider population' (Bryman, 1992: 11). Quantifiable data is that which can be presented and analysed in a statistical format. Thus, survey questions are commonly 'closed' allowing respondents to select from a limited range of pre-formulated responses (De Vaus, 2002). Sampling is an important consideration, since the intention is often to

produce knowledge that can be generalised to the wider population. Hence sampling strategies are often probabilistic, based on individuals drawn at random from the population under investigation. Statistical checks are made in order to establish just how far the sample is representative of the wider population (De Vaus, 2002).

Within survey research, concepts are particularly important. In order to maintain objectivity concepts such as 'family' must be specifically defined and operationalised. Standardised definitions must be applied throughout the research in order to maintain reliability. Therefore, we must know exactly what a family is in order to render the phenomena observable and hence available for study and measurement. Standardised definitions also allow results to be cross-checked with other research findings, in order to establish the replicability of the results and confirm causal hypotheses (De Vaus, 2002).

3.3 Qualitative Research.

In contrast, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation have been associated with humanist approaches such as interpretivism or social-constructionism. Interpretivists reject the notion that there is an independent social reality. Social phenomena are not independent of humans, since they require us thinking about them for their existence (Woodiwiss, 2005). Thus there is no 'objective' social reality about which knowledge can be obtained.

Given this refutation of an objective independent social reality, much qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings and interpretations of specific social actors, to explore how these social actors understand and experience their social reality. Thus in contrast to survey research, qualitative research would seek to explore how research participants define, understand, experience and 'do family' (Morgan, 1996).

Qualitative enquiry tends to follow the logic of inductive reasoning, that is, ideas, concepts and theories emerge from the data collected rather than having been set out prior to data collection (Payne and Payne, 2004). Qualitative methods such as in-

depth interviewing are used in order to explore the subjective life worlds of social actors, and often produce a voluminous amount of discursive data. Given this, the analytical approach and sampling strategy is quite different from that of the positivist tradition. Samples tend to be much smaller in size, and non-probabilistic (e.g. snowballing, purposive) sampling strategies are often used. The collection of discursive data to provide 'thick description' (Geertz, 1994) about the subjective meanings of social actors necessitates an interpretative approach to data analysis. There are a variety of ways in which interview data is analysed (see for example Silverman, 2005), however most commonly, interview data is analysed to establish emergent themes within the data, which are then coded and organised thematically. The use of small non-probabilistic samples limits the extent to which findings can be said to be representative of and hence generalised to the wider population (Bryman, 1992).

This brief overview of the key differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods has to some degree, and like most methods textbooks, presented each in a dichotomised and over-simplified fashion. Bryman (1992) points out that real life social research is a rather more complicated endeavour. Researchers may adopt qualitative data collection methods, but analyse the data and present the findings in a quantified format for example. Surveys often include 'open' questions and thus generate data that requires interpretive analysis (De Vaus, 2002). The acknowledgement that real life research can be 'messy' in practice is one factor underpinning the pragmatic approach to mixed methods studies. Proponents of the pragmatic approach therefore reject adherence to one particular methodological tradition and argue that different methods can be combined within the same study if the research questions warrant this. (Bryman, 1992; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Teddlie and Taskakkori, 2003; Silverman, 2005).

3.4 Integration.

Bryman (2006) argues that although mixed methods studies have become more common within the social sciences the specific methodological approach is not always clearly stated or explained by researchers. Researchers need to explain when

the decision to use multiple methods was taken, how the findings from the different methods are to be integrated within the study and in what order or sequence the data collection and analysis occurred.

Bryman also argues that too often ‘genuine integration’ does not occur within mixed methods studies. By genuine integration he means ‘how far do mixed methods researchers analyze, interpret, and write up their research in such a way that the quantitative and qualitative components are mutually illuminating?...It involves the question of whether the components of a mixed methods investigation are related to each other or whether they are either totally or largely independent of each other’. (Bryman, 2007: 8). Upon finding that the majority of those he interviewed had some difficulty in genuinely integrating the data within mixed methods studies, particularly at the writing up stage, Bryman offers an insight as to what a genuinely integrated mixed method study might ‘look’ like: ‘In genuinely integrated studies, the quantitative and the qualitative findings will be mutually informative. They will talk to each other, much like a conversation or debate, and the idea is then to construct a negotiated account of what they mean together.’ (2007: 21).

3.5 Typologies.

A variety of rather complex typologies explaining and defining the various ‘types’ of integration of data within mixed methods studies have been formulated (Greene *et al.*, 1989; Cresswell, 2002). The typology devised by Greene *et al.* (1989) in particular has proved popular (Bryman, 2006).

Greene *et al.*’s typology:

1. *Triangulation*: convergence, corroboration, correspondence or results from different methods.
2. *Complementarity*: ‘seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from another’.

3. *Development*: ‘seeks to use the results from one method to help develop or inform the other method, where development is broadly construed to include sampling and implementation, as well as measurement decisions’.
4. *Initiation*: ‘seeks the discovery of paradox and contradiction, new perspectives of [sic] frameworks, the recasting of questions or results from one method with questions or results from the other method’.
5. *Expansion*: ‘seeks to extend the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components’ (1989: 259).

The following section provides a summary of the order in which the quantitative and qualitative research was carried out in this study, in addition to explicating how the findings from each have been integrated. The integration of the quantitative and qualitative data in this research would broadly fall into three of the categories in Greene *et al*’s (1989) typology outlined above, namely, complementarity, development and expansion.

3.6 Data Integration in this Study.

The primary reason for adopting a mixed methods approach is theoretical. Irwin’s (2000) argument that changes in family composition are not just a contextual backdrop for ‘doing’ family, but are also part and parcel of the ways in which individuals ‘do’ family, has been influential here. From this perspective, ‘doing’ family and fatherhood needs to be explored at both the macro and the micro levels. This research does this. At the macro level, a secondary analysis of a large- scale quantitative dataset allows an examination of the broader changes in the parenting and partnering behaviour of successive generations of British fathers. At the micro level, a smaller scale in-depth qualitative study permits an exploration of the experiences and subjective understandings of British fathers who had followed ‘non-traditional’ paternal careers. Adopting a mixed methods approach in Greene *et al*’s. words ‘expands the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components’ (1989: 259). Additionally, the quantitative and qualitative findings complement and enhance each other, facilitating a more holistic perspective in relation to processes of individualisation. The secondary analysis of fathers’ paternal careers was completed

before the qualitative interviews were conducted. The findings from the secondary analysis informed the sampling decisions for the qualitative interviews. The secondary analysis indicated that stepfatherhood is an increasingly common experience for British fathers. Securing interviews with men who either were or had been stepfathers, at some point in their paternal career was therefore, particularly important given the lack of existing research focussing on this group of male parents.

3.7 Secondary Analysis.

Secondary analysis is perhaps best regarded as an approach rather than a specific method. It refers to the analysis of any form of data (quantitative survey datasets and qualitative interview transcripts are just two examples) that has been either collected and/or already analysed by someone else (Dale *et al.*, 1988, Robson, 2002). In the following section I discuss the rationale for the choice and selection of the BHPS.

3.7.1 Rationale for choosing the BHPS.

The decision to adopt an approach based on that of Juby and Le Bourdais (1998) and reconstruct the ‘paternal careers’ of British men was made before a suitable dataset had been selected. Thus I already had a list of criteria to assist in the selection process. Firstly, I needed a dataset that contained relatively detailed information about the parental and partnership status of British men. Secondly, I needed a dataset that collected this type of information from the *same* individuals at each wave of data collection, namely a longitudinal panel survey. And lastly, given that I wanted to compare the parenting and partnering behaviour of different generations or cohorts of men, I needed a dataset with a sample containing men of different ages.

The UK Data Archive⁹ both houses and provides detailed documentation about a large variety of survey datasets that are available to download for secondary analysis. Some such as the General Household Survey are produced and deposited by the Office for National Statistics, whereas others, such as the BHPS and the Cohort

⁹ For further information visit <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>

Studies, are produced and deposited by academic research teams. The UK Data Archive was therefore an obvious place to search for a suitable dataset.

Seven longitudinal survey datasets were available, three of which were ruled out immediately. The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) was rejected because it had only just started and as such was not longitudinal at that point in time, whereas the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) were both rejected on the grounds that they did not contain enough detailed information about male parents.

The Families and Children study (FACS) initially seemed to be a promising resource. However, this dataset was also rejected because it only became a panel study, from 1999 onwards. Additionally, the FACS is not representative of all families in the UK at all waves of data collection. FACS started as the Survey of Low Income Families (SOLIF), and higher income families were only added into the sample from 2001¹⁰. This left three datasets, the BHPS and the two cohort studies, The National Child Development Study (NCDS) and British Cohort Study (BCS).

Both the BHPS and the two cohort studies have been used to explore and provide demographic profiles of male parents (Ferri, 1994; Ferri and Smith, 1998; Ferri, 2005, used the Birth Cohort Studies; Clarke, 1997; Rendall *et al.*, 1999; Clarke *et al.*, 2000, all used the BHPS). All are longitudinal panel surveys. However, there are some major differences between the cohort studies and the BHPS. Each of the cohort studies contains sample members who are all the same age (the NCDS sample were all born in one week in March 1958, and in the BCS all sample members were born in one week in April 1970¹¹). Whilst this confers the advantage of very large sample sizes (Clarke *et al.*, 2000) a resulting disadvantage is that the cohort studies samples are not representative of men of all ages within the UK. Thus both datasets would have to be prepared and analysed in order to compare the parenting and partnering behaviour of men in different cohorts. The BHPS sample members in contrast, are representative of the British population in terms of age. Therefore, a comparative

¹⁰ See <http://www.esds.ac.uk/longitudinal/access/facs/14427.asp> for further details.

¹¹ See <http://www.esds.ac.uk/longitudinal/access/bcs70/133229.asp> and <http://www.esds.ac.uk/longitudinal/access/ncds/133004.asp> for more details.

approach can be adopted using only the one dataset, saving a substantial amount of time.

The BHPS and the cohort studies also differ in the frequency of data collection. Panel members in the BHPS have been interviewed annually since 1991, whereas those in the NCDS and the BCS are interviewed at less regular intervals¹². Whilst all three surveys have collected retrospective fertility and partnering information from sample members, the cohort surveys rely on their respondents' ability to accurately remember any changes in household and family composition over a longer time period. This can increase the potential for inaccurate reporting, thus affecting the validity of the data (Gardner, 2001).

Given the considerations discussed above the BHPS was therefore selected as best suited to the aims and objectives of this study.

3.7.2 The BHPS.

The BHPS is a nationally representative panel survey, containing approximately 5,000 households and 10,000 individuals. The survey has been conducted annually since 1991, collecting information at both the household and the individual level¹³. Retrospective conjugal and fertility data was collected from each original sample member (OSM) at the second wave of data collection in 1992 (Wave B). This yielded detailed information including the month and year each individual had entered into a marriage or cohabiting union and the month and year that they separated, divorced or became widowed. The month and year of birth of biological, adopted, foster¹⁴ and step children was also collected, in addition to the month and year the children both entered and left the household. In addition to this, prospective panel data has been collected annually from 1991 through to 2004¹⁵ (Waves A through to N), yielding information about changes in marital status, births, and

¹² The NCDS has collected data from panel members at age 7, 11, 16, 23, 33, 41-42 and 46; the BCS has collected data at ages 5, 10, 16, 26, 30 and 34.

¹³ For further detailed survey documentation visit, www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/doc/

¹⁴ Foster children have not been included in the analysis.

¹⁵ Wave 14 (N) conducted in 2004 was the most recent wave available at the time of the final analysis.

individuals moving into or out of the household. From this retrospective and prospective panel data each individual's 'paternal career' (Juby and Le Bourdais, 1998) could be reconstructed, by documenting changes in household composition and movements into and out of different family situations.

3.7.3 Sample Selection.

Whilst the BHPS contains a variable amount of information about individuals born between 1899 and 2004, the analysis is based on a sub-sample of 2,600, (2,021 became parents) men who were born between 1st January 1920 and 31st December 1979. The decision to exclude men born before 1920 was based on a variety of factors. Firstly, since the retrospective relationship and fertility data were collected in 1992, the BHPS does not contain a representative sample of men born prior to 1920 since the majority would have died before the survey started. Of those still living the youngest would have been 72 years old in 1992 and prior research (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000; Simpson, 2005) has noted that older individuals may have difficulty in accurately recalling detailed information about past life events. Upon checking the data, only 209 men born prior to 1920 had complete relationship and fertility records, thus the decision was made to exclude all those born before 1920. Similarly, only 19 men born from 1980 onwards had become fathers and given this is a very small number, these have also been excluded from the analysis.

After extracting all male sample members born between 1920 and 1979, those with incomplete retrospective and/or panel data were then excluded. Whilst this further decreases the representativeness of the final sample (as discussed further below); the main aim of this analysis was to reconstruct the paternal career of each individual, and then conduct a descriptive analysis, therefore complete detailed information was a necessity.

Complete information was available for 2,600 men¹⁶ (aged between 24 and 84 years old at the 14th Wave (N) of the survey in 2004) and of these 2,021 either were or had

¹⁶ Although men who died during the course of the survey have been included if complete information was available up to the time of their death.

been parents (biological, step or adoptive fathers) at some point during their life course. An upper age limit was not utilised because men can become biological fathers and/or social fathers at any time up until their death (Hagestad and Call, 2007). All sample members were then divided into six cohort groupings according to their year of birth.

Table 3.1 Number of Men in each Birth Cohort and Age Range at Wave N.

Birth Cohort		N	Age Range at Wave N
1	1920-29	375	75 to 84
2	1930-39	356	65 to 74
3	1940-49	501	55 to 64
4	1950-59	527	45 to 54
5	1960-69	490	35 to 44
6	1970-79	351	25 to 34

Placing individuals into 10 year birth cohort categories provided sufficient numbers within each category to perform a meaningful analysis.

3.7.4 Limitations.

Few studies have explored the fertility and/or parenting histories of British men (Burghes *et al.*, 1997; Clarke, 1997; Clarke *et al.*, 2000), and even fewer have included stepfathers in their analyses (Ferri, 1994; Ferri and Smith, 1998). Whilst this is due in part to the more recent ‘discovery’ of fathers, fathering and fatherhood as a worthy focus of research (Dermott, 2008); it is also due to the problems inherent in attempting to collect accurate and representative data about male parents. In this section I discuss the limitations applicable to surveys in general, as well as those specific to the BHPS and those resulting from how I selected the sub-sample of men from within the BHPS dataset.

3.7.5 Under and over-reporting.

Obtaining accurate estimates of male fertility and parenthood is a problem for major surveys both in Britain and across the world (Rendall *et al.*, 1999, Clarke *et al.*, 2000; Cabrera *et al.*, 2004; Clarke and O'Brien, 2004).

The first problem is that of the under reporting of children. Under reporting can occur as a result of the fact that unlike women¹⁷, men may be unaware that they are the biological parents of children. Additionally, even if aware, some men may be reluctant to report that they are the biological fathers of children. Clarke and O'Brien note that in the BHPS, 'non reporting is the major source of omission for non marital births' with 36% of births outside marriage remaining unreported (2004: 43; see also Clarke, 1997: 16; and Rendall *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, obtaining reliable estimates of the proportion of biological fathers is a difficult task, and as result men who no longer reside or who have never resided with their children are more likely to be under represented.

Further, a seldom-mentioned factor is that the extent of biological fatherhood can also be over-reported. A study conducted by Bellis *et al.*, (2005) estimates that up to 30% of men, may be unknowingly parenting children with whom they have no genetic relationship. Thus, some men may report that they are the biological fathers of children, when in reality they are not.

3.7.6 Under-representation.

The under-reporting of children automatically results in the under representation of some fathers, particularly those who are non-resident. However, under reporting is not the only factor which has an influence on how representative the findings are.

The design of the survey and the sample recruitment are both important. It has been noted that men are more difficult to recruit and more likely to withdraw from

¹⁷ Although with contemporary fertility techniques, it is possible for women who have donated their eggs to be unaware of the existence of children born as result of their donation.

longitudinal surveys in comparison to women (Cabrera *et al.*, 2004). Although the BHPS endeavours to keep track of all original sample members, contact with some is inevitably lost. Since men are more likely to move out of the household upon separation or divorce (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999), they are more likely to be ‘lost’ to the survey. Additionally, as a household panel survey the BHPS focuses solely on private residences in Britain and therefore does not include or interview men who are in prison or other institutions. In excluding all sample members with incomplete information, my method of sample selection would therefore result in the under representation of the extent of both lone and non-resident fatherhood.

Since only the final year of a child leaving the household is recorded in the retrospective data, there may have been periods where both adults and children have moved repeatedly into and out of the household. Therefore, I could only track these changes from the panel data of the younger fathers. Again this would result in the under representation of the extent of both non-resident and lone fatherhood in particular.

A final limitation is that the BHPS sample, whilst nationally representative has a major disadvantage in that ethnic minority respondents make up less than 10 per cent of the sample. This makes the BHPS an unsuitable resource for examining variations in the paternal careers of men from different ethnic groups.

3.7.7 Families, Fathers and the Dilemmas of Definition.

As discussed earlier in this Chapter, quantitative methods or approaches to research are often characterised as ‘scientific’ due to the focus on the collection of ‘objective’ data and ‘facts’. Concepts, variables and units of analysis must be explicitly and clearly defined so that the reliability of findings can be verified through the replication of the research (Robson, 2002). Additionally, Cheal states ‘Defining the object of investigation, or unit of analysis...is necessary for purposes of clarification, because theorists often have different ideas about what it is they are studying...the term ‘family’ is often used to mean different things by different theorists’ (1999: 61). Cheal’s point is particularly relevant, since there is considerable debate as to how

‘family’ should be conceptualised and defined. Furthermore, this debate has considerable relevance for this study; given that some argue ‘The changing demography of the family makes its definition increasingly difficult’ (Clarke *et al.*, 2000: 24).

3.7.8 Defining Family and Household.

Cheal (1999: 59) outlines the ‘Parsonian model of family life’ with its attendant conception of ‘roles’, which was central to what he refers to as ‘standard sociological theory’. Within this model, the structural features of the ‘conventional nuclear family’ comprised of a married heterosexual adult couple and their children, all residing within the same household. This conceptualisation provided a relatively simple basis for definition since ‘the family’ and a specific location, namely the ‘household’ generally mapped rather neatly onto each other. In addition identifying ‘the father’ was a simple task; since legally and socially he was the man the children’s mother both lived with and was married to.

However, the proliferation of divorce, cohabitation, re-marriage etc. and the resulting diversity of often-complex family structures with family members residing in different households has rendered the Parsonian model problematic. If a defining feature of ‘the family’ is two parents, then ‘new’ family forms, such as lone parent households could not be categorised as ‘a family’ for example. As cohabitation and childbirth outside of marriage becomes more common than the reliance on marriage within the definition has become increasingly untenable and as Elliott (1991: 105) points out, ‘the family can no longer be seen as coming into being when a couple is married’. Serial monogamy, re-partnering and re-marriages have resulted in complex living arrangements and family networks across households. As a result researchers can no longer assume that all family members share a common household, or even hold shared perceptions of who counts as ‘family’ (Allan and Crow, 2001).

Attempts to deal with the dilemmas of defining 'families' using criteria such as marital status and residential arrangements, has resulted in a variety of arguments¹⁸, ranging from calls to abandon the term 'family' (Scanzoni, 1987) to arguing for a shift towards conceptualising families in terms of 'practices' rather than 'structures' (Morgan, 1996; 1999).

As a result of the dilemmas involved in defining 'family', the majority of surveys tend to take the unit of analysis to be individuals and/or households. The BHPS, as the name implies, takes the household as the unit of analysis, collecting detailed information about all household members. Thus whilst it is not possible to establish individuals subjective perceptions of their 'family', it is possible to determine household structures and 'types' based on who is co-resident and their relationship to other household members.

Recognising diversity and complexity, in contrast to fixed and stable notions of families and households is one thing. However, assigning labels to distinguish between different types of household is another matter entirely. The 'labels' for different family forms or types include: 'natural' or 'first time families' (Allan and Crow, 2001: 17), reconstituted, reconfigured and blended which have been used to describe stepfamilies (Coleman, 1994; Allan and Crow, 2001) and finally 'unclear' has been used to capture the permeable boundaries of families and households in general (Simpson, 1998: 24).

3.7.9 Defining Fathers.

Similar problems arise when attempting to define who is a father. As Cabrera *et al.* state 'The issue of who is a father is not as simple as that of deciding who is a mother. Fathers can be biological, both residential and non-residential, and social, both biologically related or romantically linked to the mother' (2004: 441).

To be legally defined as a stepfather, a man has to both co-reside with children to whom he is not biologically related and be married to their mother (Fine *et al.*,

¹⁸ For a thorough overview of these debates see Cheal (1999: 61-66)

1999). Early American research in particular tended to rely on marital status to define ‘stepfathers’ (see Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley, 1997, for a review of the early stepfamily literature). However, whilst the reliance on marital status has some utility since we can be more certain that these men have an ongoing commitment to the child, it excludes ‘stepfathers’ who are currently in a cohabiting union. A further problem when defining an individual as a stepfather is that he may not agree with this definition (Marsiglio, 1995; Edwards *et al.*, 2002; Eggebeen, 2002; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). Nor can we assume that other members of the family unit would consider him a stepfather, even if he defines himself as such (Allan and Crow, 2001).

The above issues are compounded somewhat by the lack of widely accepted terms for those ‘stepfathers’ who cohabit, although the term ‘*household father*’ has been adopted by some academics (Olah *et al.*, 2002). A more general and inclusive term is that of ‘*social father*’, which has been applied to those men who have some form of parental relationship with children to whom they are not biologically related (Tanfer and Mott, 1997; Hobson and Morgan, 2002). The label social father however, is easily confused with ‘social fathering’, which refers to the actual practices associated with being a father, and can be used therefore in reference to both biological and stepfathers.

Whilst these terms offer some description or definition of the current situation of fathers, they do not capture that many social or stepfathers for example, are also the biological fathers of either co-resident or non-resident children. We currently have no concepts or terms that can account for the multiple paternal roles or statuses attached to a particular individual. Thus, the use of the term social or stepfather tends to privilege one status above all others and presents a rather static and reified account of the individual’s experience as a father.

In sum, although the term household refers to a fixed social location and its use allows the application of definitions based on co residency, we still cannot be certain that all members of the household will regard each other as ‘family’ (VanEvery, 1999). Nor, can we be certain that a man co residing with children will necessarily regard himself as a ‘father’. Thus, although the concepts household and family

overlap to a certain degree, neither provides an infallible basis for definition (Allan and Crow, 2001). Therefore the current demographic and relational complexity of both family forms and fatherhood poses a unique set of challenges when attempting to perform any analysis of fathers and their households from existing survey data.

3.7.10 Definitions used in the secondary analysis.

In order to be as inclusive as possible, a combination of residential status (either co or non-resident) and the presence or absence of a genetic relationship with the children has been utilised in the categorisations for this study. The different paternal statuses and family situations used in this analysis are categorised and defined as follows:-

- ***Co-resident biological father***– (i) Both parents are co-resident and biologically related to all children within the household. The couple may be either married or cohabiting. This family situation has been categorised as a *Biological Family* (BIO).
- Or (ii) all co-resident children are biologically related to the co-resident father, but not the co-resident stepmother. The couple may be either married or cohabiting. This family situation has been categorised as a *Stepmother Family* (STEPMUM).
- (iii) The birth of a child to the couple within a stepmother family. This family situation has been categorised as a *Complex Stepfamily* (COMPLEX).
- ***Non-resident biological father*** (NR) – The father has at least one non-resident child of whom he is the biological father. He may be either single, that is living alone OR he may have entered into a co-residential partnership, but he has no co-resident children.

- ***Lone father*¹⁹** – A co-resident biological father raising co-resident children without a co-resident partner. This family situation has been categorised as a *Lone Father Family* (LP).
- ***Co-resident step father*²⁰** – The co-resident ‘father figure’ is not biologically related to any of the co-resident children, and may be either married or cohabiting with the children’s biological mother. This family situation has been categorised as a *Stepfather Family* (STEP).
- ***Co-resident dual father*** – (i) The birth of a child to the couple within a stepfather family results in a dual co-residential paternal status, being stepfather and biological father to the co-resident children. The couple may be either married or cohabiting. This family situation is categorised as a *Complex Stepfamily* (COMPLEX).
- Or (ii) A male lone parent and a female lone parent co reside, and each is the stepparent of the others co-resident children. The couple may be either married or cohabiting. This family situation has been categorised as a *Blended family* (BLEND).
- Or (iii) If this couple then have a baby together, the family situation is categorised as a *Complex Step Family* (COMPLEX).
- Or (iv) a father who co resides with a mixture of adoptive and biological children. This family situation has been categorised as a *Complex Family* (COMPLEX).
- ***Co-resident adoptive father*** – All co-resident children are not biologically related to either co-resident parent, and have been legally adopted by the co-resident parents. The couple may be either married or cohabiting. This family situation has been categorised as an *Adoptive Family* (ADOPT).

¹⁹ The BHPS did not ask questions about 50/50 shared care arrangements until wave 12 (L), and only 4 men in the sample had this type of care arrangement. Therefore, individuals have been categorised as lone parents if they are treated as such for social security benefit purposes.

²⁰ Some of the stepfathers particularly in the 3 oldest cohorts had legally adopted their stepchildren. However, they have been categorised as stepfathers for comparative purposes, since step parental adoption has been discouraged in Britain since the 1970s (Maclean and Eekelaar, 1997). None of the stepfathers in cohorts 5 and 6 had adopted their stepchildren.

The abbreviations in brackets in the typology above are those used in Figures 4.2-4.7 in Chapter Four, to denote the different types of family situation each individual either enters or leaves during his paternal career.

Below is an example of a paternal career.

BIO ----- NR ----- STEP ----- COMPLEX

In this example, the individual began his paternal career as a co-resident biological father within a biologically intact family (BIO). This family situation ended whilst the children were still less than 18 years of age and the individual moved out of the household becoming a non-resident biological father (NR). He subsequently re-partnered and became co-resident with a female lone parent and her biological children, becoming a co-resident stepfather, in a stepfather family (STEP). Finally, the couple had a baby together, and the individual became both a step and biological (dual) father within a complex stepfamily (COMPLEX). So in this example, the individual experienced three different *paternal statuses*; co-resident biological father, non-resident biological father and co-resident stepfather. He formed two coupled *family situations* during his paternal career. The first was a biologically intact family and the second a stepfather family. These changes in paternal status and family situation are treated as *transitions*, of which the above individual made three. The first when he became a single (non-resident) father, the second when he became a stepfather and the third at the birth of his biological child within the stepfather family.

Therefore, some men can make transitions whilst remaining co-resident within the same coupled family situation, because the birth or arrival of either step, adopted or biological children within the household changes their paternal status. Only transitions, which occurred whilst at least one biological, step, or adopted child was under 18, have been documented. Thus, if in the example above, the children in the biologically intact family had all reached adulthood when the individual separated or divorced, he would not be categorised as non-resident father. He would have made two transitions, experienced two paternal statuses and his paternal career would be depicted in Figures 4.2-4.7 in Chapter Four as:

BIO ----- STEP ----- COMPLEX

Since in Britain men who become co-resident stepfathers usually have no continuing legal obligations to their stepchildren after separation or divorce (Bainham, 1999) they have been categorised and denoted in Figures 4.2-4.7 in Chapter Four as SINGLE. However, if they have non-resident biological children who are still dependent, they then move back into an episode of single parenthood, denoted as NR if non-resident or LP if they become a lone father to their child. REJOIN denotes an individual who has moved back into the previous household/family situation in which they were co-resident.

3.8 Attitudes.

In addition to providing a descriptive analysis of the each individual's paternal career, I also explored attitudes towards fatherhood, gender and parenting. The analysis of the attitude statements in the BHPS both enriches the descriptive analysis and provides a context for the qualitative interview data. The aim is to explore the extent to which de-traditionalisation is occurring at the attitudinal level, as well as establishing if the attitudes of fathers differ according to the family situation they are in. The following section discusses which attitude statements have been selected, sampling issues and the categorisations adopted for the analysis.

3.8.1 Selection of attitude statements.

The BHPS includes two rotating 'sets' of attitude statements that are asked at every other wave of data collection. Individuals are asked to indicate how far they agree with each statement, with their responses recorded on a five point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree to Strongly Disagree. A full list of the attitude statements included in each wave is provided in Appendix A.

Three attitude statements were selected according to their relevance to the aims and objectives of this study:

1. Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother.
2. A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family.
3. A single parent can bring up children as well as a couple.

Statement 1 taps into attitudes about fatherhood and fathering. This statement is perhaps an obvious choice given the topic of this research. The second statement is one that is widely used²¹ to gauge attitudes towards the gendered division of labour. The third taps into attitudes about family composition and parenting.

3.8.2 Sampling for the attitude statement analysis.

The father's paternal careers were analysed before the attitude statements were considered. Initially, the intention was to match changes in household composition and paternal status to the attitude statements, to establish if the men's attitudes changed as they moved into and out of different family and parenting situations. Unfortunately this was not possible since the number of men who were in 'non-traditional' (stepfather, non-resident, lone) parenting situations each time the attitude statements were included was too small within each category. Thus in order to obtain a sufficient number for each category a second sub-sample of fathers has been drawn from all men interviewed at Wave M (2002/3).

Only men who are the fathers of dependent children have been included in this second sub-sample. They have been placed into categories according to the family and parenting situation they were in at the time of interview, following the same procedure and labelling conventions as for the paternal career sample and analysis. Thus the second sub-sample is based on cross-sectional data only.

²¹ The same statement is used in the British Attitudes Survey (see Crompton and Lyonette, 2008) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) (see Crompton and Harris, 1997).

Whilst using cross-sectional data did result in increased numbers of fathers within each category, the proportion of men who were lone fathers remained small, as did the number of men who had been lone parents, but had re-partnered either forming a stepmother family or a complex stepfamily. I therefore made the decision to combine this small number of men into the category lone father. Evidence suggests that fathers who have been the primary caregivers tend to retain a more involved role in childcare and domestic work even when returning to full time employment or re-partnering (Russell, 1987; Ferri and Smith, 1998). Therefore, behaviourally these fathers are likely to be similar to those who were lone fathers at the time of the survey interview. However, I checked their responses in order to determine if they differed significantly to the other lone fathers. There were very few differences, thus, I am confident that grouping the fathers in this manner has not affected the results of the analysis.

This cross-sectional sample has been used in order to explore the attitudes of fathers in different family and parenting situations for all 3 of the selected attitude statements. However, the longitudinal sample has also been used to analyse the first attitude statement relating to father involvement in order to establish the levels of agreement within each birth cohort each time the attitude statement was asked.

3.9 Interviews.

The bulk of the findings presented in this study are based on in-depth interviews conducted with 25 male parents between August 2005 and June 2006. This section will discuss the issues and decisions made throughout the research process, in relation to recruitment and sampling, the male parents' characteristics, and the interview process itself.

3.9.1 In-Depth Interviews.

I adopted an in depth interview technique in order to obtain information about the paternal careers and parenting experiences of the male parents. This method is a useful resource to obtain a rich description of peoples' lives and experiences (Chamberlayne *et al.*, 2000, Geertz, 1994). Information about issues that the researcher may not have thought of can be uncovered and investigated at greater depth. Notions of objectivity are not considered of paramount importance since the aim is to uncover the subjective experiences, interpretations and meanings that the interviewee as an individual lays claim to (Robson, 2002). The interview data complements the statistical data since unlike qualitative methods, quantitative surveys cannot collect data that would enable us to explore fatherhood conceptualised in terms of processes or practices, as this requires both detailed and subjective data. Qualitative methods therefore, can allow a focus on complexity, fluidity and subjectivity as well as allowing a focus on individual agency (Seale, 1998).

3.9.2 Solo or joint interviews?

The tendency to either solely or mainly interview women in much research about parenting and 'family' has been criticised (McKee and O'Brien, 1982). As a result, there has been a growth of studies which have elicited the accounts of men (Barker, 1994; Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999; Dermott, 2003b; Marsiglio, 2004b) and an emerging trend to interview couples, both individually and together (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003; Doucet, 2006). One advantage of interviewing couples together, is that the interview dynamics can reveal processes of negotiation and decision making between couples, as well as 'providing richer, more detailed and validated accounts than those generated by individuals' (Valentine, 1999: 68). Given that the theoretical framework for this study places particular emphasis on the increasingly negotiated character of intimate life, I did consider if it might be advantageous to interview other family members like Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, (2003).

However, I needed to include men in my sample who had parented in a range of different family types and situations, and who would have any number of ex-partners and children all residing in different households. Prior research (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003) has noted the difficulties in securing interviews with family members in different households. Thus this option was rejected given the practicalities involved in establishing contact, securing agreement and scheduling interviews in the relatively short time frame within which the study had to be completed. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly since the main focus of this study was to explore the father's perceptions and experiences, solo interviews were conducted.

3.9.3 Obtaining a sample.

Given that the aim of this study was to explore the experiences and subjective meanings of male parents who had parented in a diverse range of household structures and family situations, I wanted to locate and recruit respondents who had diverse paternal careers. Decisions about sampling criteria and recruitment strategies were based therefore on both theoretical and practical considerations.

3.9.4 Fathers – a Hidden Population?

Groups of individuals that have been characterised as 'hidden populations' tend to be those who are marginalized or who constitute a small proportion of the population, such as refugees and asylum seekers (Bloch, 2004), those involved in illegal or deviant activities (Petersen and Valdez, 2005) and those who are non-heterosexual (Yip, 2008) among others. Thus, characterising fathers' as a 'hidden population' perhaps seems somewhat contradictory. They are not a minority group nor are they a marginalized group. However establishing contact and obtaining access with fathers is not as straightforward as might initially be assumed.

The main problem is that the lack of suitable sampling frames or registers of male parents renders fathers a relatively difficult group to identify and access (Barker,

1994). Fathers therefore constitute a ‘hidden population’ because of their relative invisibility (Dermott, 2003b). As mentioned in Chapter Two, qualitative research concerned with exploring fathers, fathering and fatherhood beyond the ‘intact nuclear family’ has tended to focus on one specific ‘group’ or ‘type’ of father (such as Bradshaw *et al*’s (1999) study of non-resident fathers, Marsiglio’s (2004b) study of stepfathers and Barker’s (1994) research on male lone parents). All three of these studies noted the difficulty involved in accessing what are essentially ‘hidden populations’ and as a consequence I anticipated that the research focus on family diversity might exacerbate the difficulties in recruitment.

Additionally, prior research has noted a number of difficulties involved in locating and securing male parents for social research (Henwood, 2001; Doucet, 2006). Generally speaking men are more difficult to recruit because of a reluctance to participate, or because of time constraints due to the demands of paid employment. Thus given these issues, the decision was made to adopt relatively broad sampling criteria and to use more than one method to access male parents.

3.9.5 Sample Criteria.

In order to be eligible for the study, the fathers had to be the parent of at least one dependent (under the age of 18 years old) co-resident or non-resident child (either biological, step or adoptive). Additionally, since Northern Ireland and Scotland have different policy and legal frameworks, I restricted my inclusion to those who resided in either England or Wales.

3.9.6 Sampling Strategy.

As indicated, the means of securing interview respondents was influenced in part by practical considerations. I needed to contact and recruit men who had parented in a range of different family situations within a relatively short space of time. Some studies have accessed fathers using a single approach such as through maternity services (for example, Lupton and Barclay, 1997). Whilst adopting a similar approach to access fathers may well have resulted in my recruiting a suitable amount

of respondents in a restricted time frame, I would not be able to guarantee that a sufficient proportion would have diverse paternal careers. My feeling was that step and non-resident fathers in particular would have little contact with maternity services. I considered contacting schools to ask for their assistance in recruiting potential respondents, but prior research has noted that this approach is generally unsuccessful, with very low response rates and difficulties in securing the Head Teacher's assistance (Edwards *et al.*, 1999; Burgoyne and Clark, 1984; Dermott, 2003b). Primary care giving fathers and lone parents in particular are minority groups, and as such particularly difficult to locate and access (Barker, 1994; Doucet, 2006). Doucet (2006) managed to recruit 118 primary caregiver fathers for her study using a combination of advertising, snowballing and personal contacts. However, it took 3 years to recruit this large sample. Given that my intended sample size was relatively small, I decided to adopt a similar approach to Doucet (2006) using two methods in conjunction with each other, advertising and snowballing.

Snowball sampling is widely used in qualitative research based on hidden and difficult to reach populations and 'consists of identifying respondents who are then used to refer researchers on to other respondents.' (Atkinson and Flint, 2001: 1). However, it is also possible to 'snowball' out from personal and professional contacts, rather than just interview respondents; an approach used with some success by Edwards *et al.* in their study of stepfamilies (Edwards *et al.*, 1999; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). Advertising has been used as a means of obtaining initial contact with potential respondents. Both Henwood (2001) who used radio and newspaper adverts and Doucet (2006) who placed adverts in local and national newspapers successfully recruited respondents in this manner. Edwards *et al.*, (1999) contacted parenting organizations requesting their assistance in advertising for potential respondents, although this met with limited success.

Both advertising for respondents and snowballing are non-probability sampling strategies. This in combination with the small sample size means that generalisations to the wider population cannot be made from the resulting data (Kalton and

Anderson, 1986). Both also have certain drawbacks, which can further affect the validity and representativeness of the research.

The main disadvantage of advertising for research participants is that the resulting sample is mainly comprised of self-selected respondents. Self-selection increases the probability that a disproportionate number of individuals with a particular 'agenda' will make contact. Doucet noted that some of the single fathers who contacted her about taking part 'clearly had a political or personal vendetta against their ex-wives' (2006: 53). This can result in bias since the interviewees will not be representative of the wider population of fathers. Self-selection bias is a feature of all research to a certain degree, since individuals can withhold consent to participate.

Snowball sampling has two main disadvantages. The first is the reliance on interview respondents as 'unofficial research assistants', in that contact with further respondents is dependent upon their willingness and ability to assist. In this respect, each respondent becomes a 'gatekeeper' and can influence with whom the researcher is able to speak to next. Individuals may not provide contact details for everyone they know that might be eligible, but only for those they either have good relations with or those they assume would be most likely to agree to participate. This issue is further complicated by gender. As already mentioned Edwards *et al.*, (1999) 'snowballed' from personal contacts. They note that facilitating contact with family members and friends is a predominantly female activity, and found that the female members of the stepfamily clusters they contacted were instrumental in accessing further respondents. My reliance on men to assist in contacting other fathers may therefore prove problematic. The second and related disadvantage, is that individuals' social networks tend to be comprised of people who all share similar characteristics, such as socio-economic status. The resulting sample can therefore end up relatively homogenous. Therefore, the use of both advertising and snowball sampling can increase the risk of bias within the research findings.

One means by which homogeneity can be reduced is to try and obtain as large and diverse group of contacts as possible from the initial advertising (Atkinson and Flint,

2004). With this in mind, I advertised the research in a wide variety of locations. I devised a flyer²² which outlined the general aim of the study, the ‘types’ of male parents I wanted to recruit and circulated both paper and electronic copies initially amongst friends and colleagues, requesting that they either place it on work, school, church or playgroup notice boards, or that they pass a copy onto anyone they thought might be eligible and interested in taking part. I also placed adverts asking for respondents on two fathers’ message boards on the internet (www.dads-uk.co.uk and www.homedad.org.uk), in addition to contacting two lone parenting organisations; Gingerbread and One Parent Families requesting their assistance in securing interviewees. Once a respondent had been interviewed I then asked them if they could put me in touch with anyone who had been a lone parent or who had non-resident, step or adoptive children. I also asked if they would distribute flyers at their workplaces, children’s schools or parenting groups.

Table 3.2 Recruitment Methods

	Number Responded	Number Recruited	If Snowballed and number of interviews secured	Total
Advert/Flyer	4	4	None	4
Internet Message Boards	10	4	Yes 2, both interviewed	6
Personal Contacts	12	11	Yes 7, 4 interviewed	15
Parenting Organisations	0	0		0
Total Interviewed				25

Table 3.2 shows the relative success of each method of recruitment. Advertising through either the internet or on notice boards, initially produced 14 contacts, but 5 men declined to take part after receiving more details about the study and 1 lived in Scotland and was therefore ineligible. A further eleven respondents were recruited after being approached by personal contacts and colleagues. In all cases the personal contacts passed the contact details of those who had indicated a willingness to participate on to myself, and I then followed these up. Unfortunately I did not secure any interviews through the parenting organisations.

²² A copy of the Flyer is in Appendix B

In total, 6 men from the original contact group facilitated contact with other male parents. This was fewer than I had anticipated and is perhaps supportive of Edwards *et al's* (1999) finding that women are more likely to facilitate contact with other suitable respondents than are men. This is particularly disappointing since I wanted to explore male co-parenting relationships. When respondents were parenting children who had 'another male parent' (either a non-resident biological father or co-resident stepfather) I attempted to obtain contact details in order to request an interview. However, the respondents were either reluctant or unable to facilitate this.

Thus, the most successful recruitment method was the combination of the flyer plus a personal recommendation, from the friends and colleagues who had distributed them. The extent to which the resulting sample was homogenous is explored in the next section.

3.9.7 Characteristics of the sample.

The sample was relatively homogenous in relation to the socio-demographic characteristics of the fathers recruited. The vast majority of the respondents identified as White British, with only 1 respondent identifying as Black British, 1 as Asian British, 1 as Welsh and 1 as Jewish. The majority of the sample members were also highly educated, 14 had attended higher education, 6 had some further education and 5 had left school after GCSEs/O' Levels.

Since social class, household income and tenure are subject to fluctuation and change over an individuals' lifetime, and it is unrealistic to expect individuals to remember variations in household income in particular, I only recorded the respondent's circumstances at the time of the interview. With respect to social class, the majority of the respondents were employed in either professional (11) or intermediate occupations (8), only 3 men were in lower occupations, and 3 men were unemployed (as categorised using the NS-Sec²³). The majority (15) also owned their homes, with 6 residing in privately rented accommodation, and 4 in social rented accommodation.

²³ see http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/ns_sec/

Unfortunately I had no success in recruiting younger respondents. The age of the respondents at the time of the interview ranged from 31 to 51 years old, with the mean age of the sample being 39 years old. The length of time spent as a parent of dependent children ranged from two to twenty six years. The majority of men had first become fathers (either biological, adoptive or step) whilst in their 20s (11) and 30s (10), with two first becoming fathers whilst in their teens and two whilst in their 40s.

Despite the decision to exclude men currently residing in Scotland and Northern Ireland, one respondent had non-resident children who had moved to Scotland with their mother upon separation, and a second respondent was originally from Scotland and the children from his first family still resided there. Overall, the respondents resided in a variety of regions in England and Wales; three resided in the North East of England, two in Yorkshire/Humberside, two in the East Midlands, five in East England, one in South West of England, two in the South East of England, seven in London and three in Wales. However, despite this regional variation, the majority of the respondents resided in urban locales (17) whilst the remaining eight resided in rural locations.

The sample was, however, relatively heterogeneous in respect of the number and types of family situations that the men had experienced over the course of their paternal careers. The interview respondents had followed a total of 19 different paternal careers, with two thirds experiencing at least two or more transitions. Whilst the majority (16) of the interview respondents began their paternal career as biological fathers within an intact-coupled family situation, just over a quarter (7) began as stepfathers, one as an adoptive father and one as a non-resident biological father. Overall, half of the respondents had experienced at least one episode as a non-resident biological father, half had been a co-resident stepfather, one an adoptive father and three had been a lone parent. Table 3.3 provides an overview of the characteristics and paternal career of the fathers interviewed.

Table 3.3 Father's Characteristics

Name	Age at Interview	Number of Children	Paternal Career	Occupation at Interview	Annual Household Income (000s)	Marital Status at Interview
1. Peter	48	2 non-resident biological children aged 13 and 17 2 co-resident stepchildren aged 17 and 20	BIO-NR-STEP Contact: Two weekends per month and during school holidays. Maintenance: Always paid.	CCTV Operator. His wife works full time as a Call Centre Manager.	30-40	Married
2. Steven	35	1 non-resident biological child aged 3 1 stepchild aged 6 when he left the household	STEP-NR Contact: One evening per week and every other weekend. Maintenance: Currently pays.	Project Manager	40-50	Single
3. Paul	38	1 co-resident biological child aged 5 3 stepchildren aged between 6 and 15 when he left the household	STEP-SINGLE-BIO Paul has been the Primary Carer for 4 ½ years.	Care Assistant (1 night per week). His wife works full time as an Occupational Therapist.	30-40	Married
4. Robert	42	1 non-resident biological child aged 4 1 stepchild aged 10 when he left the household	STEP-COMPLEX-NR Contact: One night per week and every other weekend. Maintenance: Always paid, and pays for his stepson too.	Actor/Care Assistant.	30-40	Single
5. Richard	31	1 co-resident biological child aged 2	BIO	Outreach Worker. His wife works part time as a Health Care Assistant.	40-50	Married
6. Geoff	51	2 co-resident biological children (twins) aged 3	BIO Geoff has been the Primary Carer since the twins were born.	Freelance Musician (Part time). His wife works full time in Teaching.	30-40	Married
7. Frank	34	1 co-resident biological child aged 3	BIO	Press Officer. His wife has two part time jobs – Artist and Administrative Assistant.	30-40	Married
8. Brian	35	1 non-resident biological child aged 16 4 stepchildren aged between 8 and 16	NR-STEP Contact: None. Maintenance: Never Paid.	Postal Worker. His partner is not currently employed.	15-20	Cohabit
9. Jake	35	2 non-resident biological children aged between 3 and 10 3 stepchildren aged between 12 and 17 when he left the household	STEP-COMPLEX-NR-BIO-NR Contact: None Maintenance: Not currently paying.	Builder. His partner is a student.	20-30	Cohabit

Table 3.3 Father's Characteristics

Name	Age at Interview	Number of Children	Paternal Career	Occupation at Interview	Annual Household Income (000s)	Marital Status at Interview
10. Dave	38	2 co-resident biological children aged 8 and 11 4 non-resident stepchildren aged between 10 and 20	BIO-NR-REJOINBIO-NR-STEPMUM Dave was the Primary Carer in his first marriage.	Social Worker. His wife works full time as a Social Worker.	20-30	[Married
11. Ray	44	2 co-resident biological children aged 2 and 4	BIO Ray has been the Primary Carer for 3 ½ years.	Freelance Writer (Part Time). His wife works full time as an IT Manager.	60+	Married
12. Tony	34	2 non-resident biological children aged 8 and 13	BIO-NR-BIO-COMPLEX-BIO-HR Contact: Every other weekend plus school holidays for one daughter. School holidays only for the other. Maintenance: Always paid.	Senior Policy Analyst. His partner works full time as an Information Officer.	60+	Cohabit
13. Jason	34	2 co-resident biological children aged 1 and 3	BIO	Website Editor. His wife is the Managing Director of her own business.	40-50	Married
14. Sam	32	2 co-resident adopted children aged 3 and 4	ADOPT	Trade Union Regional Organiser. His wife works as a Teacher part time.	50-60	Married
15. James	51	3 co-resident biological children aged between 5 and 27 1 non-resident stepchild aged 17	BIO-NR-LP-NR-STEP-COMPLEX-BIO	Trade Union Regional Organiser. His wife does not work due to ill health.	30-40	Married
16. Mark	39	1 non-resident biological child aged 12 1 stepchild aged 8 when he left the household	STEP-COMPLEX-HR Contact: Every other weekend at a minimum. Maintenance: Always paid.	Medical Personnel Officer.	20-30	Single
17. Anthony	32	2 co-resident biological children aged 1 and 4	BIO	Gas Fitter. His wife works part time as a Personal Assistant.	30-40	Married
18. Leo	34	1 biological child aged 7	BIO – LP Leo has been the Primary Carer since his daughter was born.	Full Time Carer.	Up to 15	Single

Table 3.3 Father's Characteristics

Name	Age at Interview	Number of Children	Paternal Career	Occupation at Interview	Annual Household Income (000s)	Marital Status at Interview
19. Nat	49	4 non-resident biological children aged between 13 and 21 1 co-resident biological child aged 5	BIO-NR-BIO-NR-BIO Nat was the Primary Carer for approximately one year in his first marriage. Contact: Regular with two oldest children. None with his daughters aged 13 and 15. Maintenance: For oldest two children, always paid. Not currently paying for youngest two daughters.	Senior Partner/Publishing. His wife works full time as a PR Executive.	40-50	Married
20. Adam	36	3 non-resident biological children aged between 5 and 13 1 co-resident stepchild aged 6	BI-NR-BI-NR- STEP/COMPLEX/STEP Contact: Rarely. Maintenance: Never Paid.	Unemployed. His partner is also currently unemployed.	Up to 15	Cohabit
21. Chris	32	1 co-resident stepchild aged 12	STEP	Database Administrator. His partner works full time as an Insurance Advisor.	30-40	Cohabit
22. Stan	44	1 non-resident biological child aged 12 2 stepchildren aged 8 and 11	BIO-NR-REJOINBIO-NR-STEP Contact: One evening per week and every other weekend. Maintenance: Always Paid.	Joiner. His wife works part time as a dog groomer.	30-40	Cohabit
23. Trevor	38	1 non-resident biological child aged 10 2 co-resident biological children aged 0 and 2 1 co-resident stepchild aged 10	BIO-NR-STEP-COMPLEX Contact: Every other weekend. Maintenance: Always Paid.	Accountant. His wife is a full time parent.	40-50	Married
24. Alan	45	2 co-resident biological children aged 1 and 3. Wife currently pregnant.	BIO Alan has been the Primary Carer for 2 years.	Alan's wife works part time as a Teaching Consultant.	30-40	Married
25. Darren	41	1 co-resident biological child aged 9 1 stepchild aged 15 when he left the household	STEP-COMPLEX-LP Darren has been his son's Primary Carer since he was born.	Development Manager.	30-40	Single

3.9.8 Structure of the Interviews²⁴

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours and consisted of three sections. Firstly, socio demographic information was collected from each respondent. Then I asked respondents to briefly talk about any changes in family situations, births of children and changes in both, their own, and their partners' employment situations, so that their paternal career could be established. In order to chart the different family situations and paternal statuses the respondents had experienced I adopted an approach based on the life grid, which has been used in life history interviews, particularly in epidemiological studies (Parry *et al.*, 1999, Bell, 2005). The life grid technique enabled the reconstruction of the respondents' paternal career, thus facilitating the third and final section of the interview, during which the respondents were encouraged to talk in depth about their paternal careers.

The life grid proved immensely useful for several reasons²⁵. It was a useful 'memory aid' in that it facilitated the re-call of prior events and parenting situations. Establishing each fathers' paternal career at the outset of the interview provided a useful framework and overview of the different key situations in which each father had parented. Both the fathers' and I often referred back to the information in the grid during the more open ended discussion of their parenting experiences. Key dates or other important events were often checked, amended or added. In this respect then, the grid acted as a reference point and an ideal way to maintain some sense of structure as the men discussed in depth what were often quite complex parenting situations and transitions between different family situations. As a result, in the interviews where the fathers' had more complex paternal careers in particular, there was not a clear separation between the last two sections of the interview. Filling out the life grid very often lapsed into the men providing quite detailed information about particular experiences, whilst the in depth discussions often resulted in returning to the life grid to amend information.

²⁴ A copy of the topic guide is in Appendix C

²⁵ See Appendix C for the Life Grid.

3.9.9 Analysing the interview data.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Although computer software such as NVivo has become an increasingly popular means by which to code interview data, I coded the interviews manually. This was not a consequence of either theoretical considerations or personal preferences, but was in fact due to technical difficulties. A new version of NVivo had just been released when I started the coding process, and unfortunately there were problems with the software. I started to code the interviews manually while the software developers tried to fix the problems and by the time this had been done, I had almost finished. There seemed little advantage at that point in transferring all of the interview data into the software and recoding electronically. Thus as I read each transcript I developed a general coding framework based on the key themes within each transcript. I then further refined the framework as I re-read each transcript several times, and constructed theme tables. Each table contained the relevant interview quotes for each of the key themes that had emerged from the interviews.

3.10 Fathering – a sensitive topic?

Perhaps at first glance, fathering and fatherhood does not appear to be a sensitive issue. However, whilst conducting her study of primary care-giving fathers Doucet (2006) discusses her growing realisation that for some men, fathering is an emotionally charged and sensitive issue.

Lee provides a relatively simple definition of what constitutes sensitive research, stating that it is ‘research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or who have been involved in it’ (1993: 4). He then goes on to highlight three ‘types’ of threat to those being researched, political threat, the threat of sanction and intrusive threat. Firstly, research may pose a political threat. This is particularly the case if the external environment is politically charged and respondents fear that disclosing information may benefit those with opposing viewpoints. Secondly, in relation to the threat of sanction, respondents may fear that activities or behaviours that are considered ‘deviant’ in some way may be exposed. Lastly, respondents may

experience the intrusion into their personal lives as a threat (Lee, 1993). Further, Lee (1993) argues that there are specific issues associated with the researching of sensitive topics that can impact in a variety of ways and at different points during the research process.

In my opinion, the topic of this research is sensitive in all three respects. As Doucet (2006) notes, fatherhood and particularly single fatherhood have become politicised in recent years. This 'politicisation' can affect who agrees to take part, why they take part and was certainly in evidence during the recruitment process for this research. Two interviewees mentioned that they had checked my details on the university website, although one simply wanted to check that I wasn't a journalist. The other stated that had I been based at Bristol, York or Warwick he would have refused to participate, since these three universities are 'full of man-hating feminists'. When I asked how he had arrived at this assumption, he stated that he had come across some discussions about it on message boards on the Internet. Another participant agreed to be interviewed only after he had established if I had a political agenda. He wanted to know who was funding the research and what my aims and intentions were.

Further, three of the male parents in this study were active members of the 'Real Fathers4Justice', a fathers' rights group. Earlier in this Chapter I discussed how self-selected samples can affect the validity of research findings, since those who make contact offering to participate often have an 'agenda'. Doucet (2006) did not interview fathers if she detected that they had a personal agenda. I made the opposite decision. I decided to interview these three fathers precisely because their political views are one aspect of the experience of contemporary fatherhood. I felt that by omitting these men I would be allowing my own personal values to influence the research process. In the final event, the accounts of two of these fathers were indistinguishable from those of the rest of the sample. Only one held views that could perhaps be considered 'extreme'. His interview was also especially problematic for a number of reasons, which are discussed in more detail below.

This research is sensitive because I would be asking fathers about their personal and emotional lives, and how they experienced potentially distressing situations such as separation and divorce. This is not only potentially 'intrusive', but may also prove

problematic for fathers who have ambivalent feelings about their children or stepchildren. Thus fathers who feel emotionally distant from, or who are not extensively involved in looking after their children may be reluctant to disclose this for fear of being judged ‘bad dads’. This is perhaps particularly salient in the contemporary climate within which ‘involved’ fatherhood has been constructed as essential to optimal child development (Dermott, 2008). Again this may have affected who made contact in order to participate in the research. However, there is no way of establishing the extent of this.

It is more likely that the above issues have impacted upon what the research participants disclosed and how they presented their accounts during the course of the interview (Doucet, 2006). Certainly, the potentially intrusive and emotionally charged nature of the topic necessitated a stringent approach regarding ethical considerations. It is to this issue I would now like to turn. The following and concluding section of this Chapter discusses ethical considerations and the interview process, with particular reference to the role and influence of gender.

3.11 Gender, Ethics and the ‘how’ of Interviewing.

Featherstone argues that ‘the ‘how’ of interviewing deserves more attention.’ (2000: 127) and it is to the issue of ‘how the interviews went’ that I now turn my attention. I have decided not to present a discussion of ethical considerations, gender and the process of interviewing as separate sections, because to some extent all three were inter-related during the course of the interviews. However, I start my discussion by outlining the preparations I made and the expectations I held at the start of the interviews with regards to the ethical issues involved.

I entered the interview recruitment process with full awareness (or so I thought) of the possible ethical dilemmas that may arise during the interview process. I had read the British Sociological Association’s (2002) statement of ethical practice and used this to inform my interviewing practice. I ensured that the introductory section of my topic guide, which was read out to all interview respondents, clearly stated the reasons for the research, provided assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

reassured respondents that they could either decline to answer certain questions or withdraw from the interview at any time without the need to provide reasons for doing so. I also briefly outlined how the interview data would be used and disseminated and offered to send each respondent a copy of their interview transcript so they would have the opportunity to review what they had said. I also offered them the option of sending the transcript back to me with any sections that they did not wish to be used as direct quotes marked as such. Permission to record the interview was also sought in advance from each respondent.

I had also given some thought as to how much control the respondents would have in choosing the location for the interviews. I had adopted a flexible approach to choosing a suitable location for the interviews, allowing the fathers some choice in the matter, for four reasons. Firstly in awareness of the potential difficulties in recruiting male respondents that had been identified in prior studies (Henwood, 2001; Doucet, 2006), I thought that a flexible approach might be a good way to encourage more men to agree to be interviewed. Secondly, some of the fathers were the primary carers of their children and I was conscious of the need to fit the interviews around their caring commitments. Additionally, there were practical considerations. I travelled to different parts of England and Wales in order to conduct the interviews and therefore had limited knowledge of the availability of suitable venues within which to conduct the interviews in the different localities. Finally, prior research had noted the difficulties that some men have in disclosing vulnerability (Doucet, 2006). Given this and the sensitive nature of the topic, I wanted the fathers to have some control in selecting a location in which they would feel comfortable discussing their private lives and emotional worlds. I felt this was not only fair in an ethical sense, but also that the quality of the data would be improved, since the fathers would be less likely to avoid talking about issues which were potentially emotionally charged.

Therefore, I assumed that I had provided enough information to enable the fathers to give informed consent and that I had built in an 'escape route' for any fathers who found either the interviews or particular questions distressing. In most respects, my considerations were more than adequate. The majority of the fathers seemed impatient when I was reading out the introductory statement about the research. The

majority were totally disinterested in viewing a copy of their interview transcript; only 3 requested I send it to them. None of these 3 sent the transcript back to me requesting that certain sections were not to be used in any publications or the thesis.

However, some issues emerged during the course of the interviews that I was totally unprepared for. In one of the first few interviews I conducted the respondent was discussing that he and his partner had lived together for some years and had one child together prior to getting married. I casually probed the reasons behind the decision to get married. He got visibly upset at this point and explained that his partner had an affair during which she became pregnant. She made the decision to have a termination and he had 'taken her back' only on the proviso that they get married. This highly emotional disclosure left me feeling very uncomfortable and at a complete loss as to how to respond, particularly since the respondent's children, who were visiting at the time were running in and out of the house.

This early experience resulted in a revision of my approach to the interviews. I made extra efforts to ensure that the respondents would be alone when the interviews were being carried out. I also became much more aware of just how unprepared I was for the *actual* expression of emotion during the interviews. Although I had considered the ethical implications (as outlined above) I had not given much thought as to how I would actually respond when distressing and emotional issues were being discussed. Nor had I given much thought to this issue when deciding to adopt a relatively unstructured format to the interviews.

Featherstone describes how her use of an unstructured format in her interviews with violent mothers proved problematic; 'It meant that painful material was not contained clearly, there was no clear lead up to it nor was there any winding down from it for either myself or the respondent.' (2000: 127). This was certainly my experience in some of the interviews. I had not anticipated the extent to which the interview situation would be treated like 'therapy' by some of the fathers. It was the comments made by several of the fathers once the interviews were finished that alerted me to this. One commented on how much he had 'enjoyed the interview' and that 'it was very cathartic'. Another commented that he felt better having talked about his experiences of separation and divorce since he had 'never talked to anyone

about it before'. In fact even fathers who had not discussed any painful experiences often commented how they 'felt better' from having talked about their parenting at some length.

However, although I became increasingly aware of the ways in which some fathers experienced the interviews, providing an appropriate response to visible displays of emotion was something that I felt I never got 'quite right'. I continued to feel uncomfortable or at a loss as to how to respond and in some instances, such as in one interview where the respondent was visibly shaking the whole way through, I felt both guilt and an overwhelming sense of responsibility for my research 'provoking' these painful responses.

My attempts to ensure that respondents were alone during the interview were not entirely successful. Four interviews were conducted in cafés, three at the university, one at a pub and four interviews were conducted in an office at the father's workplace. Thus in all of these interviews the respondent was 'alone', in the sense that other family members were not present. The remaining thirteen interviews were conducted in the respondent's homes and in five of these interviews other family members were present, albeit for the most part in a different room to where the interview took place. During the analysis of the interview data I scrutinised the transcripts in order to establish if the location of the interview or the presence of others had any discernable influence on what the men disclosed. I could find no major differences. The presence of others and the location of the interview therefore did not seem to affect the fathers' willingness to discuss emotionally charged issues.

However, in one interview the fact that the presence of others did not restrict the disclosure of sensitive information proved to be the problem. In the interview in question, the respondent's partner and stepchild were at home and in the same room as us. My tentative suggestion that it might be better to conduct the interview away from the presence of his partner and child was met with some hostility from his partner, who was obviously uncomfortable with what I had said. After answering some of her rather personal questions, I got the interview started, but my anxiety grew as the respondent, without prompting, discussed past relationships, sexual infidelities, and the fact that he was currently under investigation for the murder of

one of his previous partners in some detail, all in front of the young child. Whilst the child simply continued playing, his presence did not prevent the respondent from providing details that I deemed inappropriate for a child of that age to hear.

There are several points that I wish to make in relation to the discussion of 'how the interviews went' presented above.

The first set of points I wish to make concern the ethical considerations of conducting research of this type. My reflections and experiences have made me aware that my focus at the outset of the research was far too narrow. The 'problematic interview' made me realise that in placing the comfort of the respondent 'centre stage', I had not fully considered the potential impact of my research on the family members of those I interviewed. I have thought about this particular interview often and although I have not arrived at any firm conclusions, the following questions have troubled me. Was I acting in an ethically responsible manner in allowing the interview to continue with the young child present? Should I have obtained consent from the respondent's partner, given the interview was conducted in her home?

The second set of points relates to the issue of gender and interview dynamics. One assertion is that the gender of the interviewer can influence respondents' willingness and comfort with disclosing sensitive information. Padfield and Proctor (1996) for example, found that women were more likely to disclose and discuss their experiences of terminated pregnancies with a female researcher. Similarly, Williams (2002) claims that in his research with fathers, his being a male interviewer enabled the development of a greater level of trust and rapport, thus enhancing the quality of the data he collected. However, this is a debate that I do not wish to contribute to, since I interviewed all of the respondents and there is no way of establishing if my being female made men more likely to disclose emotions, than would have been the case if I were male.

A further focus is on how the gender of the respondent is an important influence on interview dynamics. Interviewing men is regarded as particularly problematic. The assumption is that interviews are sites of gender performance, and as a consequence,

men are generally unwilling to 'disclose vulnerability' since doing so goes against their efforts to present a valid 'masculine self' (Dunscombe and Marsden, 1993; Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001; Doucet, 2006). Doucet (2006: 62) noted how some men presented what she termed 'heroic narratives' when discussing emotionally distressing experiences. I discussed earlier the extent to which the fathers displayed upset and distress and conclude from this that in general, there seemed little reluctance to appear 'vulnerable'. This could be due to the influence of various fathers' rights groups, whose stories have been covered extensively in the media in recent years. Hence, emotional displays about not living with children may have become more socially acceptable and to some extent expected, for men. However, 'heroic narratives' did come into play when some of the stepfathers were discussing the nature and extent of conflict between themselves and the children's biological fathers. The stepfathers did become more defensive at this point and seemed very reluctant to present themselves as 'vulnerable' or as 'victims'. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Seven and do not want to dwell on this issue in detail here, except to state that rather than presenting a generalised notion of all men as unwilling to appear vulnerable, more attention needs to be paid to the subject matter being discussed when either vulnerability or defensive displays are produced.

A final set of points I wish to make relates to the issue of gendered power dynamics and interviewing. Although feminists have written extensively about power dynamics and interviewing women (see for example Oakley, 1981; Edwards, 1990), the experiences of female researchers conducting interviews with male respondents has received relatively little attention (Dermott, 2003b).

What little literature there is presents a rather contradictory picture. On the one hand there are accounts of male respondents asserting their power and dominance over female researchers by, belittling the knowledge of the researcher (Pini, 2005), sexualizing the researcher(s) and responding angrily to the research (McKee and O'Brien, 1983; Lee, 1997). McKee and O'Brien warn 'The potential for sexual violation is omnipresent . . . in individual interactions' (1983: 157). On the other hand, Gatrell (2006) and Dermott (2003b), report that they experienced none of these behaviours or problems during their interviews.

My experiences in this research are more mixed, in the sense that a couple of the older fathers did adopt a more authoritarian tone and were quite obviously seeking to 'educate' me, particularly in relation to how things were 'in the past'. However, this could have been as a result of the age difference and the fact that I would be too young to have first hand direct experience of family life over 40 years ago. One of the fathers did also make something of a 'pass' at me in that he stated that he was disappointed that I wasn't staying in the city where he lived overnight, because he would have liked to take me out and show me the sights. However, in general I would concur with Gatrell (2006) and Dermott (2003b) as the majority of the fathers were courteous, respectful, helpful and very forthcoming during the interviews.

Having discussed the methodological issues involved in conducting this research, the next Chapter presents the findings from the secondary analysis of the BHPS.

Chapter 4 Paternal Careers

4.1 Introduction.

In Chapter Two I outline a number of contemporary demographic trends, such as increasing rates of divorce and cohabitation, declining rates of marriage, a shift towards later ages at first partnership, and a decline in family size and fertility rates. All these factors have influenced both the timing and incidence of parenthood, with individuals entering into parenthood at later ages and with an increasing number remaining childless (Ferri and Smith, 2003). I also discuss two broad interpretations of these cause and meaning of these trends. The individualisation theorists (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2001) argue that changes in family structure are both consequence and cause of processes of individualisation. The growth of 'alternative' family forms is linked to a de-traditionalising of family life and gendered roles, as well as a more radical 'democratisation' of the family (Giddens, 1998). In contrast, those who are pessimistic about family change and tend to view a plurality of family forms as indicative of a growth in selfish individualism and moral decay, resulting in negative consequences for individuals and society (Dench, 1994; Dennis and Erdos, 1992).

Both the individualisation theorists and the pessimists have been criticised for exaggerating the extent of change (Silva and Smart, 1999; Crow, 2002), in relation to both the extent of diversity and the extent to which 'family practices' are undergoing radical change. As noted in Chapters Two and Three, establishing just how many fathers experience parenthood in different family forms throughout their life course is a difficult task and as a result there is a lack of research that has utilised longitudinal data in order to explore the paternal careers of different birth cohorts of British fathers.

This Chapter presents the findings of the secondary analysis of the paternal careers of 2,600 male BHPS sample members, in order to more fully explore the extent to which paternal careers have become more individualised. The analysis is based on

that of (Juby and Le Bourdais, 1998), and explores the different family situations (such as stepfamilies or single parenthood) and paternal statuses (such as step, non-resident etc) that fathers from six birth cohorts move into and out of over time. From this it is possible to determine the extent to which the paternal careers of contemporary fathers are becoming more heterogeneous and diverse in comparison to fathers in earlier cohorts.

There are three main objectives. Firstly, to provide a descriptive analysis of the number, sequencing and types of different family forms and paternal roles British fathers experience throughout their life course. Secondly, to compare how the paternal careers of contemporary male parents differ from those of previous generations. Lastly, I examine the fathers' responses to a number of attitude statements, in order to explore attitudes towards different family forms and 'involved fatherhood'.

Before exploring the parenting and partnering behaviours of those who do become fathers, I will first explore the proportion of men from each cohort who have become fathers and at the age at which they first became fathers²⁶.

4.2 Becoming a Father – A Universal Experience?

One area of concern is the increasing proportion of men, particularly those who are highly educated who are avoiding fatherhood altogether (Olah *et al.*, 2002). Whilst this is seen as one indicator of a 'male flight' from commitment and children by some (Popenoe and Whitehead, 2002), others have refuted this assertion, arguing that increasing childlessness is neither uniquely male nor evidence of a pervasive 'new' form of selfish individualism (Goldscheider and Hogan, 2001).

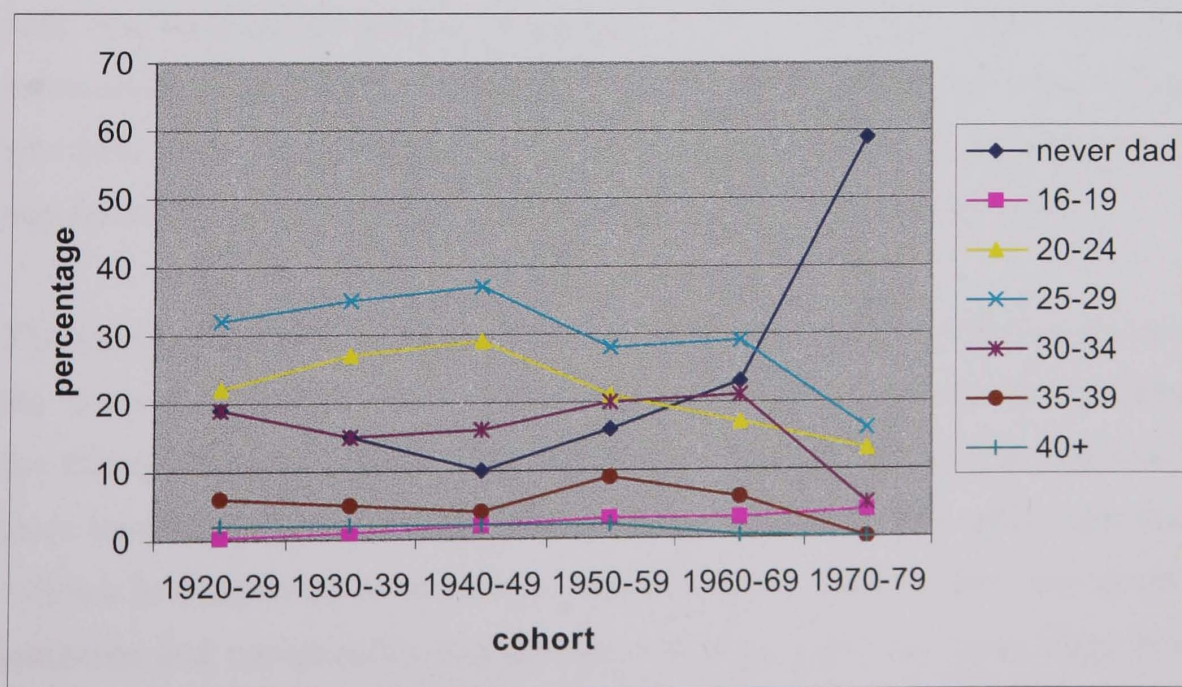
Rowland (2007) has compared the rates of childlessness amongst women in England and Wales who were born between 1910 and 1954. The findings suggest a curvilinear pattern, with rates of childlessness gradually dropping from 24% for women born between 1910 and 1914 to a low of 10% for those born between 1945 and 1949, before starting to rise again to 14% for women born between 1950 and

²⁶ Only un-weighted data has been used throughout this analysis.

1954. Estimates based on younger birth cohorts suggest that further increases in childlessness have occurred with just under a fifth of women born in 1959 remaining childless (Simpson, 2006). There are indications that patterns of male childlessness follow the same curvilinear pattern and are similar to those of women (Eggebeen, 2002) although Clarke (1997) found that men were slightly more likely to remain childless than women.

As discussed in Chapter Three, whilst fertility estimates are routinely calculated for females, estimates of male fertility levels remain scarce (Rowland, 2007; Dykstra and Hagestad, 2007), as are comparative analyses of the age at which men first become parents (Kneale and Joshi, 2007). Of the studies that have focussed on men's entry into fatherhood, ages at which men first become fathers have been based on the birth of their first biological child (Clarke, 1997). As far as I am aware, no studies have acknowledged that for some men, their first (and perhaps only) experience of fatherhood is as a stepfather. Given this oversight, Figure 4.1²⁷ below shows the proportion of men within each of the BHPS birth cohorts who had *not parented either biological or social children* by the last wave of data collection in 2004.

Figure 4.1 Percentage of men who are non-fathers and age at first fatherhood by cohort.



²⁷ The raw data tables for all figures in this chapter are in Appendix D.

The dark blue line labelled 'never dad' shows the percentage of men who have either yet to become parents or who have never become fathers. As we can see the findings demonstrate a curvilinear pattern similar to that found by Eggebeen (2002) and Rowland (2007) in that 19% of men born in the 1920s did not become fathers, dropping to just 10% of men born in the 1940s, before rising to 16% of those born in the 1950s. The rates of childlessness for each birth cohort presented above are not strictly comparable to those of Rowland (2007) who based birth cohorts on 5 year age gaps rather than 10. However, if the levels of female childlessness from each 5 year birth cohort are added together and divided by two to produce an average score, we find that approximately 17% of women born in the 1920s, 13% of women born in the 1930s and 10% of women born in the 1940s remained childless. Thus we can see that rates of male childlessness are almost identical to those of women, with men slightly more likely to be childless as noted by Clarke (1997).

Currently, 23% of men born in the 1960s and 59% of men born in the 1970s have not yet become fathers. Whilst there has been a gradual increase in the age at which men first become parents (discussed in more detail below) we can reasonably assume that very few men from the four oldest birth cohorts will make the transition to becoming fathers in the future. However, those men born in the 1960s and particularly those born in the 1970s are at much earlier stages in their life course. The proportions of men who have never fathered particularly in the 1970s birth cohort will change substantially in the future. Given this, I examined the parenting intentions of those who have yet to become fathers in these two cohorts to establish how many of these non-fathers had expressed a definite intention to have children in the future.

The responses are documented in Table D.2 in Appendix D. Almost three quarters of the 'never dads' in the 1970s cohort expressed a definite intention to have children in the future, with just under a fifth stating that they did not want any children. For those born in the 1960s, the proportions were reversed. A fifth stated they wanted children in comparison to two thirds who stated they did not. Obviously parenting intentions and opportunities may change over time; but if the proportions of men stating that they are either uncertain or that they definitely do not want children in the

future are taken into account, only 17% of men in both cohorts are likely to remain non fathers.

Thus those born in the 1940s represent a rather unusual cohort of men, for whom fatherhood was an almost universal feature of adult life. Whilst parenting intentions are not a guarantee that those intending to become fathers necessarily will, they do provide an indication that the majority of men do aspire to become fathers at some point during their lives, and that it may be external circumstances that result in increasing proportions of men who never experience parenthood rather than intentional avoidance. The BHPS data therefore does not support the assertion that younger cohorts of men are intentionally avoiding fatherhood.

4.3 Age at first fatherhood

In addition to the drop in the fertility rate, demographers have also commented on the rising ages at which both men and women first become parents. In 2006 the average age of first births for women was 27.4 (Jeffries, 2008), whereas for men in 2001 it was 31.3 within marriage and 27.8 for those who were unmarried (Office for National Statistics, 2001). Given that the ages given above are based on biological children only, I have categorised first fatherhood as the age at which men first became parents regardless of the presence of a genetic tie with that child. Figure 4.1 therefore shows the age at which those men who *did* become parents first became either social or biological parents. The percentages presented are a proportion of *all* men (fathers or not) in each birth cohort.

The BHPS data is consistent with the trend towards men becoming parents at older ages in the contemporary birth cohorts, but only in comparison to those born in the 1930s and 1940s. Again the 1940s cohort is unusual in that entry into parenthood for these men was overwhelmingly before the age of 30. Just over two thirds born in this cohort became fathers before the age of 30, with 31% first becoming fathers before the age of 25. In contrast, of those born in the 1950s and 60s only 52% and 50% respectively became fathers before their 30th birthday and the proportions becoming fathers before the age of 25 decreased to a quarter and then to a fifth. A third of those born in the 1970s have become fathers before the age of 30 so far, but this figure will

change, as more men become fathers in the future. Ferri and Smith (2003) found that a third of those in the BCS (born in 1970) had become fathers by the age of 30 and that half of men in the NCDS (born in 1958) had their first child by the age of 33. Therefore, the findings from the BHPS 1970s birth cohort presented here match those from the BCS exactly.

It is difficult to compare the results from the BHPS here to those of the NCDS since the age categories are different. Ferri and Smith (2003) used 33 as the cut off age for the NCDS birth cohort fathers as this was the age of the respondents at that particular wave of data collection. However, 33 falls roughly in the middle of my 30-34 age category. My findings are that 52% of men born in the 1950s became fathers by the age of 30, and this proportion increases to 72% by the age of 35. Ferri and Smith (2003) have also analysed data from an earlier Birth Cohort Study, the Medical Research Council's National Survey of Health and Development (NSHD) the sample members for which were all born in 1946. They found that 83% of men born in 1946 had become parents by the age of 33. Again it is difficult to compare, however there is some correspondence between the findings. Whilst 68% of the BHPS members born in the 1920s had become fathers by the age of 30, this figure rises to 84% for those becoming fathers by the age of 35. Therefore the findings presented here broadly confirm those from the birth cohort studies.

Older first time fathers have become a focus of media coverage in recent years. British actor David Jason made headlines when he became a father for the first time at age 61 in 2001 (The Daily Telegraph, 19/06/2001) as did singer Mick Hucknall who became a father at the age of 47 in 2007 (The Times, 20/06/2007). Whilst first time celebrity older fathers may generate media coverage, the proportion of men who become fathers at age 40 or above has remained small. Figure 4.1 shows that the proportion of men becoming fathers in their late 30s and older has increased, doubling in one generation, rising to 9% of those born in the 1950s from just 4% of those born in the 1940s. However, only 2% of men in each of the four oldest cohorts have first become fathers at age 40 or older. Whilst the figures could change in the future, particularly for the two youngest birth cohorts, it seems that men who have not yet become fathers by the age of 40 are unlikely to do so.

Young fathers have recently become the focus of policy interventions, as part of the government's strategy to reduce teenage conception rates and social exclusion. As a group, young fathers are regarded as 'vulnerable', and that they are more likely to either be or become non-resident fathers or have tenuous relationships with their children. There is some disagreement as to who 'counts' as a young father. Different studies have used different age ranges. Berrington *et al.* (2005) defined young fathers as those aged between 17 and 23, whereas Speak, Cameron and Gilroy (1997) adopted an age range of 16 to 24. I have adopted an age range of 16 to 24 because 16 is the age at which the BHPS sample members join the adult file and full data is collected every year. I have used the age of 24 as the upper limit, because of those born in the 1970s the youngest would be 25 years old at the time of the most recent wave of data collection. Therefore, the men who have yet to become fathers within the 1970s birth cohort can only do so at age 25 or above.

Clarke (1997) found that a third of all men became fathers before the age of 25 but that only 1% of men from the BHPS became fathers whilst still in their teens. From the data in Figure 4.1, we can see that around a third of all men born in the 1930s and 40s became fathers before the age of 25, but that in every birth cohort since, the proportion of men becoming 'young fathers' has declined to its lowest level of 17% in the 1970s birth cohort. As explained above, this proportion will not change in the future since those in the 1970s cohort were all aged 25 or over in 2004. However, teenage fatherhood (between 16–19 years old) has increased slightly across the cohorts, rising from 1% of those born in the 1920s and 30s, to 2% in the 1940s, 3% of those born in the 1950s and 60s and finally 4% of those born in the 1970s. The proportion of men born in the 1950s and 1970s who became fathers whilst still in their teens corresponds with findings from the Birth Cohort Studies. Ferri and Smith (2003) found that between 2% and 3% of men in the NCDS and the BCS had become fathers by the age of 20. Again the figures are not strictly comparable since the NCDS and BCS samples are based on individuals born in 1958 and 1970 respectively. However, there is only 1% difference and this may be due to the fact that Ferri and Smith (2003) based their calculations on children who were living in the household when the cohort members were aged 30. Men who were the fathers of non-resident children have not been included therefore. Ferri and Smith (2003) also found that 8% of men born in 1946 had become fathers by the age of 20. This is a

significantly higher proportion in comparison to the 2% of men born in the 1940s in the BHPS.

In summary then, there are some considerable differences particularly in the timing of first fatherhood across the birth cohorts. The data presented above generally support the assertion that a significant proportion of men born in the younger birth cohorts are postponing fatherhood until later ages. As a whole however, the pattern for those in the 1960s birth cohort is remarkably similar to those born in the 1920s, both in the ages at which men first become fathers and in the proportion of those remaining non-fathers. Others have pointed out that what are considered by some as ‘new’ trends are not once a longer term view is adopted (Maclean and Eekelaar, 1997).

4.4 Paternal Careers.

From this point on the analysis focuses on those men in each cohort who *did* become parents at some point during their life course. Figures 4.2 to 4.7 show in detail the paternal careers of all sample members in each cohort. The numbers in bold type on each arrow indicates the number of men who experienced a change in their paternal status because of a change in family type. The number in brackets indicates the number of men who experienced no further transitions. The number of different paternal careers within each birth cohort is indicated on the bottom right hand corner of Figures 4.2 to 4.7. As would be expected given the broader demographic changes in contemporary society, the different pathways of contemporary fathers have become more complex and more heterogeneous. In total there were 81 different paternal careers across the sample of fathers as a whole. As discussed in Chapter Three changes in marital status have not been included in the definitions of family types or paternal statuses in order to reduce the complexity to a manageable level for analysis.

4.5 ‘Traditional’ Careers.

Whilst Figures 4.2 to 4.7 display a considerable amount of complexity and diversity, it is important to note that the majority of men have both become and remained

fathers within the context of a co-resident biological family. The proportion of fathers doing so however has declined across cohorts dropping from 86% of those born in the 1920s, to 69% of those born in the 1950s. The proportion of fathers following this pathway in the two youngest cohorts has declined further to 61% and 54% respectively. Whilst we can perhaps be more confident that the men in the three oldest cohorts are unlikely to experience any further changes to their parental circumstances, given their ages at the time of the last wave of data collection in 2004, the same cannot be assumed for those in the three youngest cohorts. These proportions for the youngest two cohorts in particular are likely to be subject to a considerable degree of fluctuation, as more men become fathers, and as other experience the dissolution of their relationships.

However, given the rise in separation and divorce we would expect fewer members of the younger cohorts to follow a traditional paternal career. The reduction in the proportion of men following the biologically intact (BIO) only pathway is attributable to two factors. The first factor is that men are increasingly starting their paternal careers in alternative family situations. The second factor is that men are increasingly likely to experience further transitions due to the high separation and divorce rates.

Figure 4.2 1920s Cohort

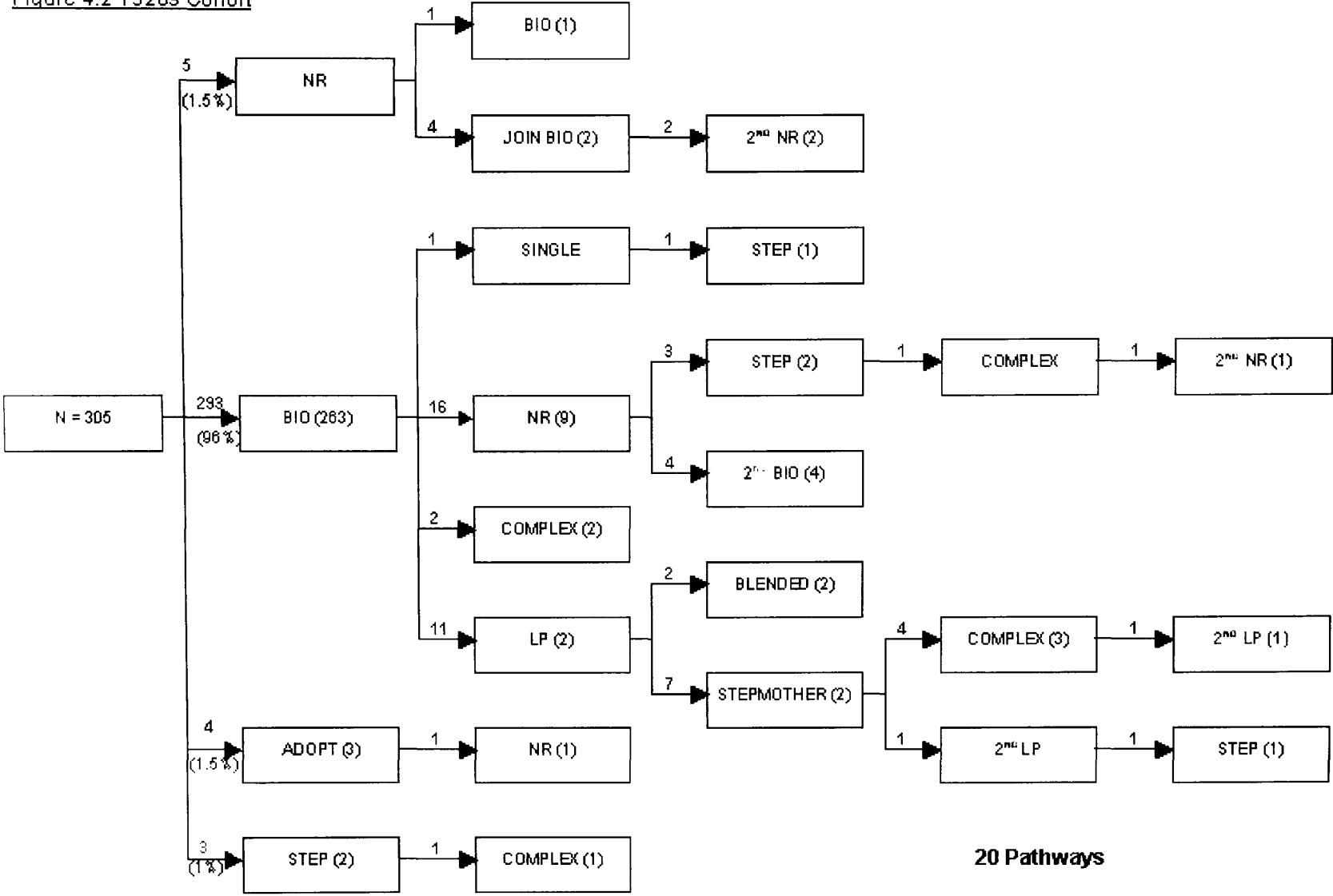


Figure 4.3 1930s Cohort

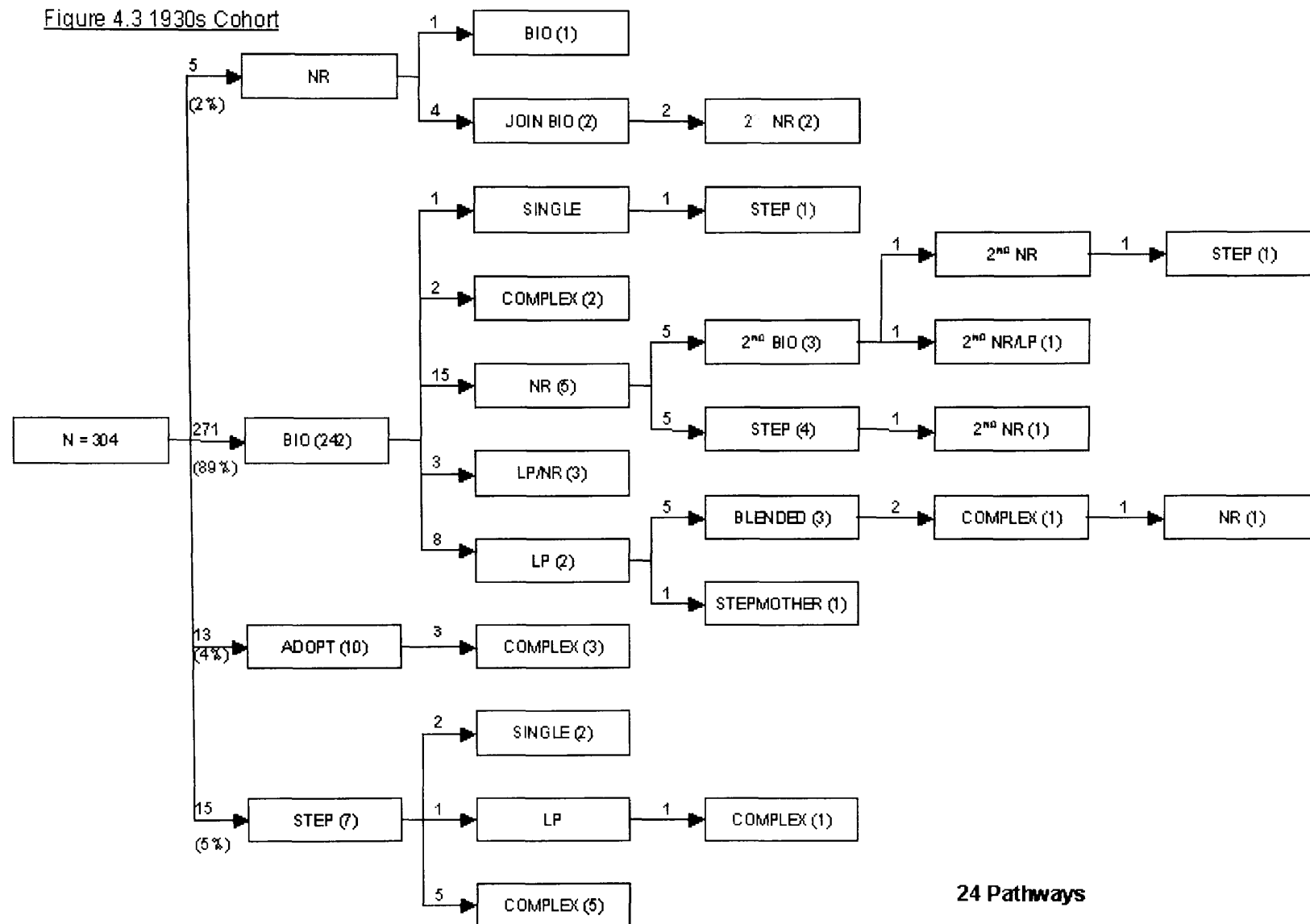
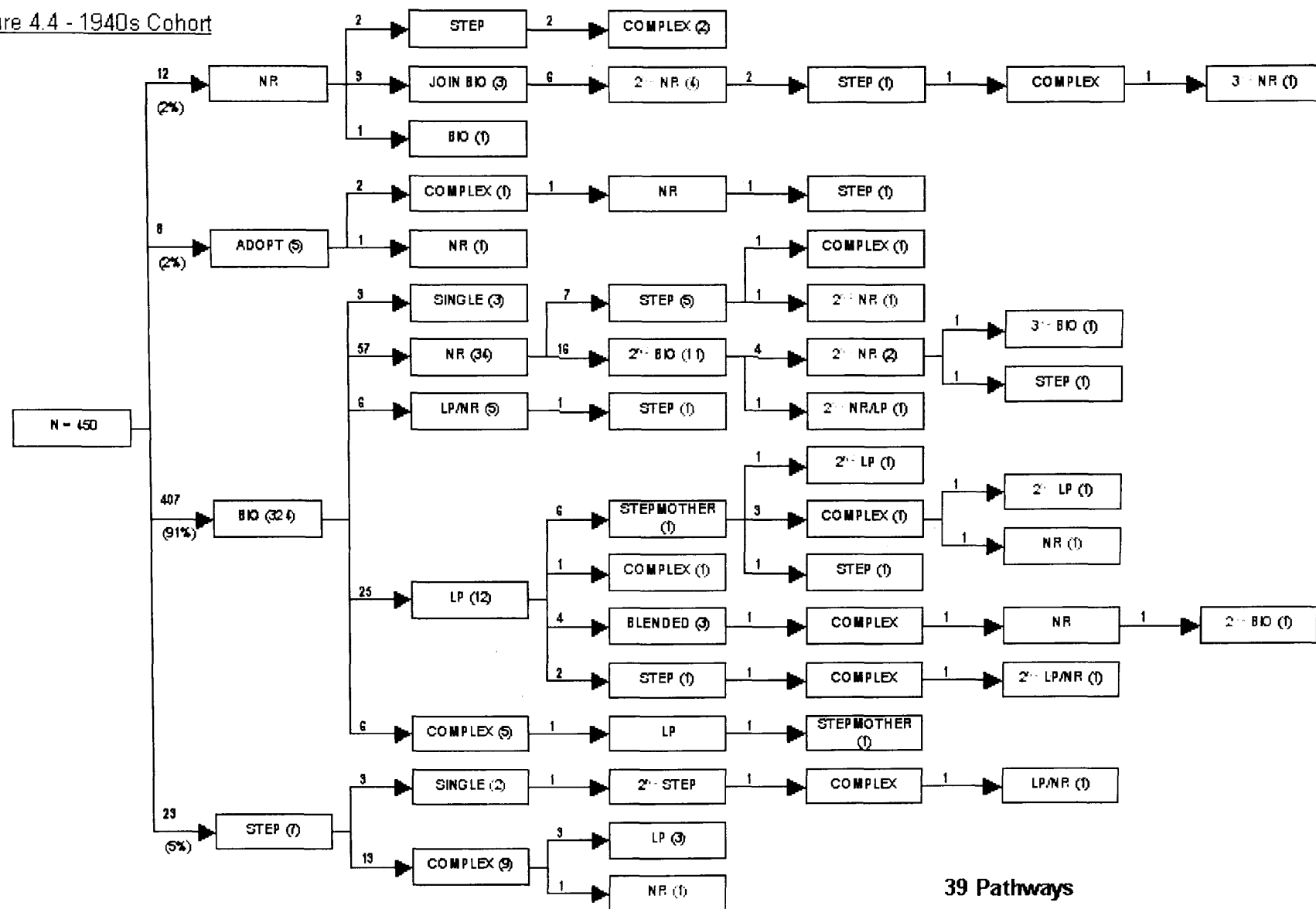


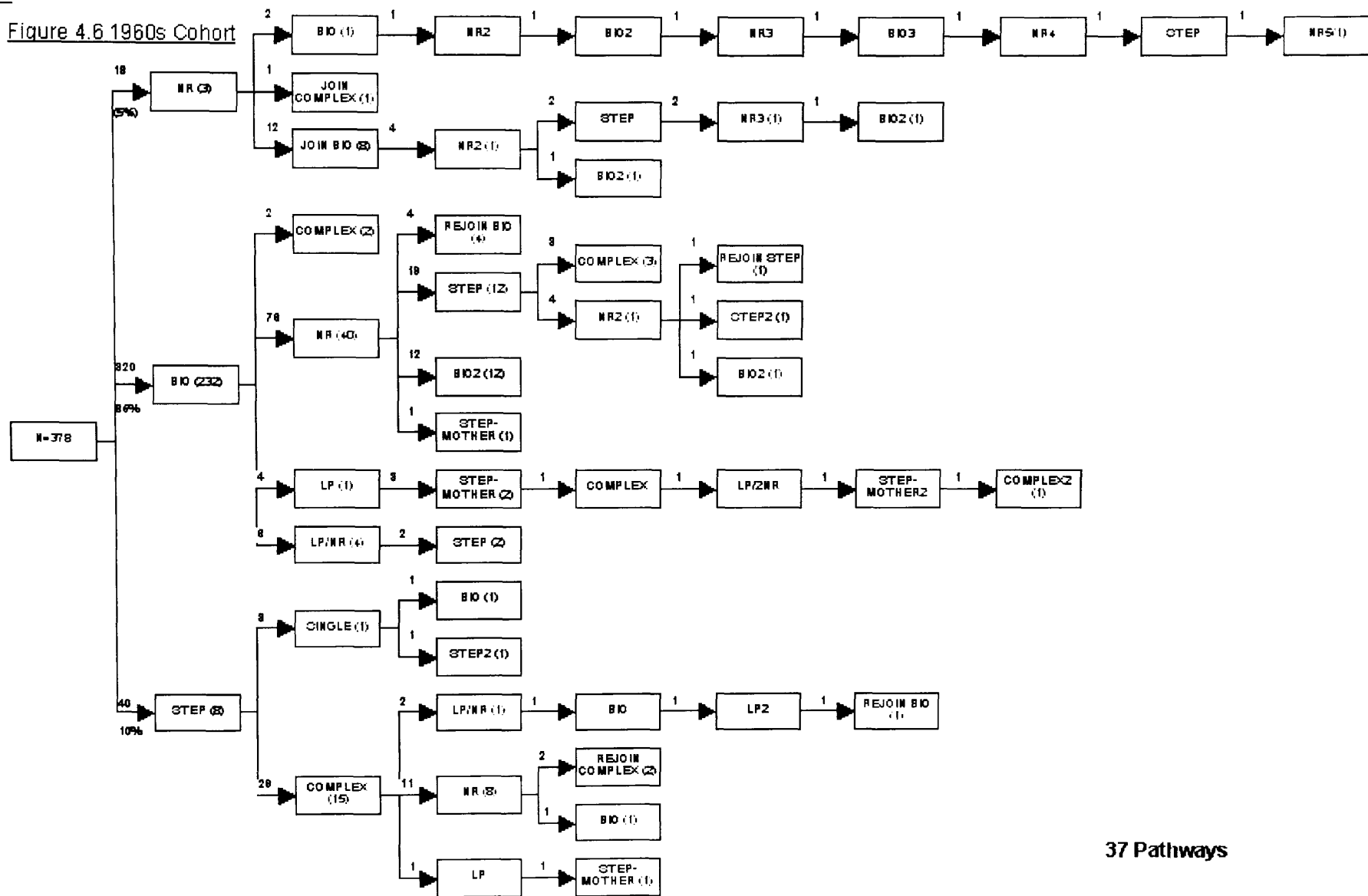
Figure 4.4 - 1940s Cohort



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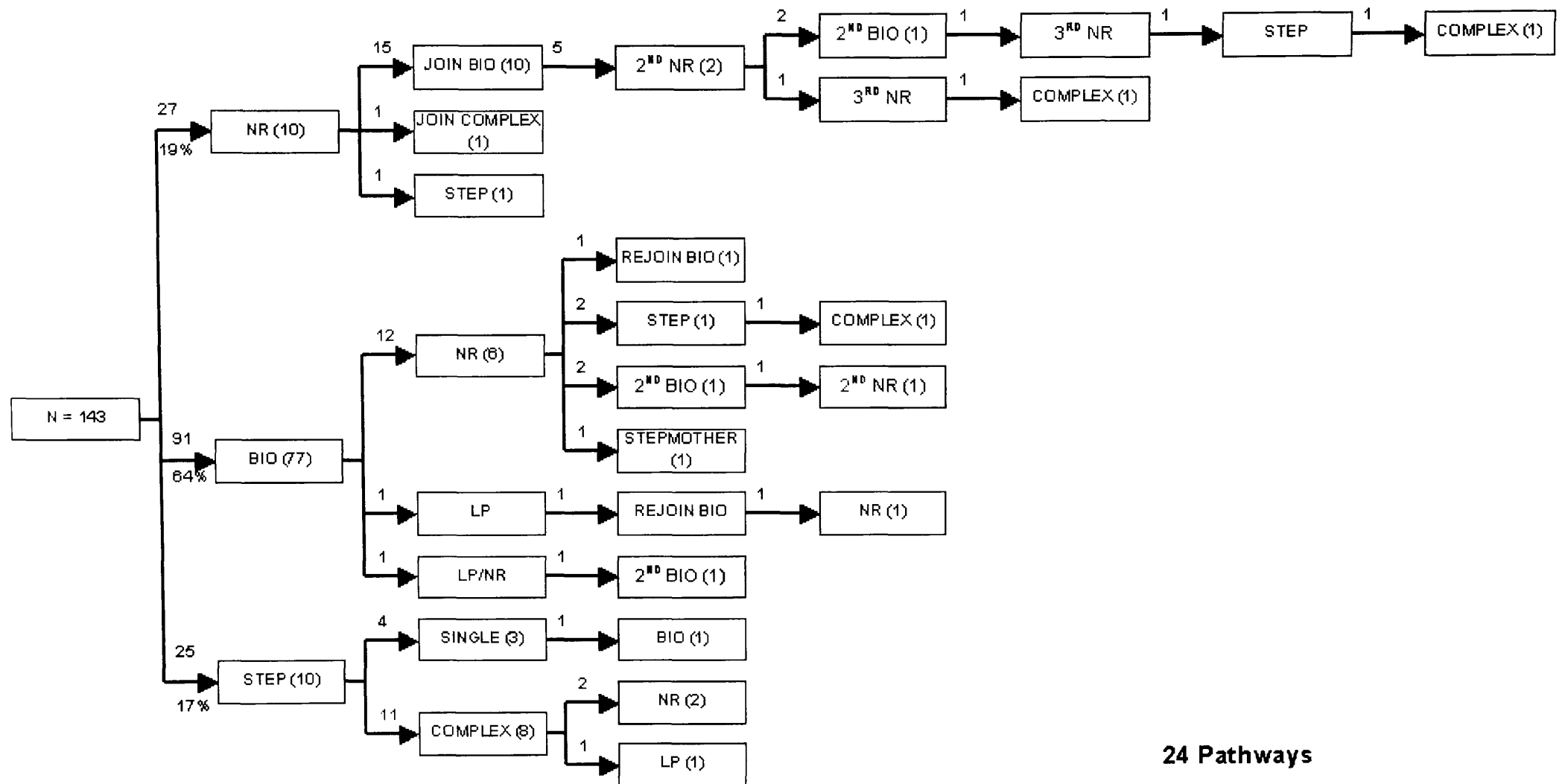


Figure 4.6 1960s Cohort



37 Pathways

Figure 4.7 1970s Cohort



24 Pathways

4.6 Diverse Starting Points.

If we start by exploring the family situation the men in each birth cohort were in when they first became fathers. The men began their paternal careers in one of four²⁸ possible situations: as co-resident biological fathers residing with their biological children and the children's biological mother, creating a biological intact family (BIO), as non-resident biological fathers residing in a different household to their biological children (NR), as co-resident adoptive fathers (ADOPT) or as co-resident stepfathers (STEP).

The vast majority of men in all birth cohorts were co-resident with the child's biological mother at the time of the child's birth, thus creating a biologically intact family. The proportion doing so however has declined over time, dropping from 96% of fathers born in the 1920s, to 85% of those born in the 1960s and finally to 64% of those born in the 1970s. However, since the majority of men born in the 1970s cohort have not yet become fathers, and these percentages are a proportion of those who are already fathers, this figure is likely to increase in the future. Therefore, the biologically intact family is still the most common family situation in which men first become fathers. Some men however, have started their paternal careers outside of the biologically intact family in all birth cohorts. Whilst the proportion starting as adoptive fathers peaked for those born in the 1930s, adoption has never been a significant route into fatherhood for the majority of men in any of the birth cohorts.

Alternatively, the proportion of men beginning their paternal careers as either co-resident stepfathers or as non-resident biological fathers has substantially increased. The proportion starting as stepfathers increased fivefold in just one generation rising from just 1% of those born in the 1920s, to 5% of those born in the 1930s, before stabilising at this level for those born in the 1940s and 50s cohorts. For those born in

²⁸ The wife of one father born in the 1940s died the same month that their child was born. It is possible that this individual began his paternal career as a lone father if his wife died in childbirth. However, since the actual date of the child's birth and the mother's death is not recorded in the BHPS, this cannot be definitively established. Therefore, this individual has been categorised as starting in a biologically intact family and then becoming a lone father.

the youngest two cohorts, however, stepfatherhood as a first experience of parenthood has become more common, with 10% and 17% of those born in the 1960s and 70s respectively starting their paternal careers as stepfathers. Thus the findings from the BHPS presented here, echo those of Ferri and Smith (2003) and Ferri (2005) who found that the proportion of men who were stepfathers had doubled between cohorts (comparing the NCDS fathers born in 1958 and the BCS fathers born in 1970), with 17% of men born in 1970 becoming stepfathers by the age of 30. Unfortunately the data from the NHSD did not distinguish between step and biological children (Ferri and Smith, 2003) so a comparison cannot be made.

The BHPS data shows a similar rise in the proportion of men starting their paternal careers as non-resident biological fathers. Whereas only 1.5% of those born in the 1920s were not co-resident at the birth of their first child, this figure had risen to 5% of those born in the 1960s and 19% of those born in the 1970s. However, this figure will decrease as more men become fathers. Whilst the data apparently demonstrates a fourfold increase between the two youngest cohorts, again caution is required when assessing the rate of change since the proportions for the two youngest cohorts will change in the future. Additionally, prior research has shown that younger fathers are more likely to be non-resident (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999) and this would result in an over representation of those starting as non-resident fathers within the 1970s birth cohort. However, again, the findings from the BHPS correspond closely to those from the MCS, which found that 15% of babies were born into lone mother households (Kiernan and Smith, 2003; Dex and Joshi, 2004).

Overall the increasing number of births outside of a marriage or a co-residential partnership, plus increasing rates of divorce and separation have resulted in increased opportunities for men to begin their paternal careers outside of the biologically intact family.

4.7 All Change?

Exploring the range of situations men are in when they first become fathers is only one dimension of diversity. Men are increasingly likely to experience multiple

episodes of single fatherhood and different paternal statuses as they make transitions into and out of different family forms. Figure 4.8 shows the number of transitions the fathers in each cohort had made during their paternal careers.

Whilst the majority of men in all birth cohorts do not make any transitions, the proportion of male parents making at least one transition has roughly trebled over time, rising from 12% in the 1920s birth cohort to 36% in the 1960s birth cohort. The proportion of men making two transitions has also trebled rising from 4% in the 1920s birth cohort to 12% of those born in the 1960s. However, whilst the proportion of men making three or more transitions has doubled over time, it remains only a very small percentage of men who experience very complex paternal careers.

Figure 4.8 Number of Transitions by Cohort.

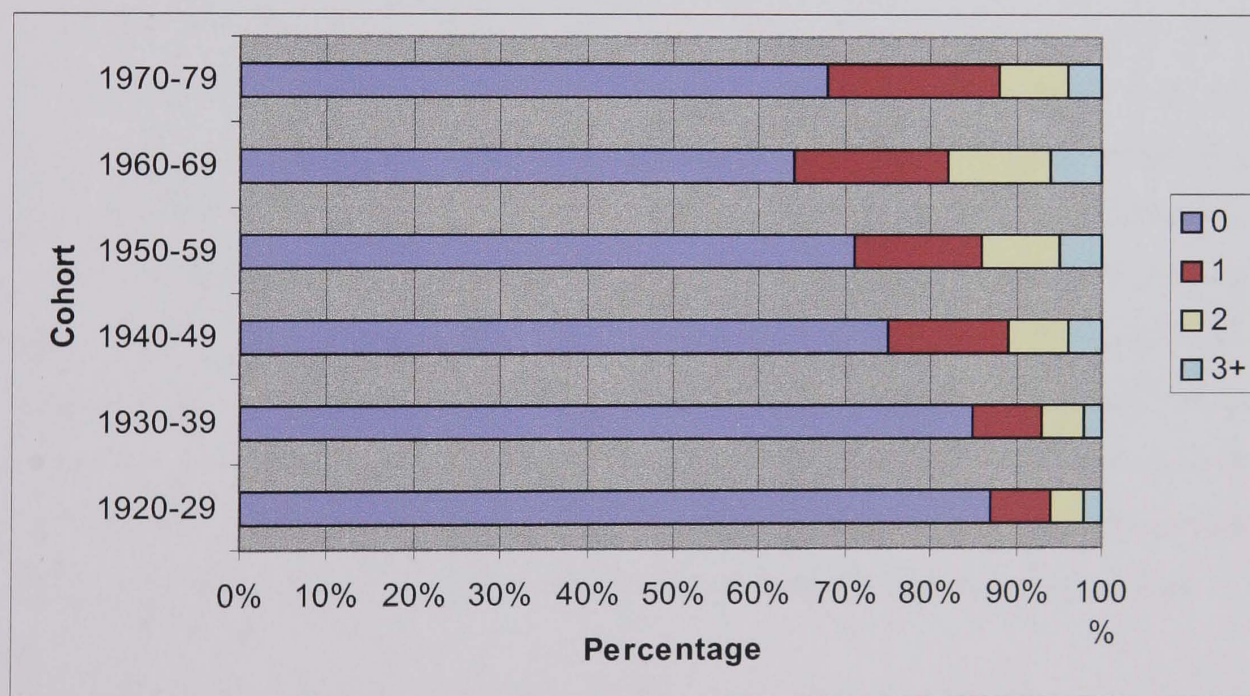


Figure 4.8 does not make the distinction between the events causing the transitions. As stated in Chapter Three, an individual can experience a change in their paternal status as a result of one of two events. The first event is the result of individuals joining a household. Those men starting as non-resident biological fathers may join their children's household (or the mother and children could move to co-reside with

him) becoming a co-resident biological father and creating a biologically intact household.

The data in Figures 4.2 to 4.7 demonstrate that for the majority of those starting as non-resident biological fathers in each cohort, the father, mother and children did eventually become co-resident. Kiernan (2005) has conducted the most detailed investigation of the demographic characteristics and fathering behaviours of this small but rapidly increasing group of men who are non-resident when their child is born²⁹. Kiernan (2005) found that whilst this group of fathers were younger on average than either married or cohabiting fathers, the majority (two thirds) were 25 or over when their child was born. The fathers were much more likely to reside in deprived areas, and have a lower level of educational qualifications in comparison to fathers who were co-resident at the time of birth. However, 63% were still named on the birth certificate and 45% had attended the birth, suggesting that men who begin their paternal careers as non-resident biological fathers are not necessarily totally disengaged and uninvolved with their children. Of significance for this analysis, is the finding that 24% of the non-resident fathers were co-resident by the time the child was 9 months old. Although numbers are small, a higher proportion (approximately 50%) of the BHPS fathers who started their paternal careers as non-resident biological fathers in each cohort made the transition to co-resident biological father within a year of their child's birth³⁰. Those born in the 1920s are an exception. The majority of men starting as non-resident biological fathers in this birth cohort became co-resident between 1 and 2 years after the birth of their child. However, all of these men became fathers during the Second World War. Active military service is therefore the most likely reason for their delayed transition to co-resident father.

Alternatively, the birth of biological children can result in an individual making the transition from being a stepfather only to becoming a co-resident step and biological father creating a complex household. The same transition may also occur as a result of a stepchild joining the household. Again Figures 4.2 to 4.7 show that in all the birth cohorts (except the two oldest) the majority of those starting as stepfathers did become biological fathers within this family situation creating a complex stepfamily.

²⁹ Although only half of the non-resident fathers in Kiernan's (2005) study were first time fathers.

³⁰ Since the numbers are so small, I have provided the raw data in Table D.4 Appendix D.

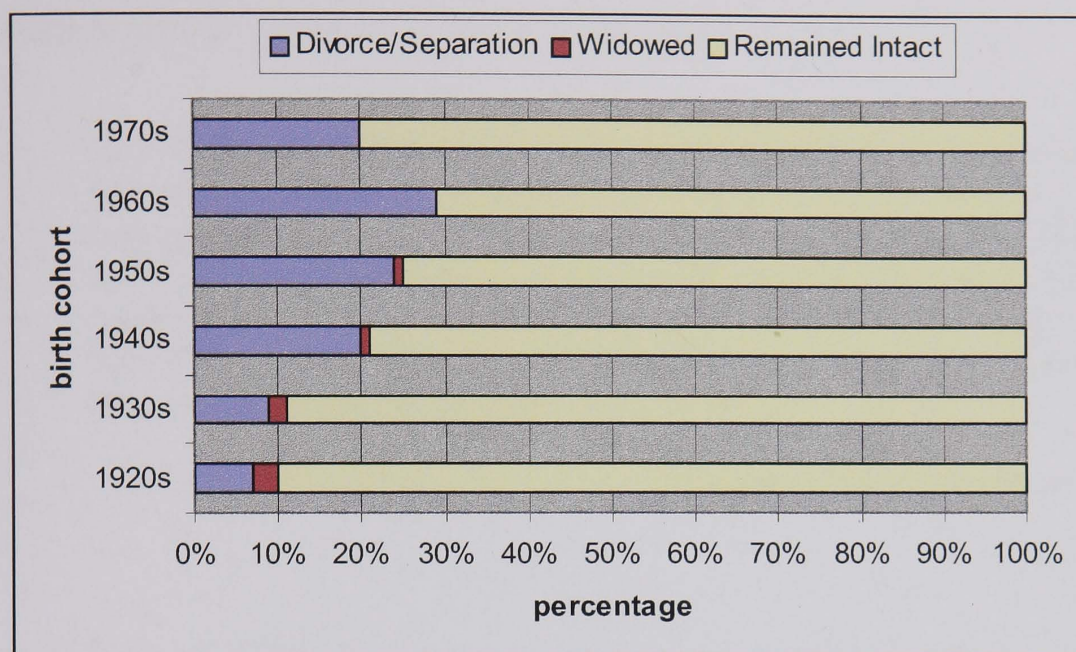
However a closer look at the figures shows that as more men in each birth cohort start their paternal careers as stepfathers, an increasing proportion of these stepfathers first become biological parents within the stepfamily situation. For those born in the 1920s and 30s a third of those starting as stepfathers went on to have their first biological child within that relationship. The proportion doubled however, for those born in the 1940s and 50s, with just under two fifths first becoming biological fathers within the stepfamily situation. There was a further increase for the fathers born in the 1960s, of which just under three quarters became biological fathers within the stepfamily situation. Whilst only two fifths of those born in the 1970s have done this, they are at a much earlier stage in their paternal career, and this proportion will most likely increase in the future. As a proportion of all fathers born in the 1970s, they currently represent 8%, a figure which matches the proportion of men born in the BCS who were residing in a complex stepfamily at age 30 (Ferri and Smith, 2003).

The second event is the dissolution of the couple relationship (through either divorce, separation or bereavement), at which point individuals (either the father, the father and children, the mother, or the mother and children) leave the household and cease to be co-resident. This marks the father's entrance into an episode of single parenthood, as either a lone or non-resident biological father. For those individuals who are stepfathers only, they make the transition to being a single man.

4.8 Relationship Breakdown.

The latest predictions based on the 2005 divorce rates are that 45% of all marriages will end in divorce (Wilson and Smallwood, 2008). Separation rates for those in cohabiting partnerships are very difficult to accurately measure since they are not formally registered, but evidence suggests that cohabiting partnerships are more likely to end than are marriages (Kiernan, 2003).

Figure 4.9 Percentage of men in each cohort who experienced the dissolution of their first coupled family situation.



Since I discussed the increased prevalence of divorce and separation in Chapter Two do not intend to discuss the data presented in Figure 4.9 in any detail. I have provided the percentages above in order to contextualise an issue that became the focus of concern during the 1990s. The relevant point from the data presented above is that a larger proportion of fathers in the younger birth cohorts find themselves in a position where they are able to form a subsequent family.

4.9 Serial Fathering.

Something of a moral panic developed at the end of the 1980s regarding the increasing numbers of female lone parents reliant on welfare benefits. In order to reduce the burden on the welfare state, the Conservative government mounted a campaign to ensure that 'absent' fathers remained financially responsible for their non-resident biological children. Evidence suggested that non-resident fathers transferred their financial and emotional resources to their 'new families', leaving the children from their 'first families' at an increased risk of living in poverty (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999) and that those forming new families were less likely to remain in contact

with the children from the first (Burgess, 1997). Thus the parenting and partnering behaviour of fathers came under scrutiny, with some voicing concern about the extent of 'serial fatherhood'. Conservative MP David Amess argued that welfare dependency and a shortage of social housing were:

'caused by what I describe as the breakdown of traditional family life in this country and the popularity of transient relationships. By this I mean men moving in and out of relationships with women, producing children and then abandoning those women and the children. This trend I utterly condemn. The women and the children are the victims of the irresponsible behaviour of many men. It is not acceptable for those men to regard the state as a substitute family; it can never be that'

(Hansard, 20/04/1993, column 297).

Thus the intention of Children Act 1989 and the Child Support Act 1991 was to reinforce the notion that first families came first, providing a deterrent to men moving from family to family leaving children behind (Smart and Neale, 1999b).

As far as I am aware, the extent of 'serial fatherhood' has not been fully explored. However, Clarke (1997) found that only 3% of men had very complicated family histories, that is three or more family commitments. There are various ways in which one could define 'family commitments' however. Clarke (1997) counted the family situation in which a man first became a biological father as his first commitment. His second would be as a result of that relationship ending and his moving into another household (living either alone or with a partner). A third commitment would result if that subsequent relationship ended, but only if he had fathered a biological child within it. A simpler way of calculating the number of family commitments men have in relation to biological fatherhood is to calculate the percentage of fathers within each birth cohort who have biological children with more than one woman.

Table 4.1 Number of Biological Mothers.

	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
0	2	6	7	20	3	15	2	10	3	10	9	13
1	85	289	91	277	92	412	92	407	92	346	86	123
2	3	10	2	7	5	22	5	21	5	20	4	5
3+	0	0	0	0	<1	1	1	3	<1	2	1	2
Base	100	305	100	304	100	450	100	441	100	378	100	143

As Table 4.1 shows whilst the proportion of men having biological children with multiple female partners has increased across birth cohorts, it remains the case that only a very small proportion of all fathers actually do so.

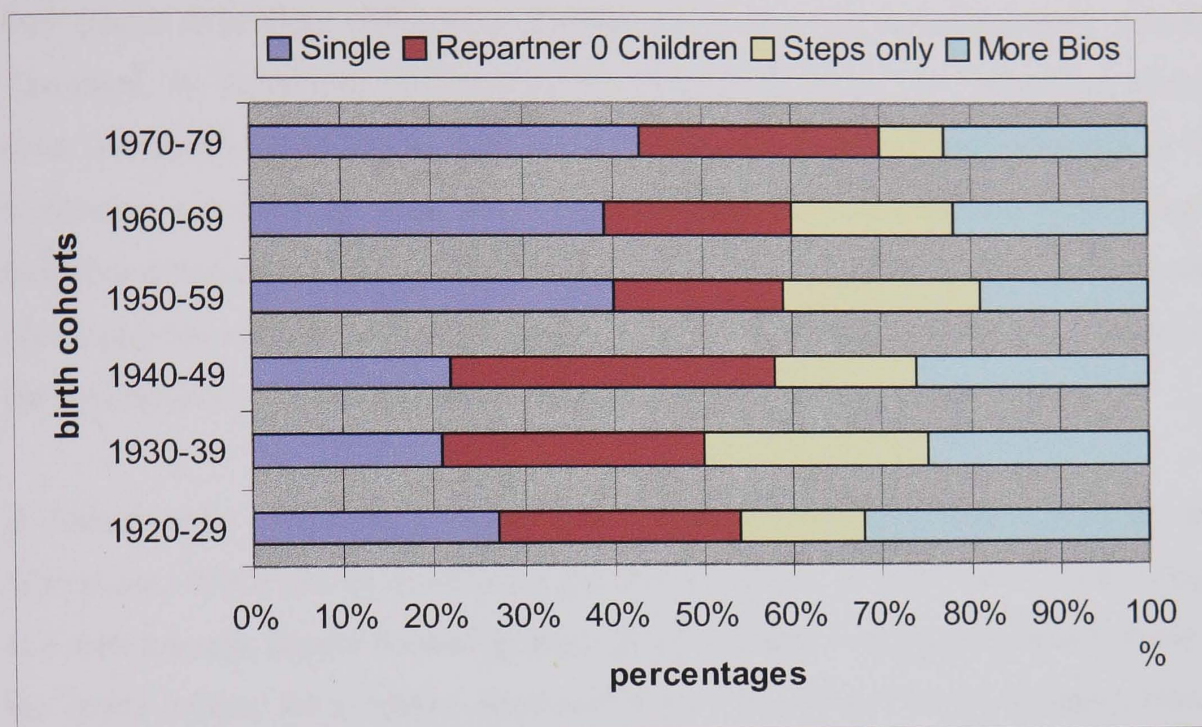
However, both Clarke’s (1997) method of defining a family commitment and the method of simply counting the number of women that men have biological children with do not take into account any financial commitments towards co-resident stepchildren in subsequent family situations. Additionally, since a larger proportion of fathers in the younger birth cohorts have experienced the dissolution of their first coupled family situation, and more men are beginning their paternal careers as non-resident fathers it automatically follows that larger numbers of men find themselves in a position to form ‘subsequent family commitments’. Therefore, in order to establish if fathers in younger cohorts behave significantly differently to those in older cohorts, a more accurate approach is to establish what proportion of those who have become *available* to form ‘subsequent families’ actually do so.

Figure 4.10 shows the parenting and partnering behaviour of those fathers who were available to form a ‘subsequent family commitment’. Given the heterogeneous nature of the paternal careers in the younger birth cohorts in particular, with some fathers making multiple transitions into and out of a variety of different family situations, I have simplified what ‘counts’ as a ‘subsequent family commitment’ somewhat.

As demonstrated in Figures 4.2 to 4.7 some men begin their paternal career as stepfathers, experience the dissolution of this coupled family situation and then go on to form a biologically intact family. For the purposes of this analysis the biologically intact family, would be his second coupled family but it would not count as a 'subsequent family commitment'. This is because in Britain stepfathers do not usually have a financial or emotional obligation towards stepchildren once they are no longer co-resident (Bainham, 1999). Thus it is unlikely that stepchildren would constitute a drain on the father's financial or emotional resources once he has established a 'new family'. Therefore 'commitments' have been counted from the point at which an individual becomes a biological father, in whichever family situation this may occur. Additionally, some fathers form multiple coupled families, some of which contain only stepchildren, only biological children or a mixture of both. Again, I have simplified the analysis, so that if a man forms three different coupled families after the birth of his first biological child, but does not become a biological father in any of these subsequent family situations he is counted as 'Steps only'. If he did have more biological children in at least one of the coupled family situations then he is counted as 'More Bios'. Furthermore, men who either return to their previous family situation or lone fathers who re-partner have not been included, since the subsequent coupled situation does not constitute a 'new commitment' on their emotional or financial resources.

Whilst the majority of men in each birth cohort do choose to re-partner and form a subsequent coupled household, the proportion of men having more biological children within that subsequent coupled family situation follows a somewhat variable pattern, dropping from a third in the oldest birth cohort to just under a fifth of those born in the 1950s before rising again to just under a quarter for those born in the 1970s. Again, given the relatively young age of those born in the 1960s and 70s it is reasonable to assume that the proportion having more biological children will increase in further in the future.

Figure 4.10 Parenting and partnering behaviour of fathers available to form a 'second family commitment'.



The proportion of fathers in each birth cohort who parent stepchildren only in subsequent family situations is even more erratic, with increases and decreases of between 6 and 10% between cohorts. However, with the exception of those born in the 1930s, of whom 50% formed a subsequent family situation containing more dependent children, the majority of fathers have remained either single or have formed coupled households with no dependent children.

The most dramatic difference is the sharp increase in the proportion of fathers born in the 1950s choosing to remain single. The figure is double that of those born in the 1930s and 40s. Whilst a similar proportion of those born in the 1960s and 70s have also opted to remain single, their younger age increases the likelihood that they will form coupled households at some point in the future. The proportion opting to repartner and form a household without any co-resident children is more variable, peaking at 36% for those born in the 1940s, before declining again to approximately one fifth of those born in the 1950s and 60s.

Disentangling the impact of social policy initiatives such as the Child Support Act 1991 on men's parenting and partnering behaviour from other factors such as the

increased costs of living is a difficult task. However, from the data presented in Figure 4.10 above, it is clear that fathers in the younger birth cohorts do not seem any more or any less likely to form subsequent family commitments within which they parent dependent children in comparison to those in the older birth cohorts. Therefore, the behaviour of contemporary fathers is not 'new'. There have always been fathers who have engaged in serial fatherhood. What is 'new' however is the increasing numbers of men who find themselves in a position where serial fatherhood becomes a possibility. Perhaps then it is prudent to tentatively state that social policies such as the Child Support Act 1991 seem to have had little impact on the willingness of fathers to engage in serial fatherhood.

A further point about the alleged 'male flight from commitment' (Popenoe and Whitehead, 2002) can be made from the data presented in Figure 4.10. Whilst there is a shift towards fathers becoming more likely to remain single, particularly those in the 1950s cohort, the evidence does not suggest that fathers are abandoning family life to any great extent. Thus whilst serial fatherhood has been condemned in some quarters as irresponsible (see Amess 1993 above), the fact that a significant proportion form subsequent families is indicative of an ongoing attachment to family life.

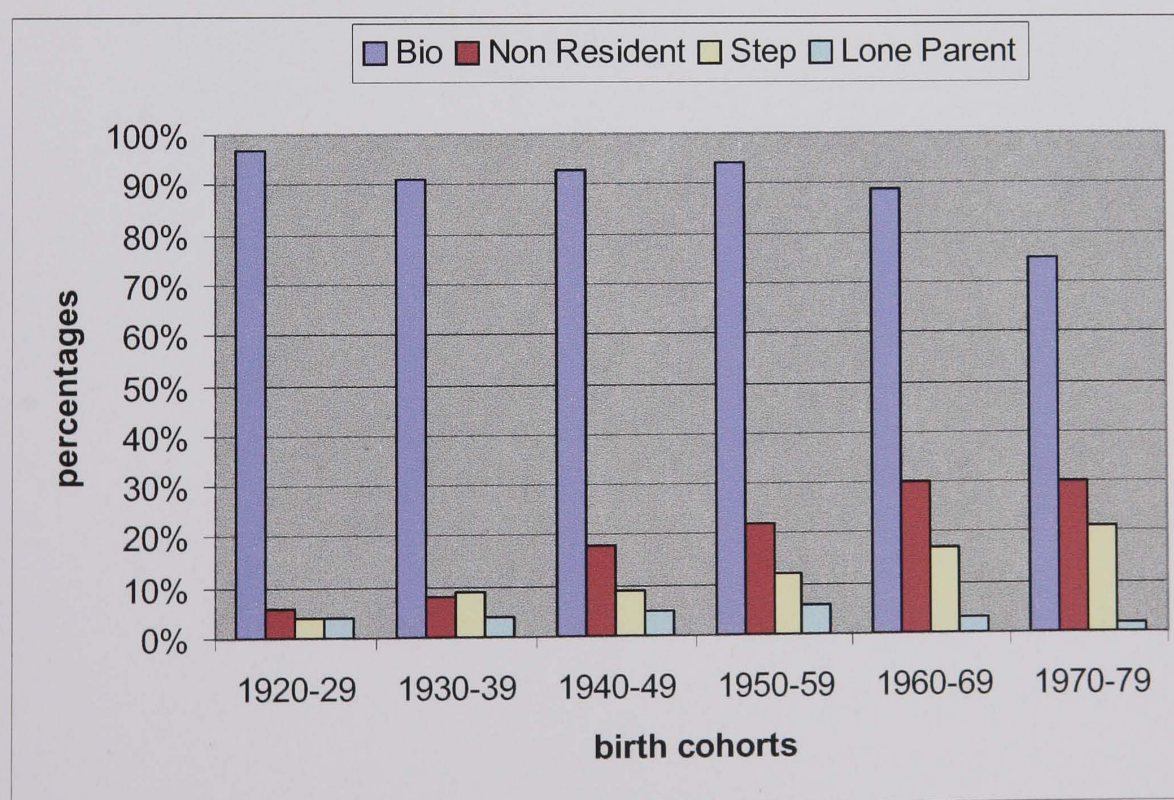
4.10 The Paternal Career over time.

Whilst analyses based on cross sectional data can indicate who is a non-resident or stepfather at any given point in time, the value of longitudinal data is that it is possible to establish the proportion of fathers who have 'ever' experienced stepfatherhood, lone fatherhood and non-resident fatherhood.

Figure 4.11 below shows the proportion of men in each birth cohort who have experienced at least one episode as either a co-resident biological father, a non-resident biological father, a co-residential stepfather and/or a lone parent. The percentage of men spending some time as a non-resident father has increased steeply rising from 6% of those born in the 1920s to 12% of those born in the 1950s. Currently, 30% of those born in the 1960s and 70s have experienced at least one

episode as a non-resident father. There has also been a steady increase in the proportion of men who have been a stepfather at some point in their paternal career. It is difficult to assess how much and in what direction these proportions will change for the two youngest cohorts, as men become fathers and others experience the dissolution of their family situations in the future. However, claims that the majority of children are being raised by stepfathers (Condrón, 2004) are erroneous. Although non-resident fatherhood and stepfatherhood are becoming increasingly common and the percentage of men who have ever fathered in a biologically intact family has decreased from 97% of those born in the 1920s to 75% of those born in the 1970s, the majority of men will parent in this family 'type' at some point during their paternal career.

Figure 4.11 Percentage of fathers who have ever experienced co-resident biological, step, non-resident or lone fatherhood.



The data above also highlights that becoming a lone father remains an uncommon experience for men. Official figures estimate that lone fathers comprise 10% of all lone parents and 2% of all families with dependent children (McConnell and Wilson,

2007). That a slightly higher proportion of men born in the 1940s and 50s have experienced lone fatherhood in comparison to the two youngest cohorts is most likely a function of age. Lone fathers tend to be older than lone mothers with 76% of lone fathers aged 35 or older (Holtermann *et al.*, 1999). The children in lone father families also tend to be older, with just under half aged 11 or older (Office for National Statistics, 2004). Ferri and Smith (2003) also found that only 2% of fathers in the BCS were lone parents at age 30, whilst amongst the fathers in the NCDS 4% were lone parents at age 42/3.

Table 4.2 below shows the five most common paternal careers within in each birth cohort. As the proportion of those following the BIO Only career decreases we can see that there is no one other pathway which currently pre-dominates as very small percentages of men have followed different paternal careers. Therefore a substantial proportion of the youngest cohorts of fathers are following any one of a number of diverse and individualised paternal careers.

Table 4.2. Five Most Common Paternal Careers in each Cohort.

1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
Career	%	Career	%	Career	%	Career	%	Career	%	Career	%
BIO ONLY	86	BIO ONLY	80	BIO ONLY	72	BIO ONLY	69	BIO ONLY	61	BIO ONLY	54
BIO-NR	3	ADOPT	3	BIO-NR	8	BIO-NR	8	BIO-NR	11	BIO-NR	7
BIO-NR-BIO	1	STEP	2	BIO-NR-BIO	3	STEP-COMPLEX	4	STEP-COMPLEX	4	NR ONLY	7
ADOPT	1	STEP-COMPLEX	2	STEP-COMPLEX	2	BIO-NR-STEP	4	BIO-NR-STEP	3	NR-JOINBIO	7
NR-JOINBIO	1	BIO-NR	2	STEP	2	BIO-NR-BIO	3	BIO-NR-BIO	3	STEP-COMPLEX	6

4.11 Changing Attitudes?

Having examined the paternal careers of the 6 cohorts of fathers, this section considers the extent to which attitudinal change in relation to parenting and partnering has occurred. If the proponents of individualisation and the associated phenomenon of de-traditionalisation (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2001) are correct then attitudes towards marriage, family life and parenting should be less traditional than in the past.

The most recent results from the British Attitudes Survey (Park *et al.*, 2008) suggest that this is indeed the case. In general, the majority of people see little difference between cohabitation and marriage (Barlow *et al.*, 2008; Duncan and Phillips, 2008), less than a fifth agree with the traditional arrangement of male breadwinner – female homemaker (Crompton and Lyonette, 2008) and the majority agree that divorce ‘can be a positive step towards a new life’ (Duncan and Phillips, 2008: 12). However, there does seem to be some variation according to parental status. Duncan and Phillips (2008) found that in some respects parents held less traditional attitudes than the general population, with only 26% agreeing that divorce should be made harder if the children are under 16, in comparison to 32% of non-parents. In light of this, the following analysis explores the fathers’ responses to a selection of attitude statements asked in the BHPS³¹.

4.12 Attitudes towards father involvement, gender roles and lone parent families.

In 2006, Jenny Watson the Chair of the (then) Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) claimed that Britain was in the midst of ‘a social revolution in how much time fathers want to spend with their families. More fathers are more concerned to be more involved with their families than ever before. Their desire to do so is moving faster than politicians' attitude to this’ (cited in The Observer, 12/03/2006). This bold statement followed the publication of findings from a survey of parents (Vinter *et al.*, 2005), which found that 70% of fathers wanted to be more involved in caring for

³¹ Methodological issues which have influenced both the selection of statements and the samples upon which responses are based have been discussed in Chapter Three.

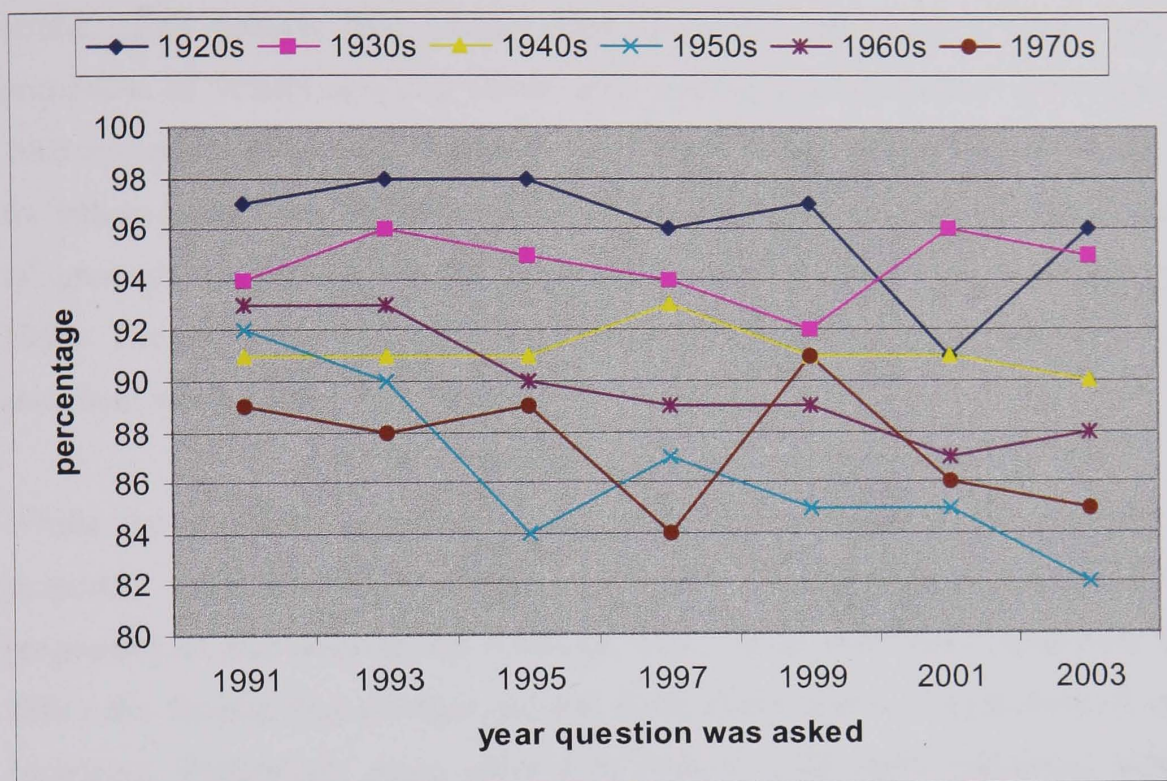
their child and that 58% did not see breadwinning as the most important aspect of fatherhood.

In order to explore the ‘social revolution’ in fathers attitudes, I have presented the proportions of fathers within each birth cohort who agreed with the statement *‘Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother’*, which has been asked in alternate years since the beginning of the survey. This permits exploration of attitudes within each cohort as well as tracking any changes in attitudes over time. Given the findings from the EOC survey outlined above, and the Labour Government’s modest efforts to establish a culture of ‘involved fatherhood’ I would expect that the proportion of fathers agreeing with the statement would increase over time. Additionally, since the model of ‘involved fatherhood’ is presented as ‘new’ and that contemporary fathers are very different in their orientations towards fatherhood in comparison to previous generations of fathers (Dermott, 2003b; 2008), I would also expect the younger birth cohorts to have higher levels of agreement with the statement than those in the older birth cohorts.

As demonstrated in Figure 4.12, in general the vast majority of fathers in all birth cohorts and at all times the question was asked agree with the notion that a child needs an involved father. However, the responses do not overwhelmingly support the expectations that levels of agreement would increase over time, or that younger fathers would have higher levels of agreement in comparison to fathers in the older birth cohorts. The fathers born in the 1920s and 1930s birth cohorts in particular, are consistently more likely to agree with the statement than are the younger fathers, and this difference is statistically significant for those born in the 1920s in almost every year the question was asked ³². Those born in the 1940s were also more likely to agree in comparison to the three youngest cohorts, although their levels of agreement only exceeded those of all three youngest cohorts from 1997 onwards.

³² For the raw data tables and details of statistical significance see Appendix D

Figure 4.12. Percentage of fathers³³ in each birth cohort agreeing with 'Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother' each time the statement was included.



Whilst the pattern of agreement for those born in the 1920s is not smoothly linear, (dropping sharply by 7% in 2001 before rising again by 5% in 2003), the levels of within cohort agreement for those born in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s remain relatively consistent over time, with only 1% difference in the levels of agreement in 2003 in comparison to 1991.

If we now examine the patterns of agreement within the three youngest cohorts. The levels of agreement for those born in the 1970s are the most erratic, dropping by 5% between 1995 and 1997 before rising sharply by 7% in 1999. Levels of agreement then dropped again fairly sharply by 5% in 2001. This is perhaps a consequence of significant proportions of these men first becoming fathers and experiencing their

³³ Some of the men, particularly in the younger two cohorts would not yet have become fathers when they responded to this statement in the earlier waves of data collection. Their responses have however been included to provide an adequate number for analysis.

first separations/divorces within this period. The majority would not yet have become fathers between 1991 and 1995, the period in which attitudes were stable.

In contrast patterns of agreement for those born in the 1950s and 60s are much less erratic. Both cohorts have similar high levels of agreement in 1991, but the proportion of fathers agreeing within each cohort steadily declines over time. By 2003 agreement levels had decreased by 10% for fathers born in the 1950s and 5% for fathers born in the 1960s. Thus whilst the three youngest cohorts were less likely to agree with the statement in 2003, the decline is most marked for those born in the 1950s. The results for this cohort were statistically significant every time the attitude statement was included in the BHPS.

Whilst the generally high levels of agreement within all cohorts supports the purported shift towards a de-traditionalisation of parenting advocated by the proponents of individualisation (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2001) the finding that younger cohorts have lower levels of agreement is rather surprising. Particularly since older men tend to hold more traditional attitudes (Duncan and Phillips, 2008). The findings certainly suggest that caution is needed before claims of a 'revolution' in younger men's attitudes towards fathering are made.

Without tracking the changes in the attitudes of each individual father as he makes transitions into and out of different family forms it is difficult to establish if the increased propensity of younger fathers to follow non-traditional paternal careers is associated with their lower levels of agreement. However, it is possible that fathers in different family situations when the question is asked may have given different responses. In order to explore if this is a possible factor, I have performed a cross-sectional analysis of fathers' responses to the 'involved father' attitude statement.

Table 4.3 shows the responses of fathers according to the family type they were in at the time the attitude question was asked. This is not based on the same sample as the longitudinal analysis (as discussed in Chapter Three).

Table 4.3. Responses of all Fathers in Wave M to the statement ‘Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother’ by Family Situation.

	BIO		STEP		COMPLEX		LONE		NR		
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	
Agree	88	1269	78	135	93	147	95	55	89	33	
Neither	9	139	18	31	7	11	5	3	8	3	
Disagree	3	40	4	7	<1	1	0	0	3	1	
Base	100	1448	100	173	100	159	100	58	100	37	1875
χ^2 22.096 d.f 8 p < .005 (significant figures in bold)											

However the sample contains all men who were either co-resident or non-resident biological fathers, and co-resident stepfathers of dependent children at Wave M in 2003. Without a detailed exploration of the father’s paternal histories it is not possible to ascertain how many of the fathers in biologically intact, step, complex or lone father family situations also had non-resident dependent children.

The findings do suggest that levels of agreement vary according to the family situation the men were in at the time the question was asked. Both co-resident and non-resident biological fathers have very similar levels of agreement and disagreement. Therefore residential status does not appear to have any impact on attitudes towards father involvement. Given that lone fathers are likely to be highly involved in the care of their children, it is unsurprising that this group have the highest levels of agreement with the attitude statement.

However, the responses of the fathers living in stepfamilies are polarised. Whilst the responses of those living in complex stepfamilies containing both biological and stepchildren are very similar those of the lone fathers, stepfathers residing in households containing only stepchildren are considerably less likely to agree, and more likely to hold rather ambivalent attitudes towards a father’s involvement with children. Both of these figures are in bold as they are statistically significant. The

question then, is why stepfathers without any co-resident biological children within the household would be significantly less likely to agree than stepfathers who co-reside with both biological and stepchildren.

Firstly it is possible that some of these stepfathers have non-resident biological children with whom they have no contact. Thus, they may be more reluctant to feel that the fathers' involvement is central to the child's welfare. Alternatively, it may be that these stepfathers have a difficult relationship with their co-resident stepchildren, who may resist the stepfathers' attempts to establish a paternal role or relationship (Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). A negative experience of stepfatherhood or a marginal role in the household may result in their different response. A further consideration is how the stepfathers have interpreted the wording of the attitude statement. If their stepchildren have non-resident biological fathers who have little or no contact, it is possible that the stepfathers have this in mind when providing an answer. Therefore, a stepfather may be more likely to answer in relation to levels of contact between the stepchildren and the biological father, rather than making a statement about the children's needs as far as their own fathering is concerned.

Nevertheless, regardless of the reasons behind the lower levels of agreement, it is possible that the increasing number of men becoming stepfathers in the younger birth cohorts is at least partially responsible for the decreasing levels of agreement demonstrated in Figure 4.12. Further investigation is required to disentangle this conundrum however.

Given that stepfathers do not agree that fathers need to be involved in the care and upbringing of children to the same extent as biological fathers, I explored the pattern of responses to two further attitude statements. The statement '*A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family*' has been asked in the same alternate years as the father involvement question and provides an indication of how individuals view the appropriate division of earning and caring responsibilities. Table 4.4 below presents the findings.

Table 4.4. Responses of all Fathers in Wave M to the statement ‘A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family’ by Family Situation.

	BIO		STEP		COMPLEX		LONE		NR		
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	
Agree	12	167	13	22	11	18	14	8	30	11	
Neither	30	438	28	48	40	63	40	23	22	8	
Disagree	58	844	60	104	49	78	47	27	49	18	
Total	100	1449	100	174	100	159	100	58	100	37	1877
χ^2 21.367 d.f 8 p < .006 (significant figures in bold)											

In the most recent British Attitudes Survey, 17% of men agreed with the same attitude statement (Crompton and Lyonette, 2008). As we can see, with the exception of those who are non-resident at the time the question was asked, fathers in all the family types are slightly less traditional in their attitudes towards the division of earning and caring in comparison to those in Crompton and Lyonette’s (2008) analysis. Those who are non-resident biological fathers are significantly more likely to agree with a traditional division of earning and caring responsibilities. It is unclear why those who are non-resident only would be significantly more likely to agree with the statement, although the numbers of men in this category are very small, and a larger sample may yield different results.

Whilst the figure is not statistically significant, men in stepfather only families are the group most likely to firmly disagree, closely followed by men in biologically intact families. Thus the responses of the men in both these categories are very similar. Again the responses of fathers in complex stepfamilies and those who are lone fathers are similar to each other. Men in both categories are more likely to provide an ambivalent response.

The BHPS also asks respondents how far they agree with the statement ‘*A single parent can bring up children as well as a couple*’. The men’s responses are presented in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5 Responses of all Fathers in Wave M to the statement ‘A single parent can bring up children as well as a couple’ by Family Situation.

	BIO		STEP		COMPLEX		LONE		NR		
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	
Agree	37	540	55	95	58	93	52	30	51	19	
Neither	27	382	26	45	21	33	26	15	19	7	
Disagree	36	526	19	34	21	33	22	13	30	11	
Total	100	1448	100	174	100	159	100	58	100	37	1876
χ^2 20.362 d.f 8 p < .001 (significant figures in bold)											

The results are generally what would be expected. The majority of men in all family situations except for those in a biologically intact family agree that single parents can make good parents. It is unsurprising that fathers in stepfamilies have the highest levels of agreement, since they have partnered former lone parents. Non-resident biological fathers are least likely to hold ambivalent attitudes and have similar levels of disagreement to those in biologically intact families. What is perhaps surprising is that only 52% of lone fathers agreed with the statement. However, perhaps their responses are influenced by their own experience of raising their children. If they have found this difficult or struggled, then this could influence their responses.

Respondents in the British Attitudes Survey (Duncan and Phillips, 2008) were asked if they thought that single parents are as good as two parents at bringing up children. 42% agreed, an increase of 7% since 1994. The results presented in Table 4.5 demonstrate that the fathers in the BHPS who are in family situations *other* than a biologically intact family, but particularly stepfathers, have much more liberal attitudes in relation to single parenthood.

4.13 Conclusion.

The findings presented in this Chapter confirm both continuity and change. On the one hand, as the individualisation theorists (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) suggest, contemporary fathers are experiencing more diverse

paternal careers in comparison to older generations. Those born in the 1960s and 70s are between two and three times as likely to experience the dissolution of their first coupled family situation and five times as likely to experience at least one episode as a step or non-resident parent in comparison to those born during the 1920s and 30s. Despite being at a much earlier stage in their paternal careers than men in the older birth cohorts, a larger proportion of the current generation of fathers have compressed a greater number of transitions into a much shorter time span. As a result the current generation of fathers are more likely to follow individualised paternal careers and to be negotiating the increasingly fluid and permeable boundaries of families, as well as multiple paternal statuses.

However, as Silva and Smart (1999) and Crow (2002) point out, it is important not to overstate the extent of change. There are important continuities. The majority of those born in the 1970s in particular have yet to become fathers and it is likely that this will increase the proportions that become fathers within a biologically intact family. Very few fathers in the two youngest birth cohorts have *never* parented in a biologically intact family. This family form is not therefore simply being ‘replaced’ by others in a straightforward fashion and it still remains the most popular family situation in which men parent. Similarly, despite the ‘moral panic’ about serial fatherhood only a tiny proportion of men have biological children with multiple mothers. Therefore, the data presented in this Chapter does not support the pessimists’ argument that contemporary fathers are demonstrating a ‘flight from commitment’ (Popenoe and Whitehead, 2002) or are more likely to engage in serial fatherhood in comparison to older generations. It is rather that given the increasing numbers separating and divorcing, there are a larger number of younger fathers available to form subsequent family commitments.

In relation to attitudinal change, prior research has demonstrated that attitudes towards alternative forms of family structures are becoming more accepting and positive, which is what we would expect if the individualisation thesis is correct (Duncan and Phillips, 2008). The data presented above does seem to support this. Men who are parenting in family forms other than the biologically intact family, in general, do have more liberal attitudes towards alternative family forms. However, the responses to the statement ‘*Children need a father to be as closely involved in*

their upbringing as the mother' are rather surprising. That those born in the 1960s and 70s are *less* likely to agree both in comparison to older cohorts *and* over time contradicts what would be expected. These two cohorts have become fathers at a time when 'involved' fatherhood has been actively promoted by the government and a wealth of evidence suggests that involvement is equated with 'good fathering' (Dermott, 2008). As already noted above, it is difficult to establish why younger fathers are less likely to agree and this warrants further investigation.

The next three Chapters present the findings from the in-depth interviews with twenty five fathers. The first (Chapter Five) focuses on the accounts of biological fathers and one adoptive father, exploring the extent to which, the fathers aspire to a model of 'intimate fatherhood' (Dermott, 2008).

Chapter 5 Intimate Fatherhood?

5.1 Introduction.

This is the first of three Chapters that present the findings from in depth interviews with twenty-five fathers. Whilst the following two chapters discuss themes that emerged from my analysis of the interview data, this Chapter is based on a different approach. The reason for this is explained below.

The interviews were not designed to ‘measure’ either the amount of time the fathers spent engaged in fathering practices, or the type of parenting activities they performed but to encourage the fathers to discuss the more practical aspects of their parenting and to find out the types of child care roles they were undertaking in the family. For example, did they take responsibility for things such as arranging dental appointments and making sure children were enrolled in school, or was this left to mothers?

From their interview accounts, it became clear that there was an enormous amount of variation in the actual practice of ‘fathering’. Different fathers engaged in different types of activities with the children and performed varying amounts of the routine everyday childcare. They spent different amounts of time with the children and took varying degrees of responsibility for housework and organising and managing the children’s lives.

It also became clear that for some fathers, individual fathering practices varied enormously over time. Many factors influenced their fathering practices such as changes in their own or their partner’s employment situations, relationships ending, becoming a step, non-resident or a lone parent, fluctuating contact arrangements, and health related issues, among others. Similarly, it is difficult to make any generalisations about fathers in similar family situations. The experiences and perceptions of those who either were or had been non-resident biological fathers for example were not homogenous. There was considerable variation according to

different contact arrangements, the distance they had to travel to see their children, the relationships they had established with their children's mother and so on.

To a certain extent the interview data supports Williams' (2008) assertion that fathering is individualised to the extent that fathers are negotiating and responding in individualistic ways to the circumstances they find themselves in. The fathers in this study were altering their practices to accommodate changing circumstances and not always voluntarily. However, this creates some difficulties in making any generalisations about common experiences or emergent themes from the interview accounts.

What I want to explore in this Chapter therefore, is not the variation in fathering practices over time, important though it is, but rather use the data to assess Dermott's (2003b, 2008) argument about the salience of intimacy to contemporary fatherhood and fathering. As discussed in Chapter Two, Dermott (2003b, 2008) argues that creating and sustaining an intimate connection with the children was a key element of being a 'good father.' Moreover love and commitment to children was not according to Dermott (2003b, 2008) demonstrated through the performance of everyday mundane childcare tasks. Rather, the fathers sustained an intimate connection through shared leisure pursuits, play and open communication. Dermott (2008) argues that the fathers were practising a form of 'disclosing intimacy' (Jamieson, 1998) and interpreted involvement as 'caring about' rather than 'caring for'. 'Involvement' therefore was not based on spending extensive amounts of time with the child and the fathers highlighted the importance of quality time, which they could fit in around the demands of paid employment.

As Dermott (2008) acknowledges, that fathers value the emotional connection with their child is not new (see for example Burgess 1997; and Lupton and Barclay, 1997) and that other more traditional aspects of fatherhood such as financial provision remain important to some fathers. However, it is the centrality of the intimate father-child relationship to conceptions of good fatherhood that is of importance.

5.2 Expectations of Fatherhood.

The transition to fatherhood is a key time when men begin to consider what being a father will involve. The following quotes describe the thoughts of men who were about to become (biological) fathers for the first time. When these men became fathers they were in family situations closely resembling those in Dermott's (2003b) study.

'I just looked forward to the time I would be sort of playing with them and engaging with them and doing the dad things really.' (Dave)

'But I'm pretty sure I expected fatherhood to change me which I think it did, and for the better and erm and I had expectations of fatherhood you know the enjoyment of holding your first born, and bouncing him on your knee and teaching him to kick a football and that sort of stuff.' (Ray)

'I remember thinking how much I was going to like being a dad. I had visions of taking them to the first sort of football match and you know the usual, playing football with him'. (Nat)

These quotes present a conception of fatherhood and fathering that centres on direct interaction and active involvement with the child. In one sense they seem to confirm the shift towards the notion of actively involved fathering popularised in contemporary discourse (O'Brien, 2005) and there is little focus on the nurturing component of parenting. What is striking about the above accounts is that the practicalities involved in caring for young babies and infants are largely absent. The fathers were focussing on fathering practices that would be appropriate for older children who need less intensive active care rather than on newborns, who need intensive care and input. In addition to this, the fathering practices mentioned above are those traditionally associated with fathers and fathering. Play features prominently in the accounts, particularly football. This is surprising given the findings from the EOC study discussed in Chapter Two that almost four fifths of fathers claimed that they would happily stay at home and look after the baby (Vinter *et al.*, 2005).

Stan's quote however, provides some indication as to why activities with older children featured so prominently in the expectations of the fathers above. Stan states that he didn't really have any expectations of what fatherhood would involve prior to becoming a father and instead discusses how he felt when his son was a baby.

'I hadn't really any expectations of being a dad, well except of some idea of how my own dad had parented me I guess. But initially it was a bit, not difficult, er, I don't know the word, but I didn't really feel like a dad when he was very young. I think you feel that, to some degree you expect some sort of interaction and at that age you're not going to get it. Er so aside from all the usual stuff of changing nappies and bathing him and stuff well er I dunno. It was once he came of an age where you get something back. It sort of changed, you know you are sort of talking with him, and then I enjoyed it.' (Stan).

Stan's quote is interesting. Although he states he had no prior expectations, he contradicts himself by going on to say 'you expect some sort of interaction'. Whilst he mentions performing some of the everyday routine childcare tasks associated with caring for a baby, this did not make him *feel* like a father. Rather, getting something back, but more importantly, getting something back through shared communication resulted in Stan feeling like a father.

Frank was unusual amongst the biological fathers, in the sense that his expectations of what fatherhood would entail did not centre on play activities or older children, but rather focussed on nurturing.

'My expectations were of erm like nurturing and helping a little person growing in to a bigger person in their own unique ways all these kind of things you know. Whether that's idealised or not I don't know. I'd always like had these images and processes in my mind about what it's like to be a parent. Um, I think I've not been disappointed so far cos you expect at certain stages a complete lack of sleep, the terrible twos you know all that sort of stuff but I think a friend of my wife's summed it up so well he just said he did not expect to fall in love all over again you know and I have done with this little person and its fantastic. That's what I've found'. (Frank)

Whilst Frank does not focus on the practical aspects of caring for a baby or young child, his expectations of fatherhood do focus on nurturing. His conception of what fatherhood might entail is less gendered in comparison to the other fathers mentioned above. Frank is also unusual in that he discusses the emotions he felt upon becoming a father, likening it to ‘falling in love all over again.’ Expressing love for children in this rather romantic manner is a common theme in the literature on the transition to fatherhood, as is the tendency for some fathers to discuss the often-unexpected emotional intense emotions aroused by witnessing the birth and becoming a father for the first time (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Gatrell, 2005). I had therefore expected more fathers in this study to express similar sentiments, but only Frank did.

5.3 Comparisons to ‘dad’.

The theme of consciously developing an emotionally close relationship with children emerged when some fathers were discussing how their own fathers had parented them.

‘I always thought that with my 2 kids I try to be as close as I can with my 2 boys. Whereas me and my dad aren’t. I don’t think my dad has ever said he’s loved me. I’m always telling the boys I love them. You know and we talk about things, which me and my dad never used to do’. (Peter)

‘I get on really well with my dad, I really do get on well with him and er, I’m really lucky to have the parents I do. The main difference for me is that I still find it hard to talk to my dad about like emotional issues and things. Me and him don’t really kind of talk about stuff, and I don’t quite feel as though I could go to him with everything. But I really want the kids to be able to talk to me about anything. Anything at all. And I really wanna try and make sure that they can do that’. (Anthony)

The quotes from Anthony and Peter reflect the sentiments of some of the fathers in Dermott’s (2003b, 2008) research. Peter highlights his father’s lack of ability to openly express emotion, whilst Anthony mentions his father’s reticence to discuss emotional matters. Both felt some degree of emotional distance in their relationship

with their fathers as a result. This is something that both are keen to ensure does not happen with their own children.

Nat engages in a lengthy and detailed discussion of what he perceives as the failings of his own father.

‘My dad wasn’t particularly a good dad. Erm, he was an absent father in that he worked away a lot in a different country. Particularly through to my teens erm, he never had much time for us erm, I mean even like, I can’t even remember my dad ever playing football with us for instance or erm sitting down and building a model kit with me or anything. Erm, my father also was an old fashioned disciplinarian in that if we’d done anything wrong it was a stick erm, and there was a shout you know a real loud bellow usually and then a stick. And so it was well not Victorian but of that time. He wasn’t much of a hands on dad and he erm, if I had a problem I went and spoke to my mum about it, I didn’t go to dad. Whereas with all my kids the one thing we’ve always done is talked erm, we’ve always sat down and talked. In contrast, I’ve agreed with my wives a very similar sort of parenting role where we talk with the children all the time, we explain the results of their actions and erm, and luckily touch wood that all 5 of them are fairly balanced.’ (Nat).

Here Nat draws a very distinct contrast between his own father’s style of parenting, and the way that Nat parents his children. He obviously finds his father’s parenting lacking in warmth and likens his father’s authoritative and disciplinary parenting style to that of the stereotype of the ‘Victorian’ father. Nat draws attention to several aspects which are particularly salient to the theme of this chapter. Firstly he comments on his father’s absence as result of the demands of his work. He draws attention to his father’s lack of time, interest and direct interaction with him as a child. However, he does not judge his father on the grounds that he was uninvolved in childcare, but rather that he did not engage in play activities with him as child. Thus ‘hands on’ for Nat is about playing with children not routine childcare. From Nat’s account it seems that long periods of absence plus a failure to ‘play with’ resulted in a feeling of emotional distance and as a consequence he turned to his mother for emotional support. Therefore Nat’s father did not attempt to build a relationship with Nat, and it is on this basis he is judged an inadequate father. Nat’s account therefore demonstrates the extent to which the relationship between father

and child has become more important. Playing with children and engaging them in conversation are important activities because they facilitate and strengthen the relationship between father and child.

Nat's account also demonstrates a point that Giddens (1992) raised about the nature of parent child relationships in contemporary society. Giddens (1992) argues that family relationships are becoming increasingly 'democratised', and that parent-child relations are altering as a result. In stating 'we talk with the children all the time, we explain the results of their actions', Nat does seem to emphasise a democratic approach based on discussion with the children.

Whilst Nat spoke in rather negative terms about the way his father parented, some fathers spoke in very positive terms about the way in which their own father parented them. When I asked Tony what he thought the similarities and differences were between his fathering and the way his own father parented he replied:

'I think what I'm about to say will sound like I just copied it from dad but I think it's also in my nature. He kind of in many ways befriended me um as a youngster rather than sought to control me and he got me to speak fairly openly and stuff. So we were very close. I do that with my children perhaps because I valued it so much. Maybe I do it more often and more deliberately than he did because it's kind of quite important to me to do that and I've always had a fairly chatty and irreverent relationship with both of my children. I like to feel that they're open to talk to me about, about most things and I can tease them and they can tease me and so on. So I think I learned that from him. I think he did quite a good job.'

(Tony)

As Tony's quote demonstrates he does not see any major difference between his fathering and that of his own father. He recognises that his father's encouragement of open communication facilitated an emotionally close relationship, and this is something he values. Tony therefore is quite happy that he parents in a very similar way to his own father and sees his father as a positive role model. This is in keeping with some of the fathers in Dermott's (2003b, 2008) study, who also regarded their

fathers as positive role models because their style of fathering enabled the establishment of an emotionally close relationship.

5.4 When Breadwinning becomes important.

In the accounts discussed so far, the ‘traditional’ conception of fathering as financial provision is absent. There is some debate as to the extent to which financial provision remains central to fatherhood. The majority of fathers in Warin *et al*’s, (1999) study repeatedly used the term ‘provider’ to characterise their fathering. Hatter *et al.*, (2002: 7) claim ‘the breadwinner role still defines the way in which many men think about fatherhood.’ The majority of the non-resident fathers in Smart and Neale’s (1999b) study tended to view fatherhood as equated with financial provision. In contrast, some such as O’Brien (2005) argue that fathers no longer routinely invoke financial provision as a central aspect of fathering.

Financial provision as a core or central aspect of either fathering or fatherhood was conspicuously absent in the accounts of the majority of fathers in this study. However, some of the fathers did foreground payment of maintenance and the division of property and assets upon their divorce in their accounts when discussing non-resident fatherhood.

When I asked Peter to talk about his experience of non-resident fatherhood this was the first thing he chose to discuss:

‘The DSS told me how much they wanted me to pay and so I did, no problem. I had done right from the word go. I hadn’t shirked any of that. Erm I just walked out the house with my cricket stuff, me fishing tackle and some tools and clothes and that was it. I left everything there, I left the house there, everything, I more or less handed it over to my ex wife and the boys, which I could’ve asked her to sell the house or whatever’.

Similarly, Dave commented:

‘But from day one, I’ve paid everything that they’ve asked me to pay and done all the assessments they’ve wanted me to. For the first 18

months of my leaving I paid the full mortgage on her house as well. I've always paid my dues for the lads. No question.'

Thus both Peter and Dave were concerned to highlight that they had continued to be responsible providers even though they no longer lived with their children. That the father's financial provider role becomes more salient when fathers no longer live with their children is also evident in the account of Mark albeit in a different way.

'So I have him every weekend, and I have to sort things out because he expects new trainers and stuff all the time. He thinks I'm gonna buy him this and buy him that and sort of like heap all these monetary gifts on him. Well he never expected that before I moved out. I shouldn't have to do that. When he comes to me every weekend, I heap love on to him for the whole of that weekend, and that should be more than enough. I shouldn't have to buy you trainers or do any of those sort of things and no one should expect that from me.'

Whilst research has found that children are more likely to go to their fathers when they want money and their mothers when they want to talk (O'Brien and Jones, 1995), it is interesting that this shift in Mark's son's expectation has occurred once Mark has become non-resident.

Gatrell (2005) argues that the roles and responsibilities for non-resident biological fathers are more clearly defined than for fathers within coupled families. This she links to the Child Support Act 1991 which sought to enforce the financial obligations of non-resident biological fathers. This could be a reason for the appearance of financial provision in the accounts of some of the non-resident fathers. However, the way in which Dave and Peter made their statements about paying maintenance, particularly Peter's comment 'I hadn't shirked any of that' suggests that it was an expression of 'good non-resident fatherhood', rather than a simple acknowledgement of financial responsibility. I have discussed how non-resident biological fathers were constructed as 'bad dads' and 'unwilling payers' in Chapter Two. Peter and Dave were therefore making a moral statement, and in doing so expressing what they consider to be a core aspect of good non-resident fatherhood.

However, it is also important to note, that neither Peter nor Dave focussed exclusively on demonstrating they were ‘good payers’ in their interview accounts. I have discussed Peter’s conscious attempts to foster an emotionally close relationship with his sons above. Dave, also talked about demonstrating that he loved his boys.

‘There were flaws in the way that I feel I were brought up, in the lack of sort of bond between me and my dad. I wanted to make certain of was that I sort of weren’t gonna repeat that process. We do both love our children without question. Erm, but the difference is in how we show it. My dad when he met his new wife, he put all his energies into his new wife, to the detriment of us. His priority then became looking after his relationship with his wife. So, I love em like me dad loved me, but the way that you show it, I think I’ve shown it without sort of question and I think I’ll continue to but me dad sort of loves from a distance.’

Like his father, Dave has re-married and his sons have a new stepmother. For Dave demonstrating that he loves his boys is not based on a form of ‘disclosing intimacy’ like the other fathers discussed so far, but is instead centred on his conviction to put the children before his new relationship. Thus Dave demonstrates his love for and commitment to his children with reference to his specific circumstances. I return to the possible influence of family structure on the extent and the manner in which fathers subscribe to a form of ‘intimate fatherhood’ later in the chapter.

5.5 Disclosing Intimacy as a form of control.

The majority of the fathers discussed so far could be regarded as demonstrating a shift towards a form of ‘disclosing intimacy’, placing a premium on understanding the child and demonstrating a close emotional bond. This is generally regarded as having positive emotional consequences for both fathers and children. However, discussing Brannen *et al*’s, (1994) study of parents and teenage children, Jamieson (1998) raises an interesting issue about parent-child relationships and the desirability of constructing intimacy through open communication. She highlights how some mothers encouraged open communication in order to ‘keep tabs’ on their children’s

activities. Disclosing intimacy could therefore be a means to control and influence the child.

I return to the account of Mark, who, as discussed above, had resented his son's expectations that he should buy him presents and new trainers at every contact visit. In discussing his own father he stated:

'I can't remember times where I've just sat down with my dad and sort just had like one to ones or sort of had hearty conversations and that and I make a point of doing that with my son. My son's eleven now and he's asking all sorts of questions, you know he dotes on me'.

In many respects then Mark's quote above seems very similar to those of the other fathers. But as Mark discusses the conversations he has with his son further, a rather different picture emerges.

'Because like I don't live with my son now I only have him at weekends I make a point sometimes we just sit down I say ok let's have a father and son chat and I say what we gonna talk about and it then it makes him think of something for us to talk about. There's nothing that I wouldn't talk to my son about. What I say, that's what he's gonna think and that's what he's gonna perceive in life when he grows up so I've gotta make sure I'm telling him the right things and guiding him in the right way. Otherwise he'll get all his influences from school and you know the playground and all that sort of thing. So I think it's very important that I make sure I tell him what I believe to be the right things and the right way of growing up and how he should sort of guide his life and what sort of like route to take and that. And he's the kind of boy that will go away and think about things and then come back and agree with me'.

From Mark's account it does not appear that his son has much choice as to whether to engage in conversations with his father. Mark is also using the 'chats' to try and extend some control and influence over his son. In contrast to Nat's account discussed above, Mark instigating conversations with his son does not seem to be based on a democratic style of parenting. Rather their conversations are used by Mark to assert a more authoritarian style of fathering.

I now discuss the accounts of fathers who did not foreground emotional closeness or disclosing intimacy as a core component of fatherhood or fathering.

5.6 Fatherhood as ‘caring for’.

As already discussed, the fathers in Dermott’s (2003b, 2008) sample were relatively homogenous in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics and family situations. All were also in full time paid employment. In contrast, the fathers in my sample had parented in a variety of different family situations and not all were in paid employment or coupled family situations.

As I stated in Chapter Three, I had actively attempted to recruit fathers who were parenting in a diverse range of family situations. I had anticipated some difficulty in recruiting lone-fathers. As my analysis of the BHPS in Chapter Four highlighted, only a very small proportion of men become lone fathers during their paternal careers. Lone fathers did prove difficult to recruit, but 3 of the interviewees either were, or had been, a lone father. I was unable to establish the proportion of fathers who become the primary caregiver within a coupled relationship from the data contained in the BHPS, and as discussed in Chapter Two there are no reliable estimates of how many fathers are primary caregivers. However, the available statistics suggest that there are very few fathers in this position (uSwitch.com, 2008). Despite this 6 of the fathers I interviewed either were, or had been, the primary caregiver at some point during their paternal career. Thus a total of 9 fathers in this study had experienced being the primary caregiver.

The fathers’ accounts of being the primary caregiver were quite different from those of the fathers discussed at the beginning of this Chapter, in that the emotional relationship with their children was not fore-grounded or in some cases mentioned at all. Since there is not the space to discuss the accounts of all the primary care giving fathers here, I have selected three to discuss.

I start with a discussion of Steven, who although a non-resident biological father was also a primary-caregiver in the sense that when his daughter came to stay at weekends and during holidays, he was solely responsible for her care.

Unlike the majority of the other biological fathers in this study, Steven had separated from his partner before his daughter was born. Despite this and some initial problems regarding contact arrangements, Steven had managed to forge a positive co-parenting relationship with his daughter's mother.

Yeah well now there's some trust between us, well yeah we share the parenting really. The only difference is that my daughter is with her mother for more of the time. But we discuss parenting a lot and help each other out with things about when to do potty training. Or food and stuff and so yeah, we discuss all that. And you know we swap hints and tips, and say I've got her to do this by doing this and, things like that so...'

Steven had also re-arranged his working hours so he could accommodate his daughter coming to stay during the week.

'I have to pick her up early from nursery, so I have to finish work early, so I get to work early the next morning and things like this so. I've altered my hours of work'

He discussed how he was very happy that his daughter came to stay overnight and at weekends because it gave them more time together.

'I do all of it you know er, taking her to bed, waking her up in the morning, feeding her three times, changing her nappies a couple of times. Whereas if I only had her 3, 4 hours you maybe not even change her nappy, *so you don't get to see the full her and she doesn't get to see the full me*, cos obviously if she's only here the 3, 4 hours I can put off doing the hoovering, I can put off doing the washing, but if she's here for 48 hours, I've got to do some household chores. So she's got to be me with me and see that *so it can't just be you know, special dad*, you know that was one of the things I was erm, careful of, was that I didn't want my daughter to see me as someone she always has treats with, and her mum was someone who always had to do the boring work and me the interesting stuff. So I definitely wanted my daughter to see me do some of the boring stuff as well. I'm very much looking forward to teaching her things and getting her to think and think for herself and to do and to feel and stuff. Books,

we've always got books, I'm always reading 2 or 3 books every time yeah. So there's always that aspect. Yeah I'm very much looking forward to helping her through that.' (my emphasis)

Steven's account of his parenting activities demonstrates that although his daughter does not live with him full time, he is a very highly involved father. During their time together his parenting is virtually indistinguishable from that of a mother. This seems to be very self-conscious on Steven's part. His comment that if his daughter did not stay over the weekend she wouldn't get to 'see the full me' demonstrates that for Steven, active fatherhood is an integral part of his identity. His comment about not wanting to be the 'special dad' highlights his awareness that often the activities that non-resident parents engage in are based on fun outings and leisure pursuits rather than the more mundane aspects of childcare (Stewart, 1999). These activities which some of the fathers' in Dermott's (2003b, 2008) study credit with fostering a closer relationship, are evidently deemed unsuitable by Steven. Therefore actively involved fatherhood and fathering for Steven is about 'caring for' rather than 'caring about'. This resonates with the findings of Smart and Neale (1999b) who found that some fathers revise their paternal identities as a consequence of their children living with them part of the time, shifting from 'breadwinners' to involved fathers.

Alan is a co-resident biological father, who has been the primary caregiver for his two children for two years. He became the primary caregiver after being made redundant. His wife works part time as a consultant. Throughout his interview Alan made several references to how lucky he was to be able to spend so much time with his children.

'I'm so lucky erm, I don't want to sound too smug, but I do spend a lot of time with the children'.

'I think I'm very lucky as a father in that this is probably the first generation that aren't expected to go out and do a full time job and bring the money in. I can spend lots of time with the children'.

'The amount of time I get to spend with the children is fantastic. Again I feel so lucky that I'm able to do that. A lot of dads wouldn't get that'.

Thus like the fathers' in Dermott's (2003b, 2008) study, Alan places a high value on time spent with the children. However, a key difference is that he can claim to spend a significant amount of time with the children.

When he describes what he sees as the differences between his parenting role and that of his wife it becomes clear that in some respects, their role reversal has resulted in his wife doing more of the 'fun' activities with the children whilst he focuses on the housework.

'I think Alice tends to want to direct their activities more than I do so, this probably sounds very menial but I've always got my mind on the washing up and the laundry and what have you. Er to get it out of the way. Whereas she'll more readily sit down and paint with them for half an hour more readily or she'll look for an activity to do with them for the afternoon. So if we see a clear afternoon I'll more likely leave them to play with Lego and get on with some housework. We have lots of conversations, so that's good. My son has reached the age now where he never stops talking mostly, so er a lot of erm steering those conversations and trying to make sure that my daughters involved as well. I do a lot of cooking, so we mainly eat fresh food which is good'.

Therefore Alan is perhaps in a highly unusual position in comparison to most fathers, in that he fits activities done directly with the child around the demands of housework rather than paid employment. Thus in contrast to the fathers in Dermott's (2003b, 2008) study who placed a high value on direct interaction with children during 'quality time', Alan spends a lot of time with the children, but this doesn't necessarily translate into more time spent engaging in direct interaction with them.

The final primary care giving father I wish to discuss is Leo. Leo has been the primary caregiver to his daughter since she was born. His relationship with her mother ended when his daughter was about 9 months old. Leo has been a lone father for 6 years. Leo's account is dominated by the everyday realities of being responsible for his daughter. Here he discusses what he feels are the differences between fathers and mothers.

'I certainly do things differently from mothers. And I'm probably harder on some things and softer on others. You know, but the end results the same you know. The child's been brought up happy and

healthy, cos that's the main thing. Er yeah different styles, definitely different styles. I mean I notice like behaviour wise how my daughter can go anywhere and everyone will say what impeccable manners she's got, great attitude, always happy this kind of thing and I think that's because I've never let her get away with it. I've never let her get away with being a bully or misbehaving and that. Where I tend to see and again it is a generalisation and not always the case, but I do find a lot of the parents, a lot of the kids, some of the kids from the single mums haven't got the same kind of discipline when the father isn't on the scene. You know there's definitely like behaviour issues er, and I think that's something that fathers do. Er, as I say not in every case but generally fathers do the discipline bit better than the mums. As I say not in every case. But whereas the emotional side, the hugs and the cuddles and stuff like that, I'm not a cuddly type. I mean she sits next to us and cuddles us when we're watching the telly and that and she gets a bedtime cuddle and that, but I'm not, I've never been really a cuddles all the time kind of thing. But I see mums are more cuddly and you know a bit more sort of possessive in a way. As I say it is a bit of a generalisation they're not all like that'.

Leo's account presents a conception of fatherhood that is in stark contrast to fatherhood based on intimacy. Although he is undoubtedly a highly involved father, who performs the bulk of care for his daughter, he chooses to focus on what is perhaps an outdated conception of fatherhood. He seems critical of an emotional approach to parenting which he links to possessiveness. Leo's account is similar to some of the lone fathers in Smart and Neale's (1999b) study, who saw lone fathers as 'superior' to lone mothers because of their less emotional parenting style.

Therefore it appears that when fathers have primary or sole responsibility for the care of their children they are less likely to foreground an emotionally close father-child relationship. Their accounts of their fathering, and their conceptions of fatherhood are grounded in the practicalities of 'caring for' children rather than a demonstration of 'caring about'. Perhaps the quality of the father-child relationship is to some extent taken for granted, since these men are providing a practical demonstration of their love and commitment.

5.7 Emotional Uncertainty.

Dermott (2008: 113) acknowledges that some fathers could be regarded ‘in some way, ‘fragile’, that is, fathers for whom temporal, financial, biological or emotional links with their children are either non-existent or under threat.’ This she claims can pose a barrier to the development of fatherhood based on intimacy. Below I discuss the account of a father whose relationship with his daughter was ‘fragile’.

Sam first became a father in very different circumstances in comparison to all of the other fathers I interviewed. After some years of failing to conceive Sam and his wife decided to adopt. The transition to fatherhood for Sam was therefore marked by a lengthy period of interviews with social workers, assessments as to their suitability as adoptive parents and attendance at various parenting courses in order to gain approval to adopt. Sam was one of only two fathers to actually use the word ‘involved’ during his interview and he acknowledged that it was a term he had picked up from the parenting courses he had attended as part of the adoption process.

‘Yeah they covered the whole involved father thing. You know that there have been massive changes in a short space of time and that there’s an expectation now that fathers will play a greater part um in their kid’s world. You know going along to school and all that.’

The adoption process in some respects forced Sam to reflect at some length on what fatherhood would entail.

‘I think I had some quite firm ideas anyway in terms of how I was brought up. I’d always assumed that I would parent in that way you know. Erm, so if anything it makes you examine it that a bit more and consider it a bit more. I don’t think the process actually made me change my ideas of how I would deal with it. I was brought up in a nice positive way. I had a quite strict upbringing and I think um it was my intention to parent in the same way. You know be firm in setting the ground rules. Hopefully we do a lot of play as well and all the rest of it.’

As Sam acknowledges above, the adoption process did result in his examining parenting and fathering to some degree, but this did not provoke a change in how he had already decided he wanted to parent. Like many other fathers interviewed Sam mentions play activities as part of the fathering he provides, although in stating ‘hopefully we do a lot of play’ this seems rather tentative. Sam’s quote demonstrates that he equates fathering with discipline and setting ‘rules’, there is no narrative of the importance of building an ‘intimate relationship’ with the children emerging from his interview account.

Sam’s use of the term involvement provided a good opportunity to explore the issue of what involvement means in a more direct manner. I asked him if he would say that he was an involved father.

‘Yes I would, but I can see how in many ways not as involved as my wife. Well I guess it’s different cos my wife works part-time, erm, but and we’ve had this debate you know and she pulls me up now and then. If I arrange to do too much at work evening or weekends or whatever you know she’s clear you can find yourself another family. My wife will think about if their school uniforms are clean or we’ve got these school letters to respond to, you can’t make this on Friday and all that stuff. Sorting out the arrangements all of that is down to my wife. So I’m involved but not as involved as that.’

Sam is very aware that he is less involved, particularly in the organisational and managerial aspects of parenting the children in comparison to his wife. Sam’s account does confirm Dermott’s (2003b, 2008) assertion that fathers can claim to be an ‘involved’ even though they perform only a minimal amount of childcare or spend minimal amounts of time with the children. However, Sam does not draw on a discourse of ‘intimate fatherhood’ in his interview. His recurring emphasis is on his role as the parent who ‘sets the rules’ and enforces discipline. Whilst he acknowledges that in his life ‘the balance is much more in favour of work’, he does not draw on a discourse of his commitment to work and financial provision as a central aspect of his fathering either.

However, there are indications in Sam's account that the relationship with his daughter in particular is fragile. He mentioned the difficulties he had experienced with his daughter whilst he was discussing a friend of his who had recently become a stepfather. He started to empathise with his friend's feelings of rejection when he had attempted to forge a closer relationship with his stepchildren. Sam discussed how he understood what that rejection felt like because he had felt rejected by his daughter.

'She just wouldn't she wouldn't even look at me I, I, I, couldn't go near her. It was literally probably a good few months before she started to fall towards me you know that was really hard because all I wanted to do was sort of like get hold of her and become her dad. It's getting better now, but she still favours my wife over me.'

Sam's account is interesting both in what he does and doesn't say. On the one hand he regards himself as an 'involved' father. However, he acknowledges that he spends most of his time at work and his wife has far more responsibility for the care of the children. That he went on to justify why he wasn't more involved shows that he is aware that his admission of minimal involvement may make him appear a 'bad' father. Even though he admitted that his focus was more in favour of work than being at home with the children, it is interesting that he does not include financial provision to be a core component of his fathering. This perhaps demonstrates that financial provision is no longer regarded as signalling 'good fatherhood'.

But when discussing his fragile emotional relationship with his daughter he states 'all I wanted to do was sort of like get hold of her and become her dad.' This indicates that Sam perceives active demonstrations of love and emotion as confirming the father child relationship. Being able to be physically demonstrative to his daughter would consolidate his feeling of 'being a dad.' Thus whilst, Sam is experiencing some difficulty in the actualisation of an emotional relationship with his daughter, his account does demonstrate how important the emotional relationship is for his sense of feeling like a dad. Whilst he is legally her father, this ascribed status is not enough and it seems it is the achieved relationship that is necessary for him to feel like a father.

5.8 Conclusion

In this Chapter I have explored the extent to which the fathers in this study regarded the development of an emotionally close father-child relationship as a core aspect of fatherhood. My findings provide mixed support for Dermott's (2003b, 2008) 'intimate' fatherhood thesis.

The salience of the intimate father-child relationship varied according to family structure, albeit in different ways. It is the accounts of the co-resident and non-resident biological fathers, who work full time, that most closely resemble those in Dermott's (2003b, 2008) study. These fathers did foreground the conscious and active development of a close intimate relationship with their children. They also regarded play, shared leisure activities and conversations with the child as the key way that this could be achieved.

That financial provision was prominent in some fathers' accounts of being a non-resident father, suggests that elements of 'traditional' fatherhood are still important. However, this also highlights how wider social constructions of the responsibilities of fathers influence notions of 'good fatherhood'. Non-resident biological fathers have been constructed in policy discourse and publicly condemned as 'unwilling' payers and therefore 'bad dads.' (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999). The fathers in this study therefore seemed concerned to distance themselves from this stereotype.

In contrast, fathers who were the primary care-givers for their children either on a full time or part time basis foregrounded the actual care of their children. Whilst playing with children and shared conversations were apparent in the accounts of these fathers, they did not seem to be considered as particularly important, as Alan's account demonstrates. In contrast to the co-resident and non-resident fathers who's time with children was limited by work or contact arrangements, these fathers could draw on the substantial amount of time spent caring for children. For these men actively caring for their children was a core component of their identities as fathers and a key demonstration of 'good fatherhood'.

Dermott (2008) notes that some fathers who have fragile relationships with their children may not be able to develop and sustain an intimate father-child relationship and Simon's account demonstrated this. However, the important point is that he did regard being able to provide physical demonstrations of love as central to 'being a dad.'

This chapter has only focussed on the accounts of biological fathers and one adoptive father. This is because the majority of the stepfathers' seemed more concerned to demonstrate that they were not a 'father'. This is discussed in detail in the next Chapter.

Chapter 6 Who's the dad?

6.1 Introduction.

This chapter is the first of two exploring the fathers' experiences of parenting in what Marsiglio and Hinojosa (2007) have termed 'multi-father families.

One often ignored outcome of contemporary trends in family formation and dissolution, is that biological fathers and stepfathers are increasingly likely to find themselves in some sort of contact and interaction with each other. My estimate from the data presented in Chapter Four, is that 35% to 39% of fathers born in the 1960s and 70s respectively have experienced a family situation where they are *potentially* parenting alongside another male parent. Whilst fathers born in the earlier birth cohorts were more likely to be parenting within the framework of the 'clean break' policy, those born in younger cohorts are parenting within a 'continued contact' framework (Smart and Neale, 1999b). Thus although some lone mothers may not re-partner, and some non-resident fathers may not remain in contact with their children, the proportion of children who are parented by 'two' male parents is increasing.

Despite this increase the factors and dynamics that shape interactions and relations between the male parents in 'multi-father' families have yet to be fully explored. This chapter explores a dominant theme that emerged in the fathers' accounts of being a stepfather; the issue of being called 'dad'.

6.2 What do I call myself?

Marsiglio states 'The power of labels to signify a sense of family belonging...are issues relevant to understanding stepfathers experiences.' (2004b: 128). The issue of labels and names was certainly a key theme in the interviews with stepfathers in this study. A particular difficulty I encountered during the course of the fieldwork was that of terminology. Prior research had noted that the term 'stepfather' was

potentially contentious, with some men rejecting the label (Burgoyne and Clark, 1982, 1984; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003).

For the stepfathers, the issue of 'labels' usually came to the fore whilst filling in the life grid at the beginning of the interviews, which was when I asked the research participants to provide the details of all children they had either lived with or to whom they considered themselves a parent. Although I used the term 'stepfather', I explained to the interviewees that I was aware not everyone would agree with this terminology and invited the respondent to discuss how they felt about the term.

Enquiring about who the stepfathers were in relation to the children and how they viewed the nature of their relationships revealed general difficulties in adequately verbalising their status and identity within the family. In common with the findings of Burgoyne and Clark (1982, 1984) and Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, (2003) the majority of the stepfathers rejected the use of the term 'stepdad' or 'stepfather'.

I wouldn't have described myself as a step dad. (Mark)

I dunno I've never really thought of myself as being a stepdad. I'm just Stan, erm the term stepdad has never sort of entered my mind really. (Stan)

I dunno really, a stepfather's supposed to be a guardian along with the mother aren't they? You are a stepfather if you have kids, if you look after kids, I don't even know where that terminology comes from. I'm just Peter to the girls, haven't thought about it in any other terms really. (Peter)

I don't really use the term stepparent to be honest. He (stepson) just calls us Adam. (Adam).

Well I guess I was a sort of stepdad, cos I married someone with 3 children, but I wouldn't really consider myself as such, I was just Jake to the kids. (Jake).

However, in contrast to Burgoyne and Clark (1982, 1984) who found that a significant number of stepfathers in their study rejected the label stepfather because they saw themselves as a 'father' in a similar sense to a biological father; the majority of stepfathers I interviewed also rejected the label 'dad' or 'father'.

‘I wasn’t his dad and I never wanted to be his dad’ (Darren)

‘I wouldn’t have said I was a father, no. (Chris)

‘I was not her dad.’ (Steven)

Therefore the majority of stepfathers rejected the familiar paternal labels as a means to describe who they were in relation to the stepchildren, opting to use first names within the family setting. Rather than simply stating ‘I am a stepdad’ or ‘I am a dad’, the stepfathers tended to describe the nature of their relationship with the stepchildren instead. However, even this was not without difficulty, as the quote from Paul below demonstrates.

‘How would I describe who I was to the children? Hmm, not a father nor a stepfather, I would not have used either of those words. I might’ve used; I might’ve said I parented them. I don’t know how to describe who I was actually, I guess the relationship that developed was a weird brother/father type relationship, but then again it wasn’t really. I couldn’t define what I gave to them, I don’t know’.

Here we can see that Paul (like many of the stepfathers I interviewed), finds the usual family terms of brother, father and parent inadequate tools to convey who he was in relation to the stepchildren. In general, it seemed far easier for the stepfathers to explain who they were *not* as opposed to who they were. Paul’s quote also demonstrates his reluctance to claim the gender neutral status of ‘parent’, he goes as far to acknowledge that he might have *parented* the children, but stops short of claiming that he was a *parent*.

There are no alternative widely accepted terms used to denote men who are co-resident with children, with whom they do not share a genetic tie (Olah *et al.*, 2002). The lack of descriptive labels for stepfamily relationships has been linked to the inherent variability and ambiguity that accompanies the more fluid conceptions of familial relationships outside of the biologically intact framework (Marsiglio, 2004b). However, my focus in this chapter is not on the lack of words or labels available through which stepfathers can convey the often subtle and nuanced nature

of their relationships with the stepchildren, but what using the terms ‘father’, ‘stepfather’ and/or ‘parent’ means in the context of multi-father families.

6.3 What’s in a name?

Weeks (1991) argues that language cannot be separated from the experiential, and as such it is a device through which we can ‘know’ and make sense of ourselves and others. Therefore labels are not just labels, but signifiers. Labels signify who one is, what one means to others and within the familial setting, can convey a sense of relatedness to other family members (Smart and Neale, 2004; Finch, 2008).

Thus in stating ‘I am a father’ or ‘I am a stepfather’, stepfathers are signalling that they occupy a particular position and status within the family and in relation to the children. Stepfathers’ claiming a parental status has been interpreted as a positive indication of their successful integration into and adjustment to stepfamily life as well as indicating a sense of commitment towards the children (Gamache, 1997). From this perspective it would appear that the majority of the stepfathers in this study, through their rejection of any form of parental status have not integrated into the stepfamily and remain uncommitted to the children. Viewing stepfathers and the parenting they provide as inadequate because of their failure to claim a parental status is not uncommon (see for example Popenoe, 2005; and Gamache, 1997).

However, the interview accounts suggest that the reality is rather more complex and that the rejection of the status of ‘dad’ or ‘stepdad’ is not necessarily indicative of a lack of commitment, a lack of parenting or a lack of an emotional bond between stepfather and child.

6.4 Parenting does not a parent make.

There were numerous indications in the stepfathers’ interview accounts that although some did not regard themselves as a parent, father or stepfather, they nevertheless engaged to varying degrees in activities that are generally regarded as parenting.

Helping with homework and participating in shared activities was mentioned by some of the stepfathers.

I regularly helped her with letters and writing and things like that. I read her stories and helped to get her ready for school as well. So we could bond over that. (Steven)

We do things together, like his maths homework. We often have a go at that together when he's struggling with it. I actually related it back to what my dad used to do with me. My dad used to have this silly thing about working maths out with camels and oranges. You know if you've got 17 camels and 15 oranges, I don't know what on earth that's got to do with maths, but we got through it and I showed him how to work it out and that, it was fun and that's something we do together. And the other night I was out in the garage making some racking. He came and helped me with that, he likes doing that and we have a chat while we are doing it. (Stan)

Some stepfathers performed a near equal or even greater amount of childcare in comparison to their partners. Chris had a greater degree of flexibility with his job in comparison to his partner and as a result he would work from home if his stepson was off school due to illness or during school holidays. He also arrived home earlier than his partner and did most of the cooking, and activity which he and his stepson enjoyed doing together.

'I'm here working from home two days a week, so when he comes home from school we get the dinner on, maybe play on the Playstation a bit, that kind of stuff.'

One stepfather, Darren was in what is perhaps an unusual position before his marriage ended, in that he spent two years as the stay at home carer for both his stepson and his biological son from the current relationship. Darren was therefore highly involved in parenting. He commented on the quality of the emotional relationship with his stepson stating 'I did grow to love him' and described him as 'a great kid, very sporty and sociable.'

Dave is a non-resident stepfather, his partner's children came to the house to visit and share meals several times per week. He acknowledged that he shared in the parenting of the children and that this was something he and his partner had actively discussed and agreed upon.

I see myself as kind of a parent from the practical side of things. I'll fetch and carry em to school and everything else and take em to their friends and all sorts and we, we give em pocket money equally and everything else. I consider myself to be someone that can set and maintain boundaries and structure for the kids while they're here. Erm, I've opened the door sort of emotionally to them all, in terms of if they need me I'm here. And that has been used a few times, especially by the daughter when she's had a bad time.

Thus on the whole the daily parenting activities that stepfathers participated in were not radically different from those of the biological fathers I interviewed, and the stepfathers exhibited a similar degree of variation in levels of involvement in childcare and parenting. Additionally, participation in shared domestic duties, leisure activities and activities such as homework were credited with facilitating a closer relationship and 'bond' in much the same way as with biological fathers. Even Jake, who by his own admission 'worked away a lot' and 'didn't have much to do with em (the children)' reported involvement in some parenting activities:

'I would sit and you know help em with their reading for school, help em with their learning and stuff like that.'

Given the contemporary shift towards a model of 'good fatherhood' based on the active care of children discussed in Chapter Two, it is not unreasonable to expect that stepfathers such as Darren, who has a strong emotional attachment to his stepson as well as being highly involved in parenting would make some claim to occupying a parental status. Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, (2003) found that working class stepfathers disregarded the significance of the biological tie as a determining factor in who is a parent, focussing instead on the parenting they provided, their emotional bond with the stepchildren and the amount of time they had lived in the stepfamily to legitimise and justify their claim to being a father. However, as already mentioned all but 2 of

the stepfathers rejected any claims to occupying a parental status. The question is why this should be the case.

6.5 There is only one dad.

The most common reason that the stepfathers rejected a parental status was the continuing relationship between the child and the non-resident biological father. Given that Paul had stated ‘I might’ve said I parented them’, I asked him why his parenting was not in itself an adequate basis to claim the status of parent, to which he simply replied:

‘Because they had a parent and they considered him their father totally’.

Dave too had discussed the extent to which he had effectively ‘parented’ his partner’s children, but was adamant that this did not make him either a ‘parent’ or a ‘dad’.

I’ve always stressed to them that I don’t intend, that I’m not their dad and I never will be, and that’s not who I am, I’m Dave to them. They’ve already got their dad and so they should have and that’s it basically.’

Thus both Paul and Dave implicitly hold the view that children have one and only one father or male parent. Darren was more explicit, articulating that a stepfather who claims the status of ‘dad’ would be actively replacing the biological father in the child’s life.

‘And I never wanted to be his dad, he knew his dad, and I always said to my stepson and to his dad, ‘look I’m not here to be his dad. I’ll parent him the best I can, but I am not here to replace anybody.’
(Darren)

The concern to demonstrate that they did not intend to replace the biological father was a dominant theme in the accounts of stepfathers, and their attempts to signal

their intent extended beyond a rejection of a parental status. Some of the stepfathers also made sure to correct the stepchildren if they called them 'dad'.

I have corrected him when he's slipped up and called me dad a couple of times, because I'm not his dad, he's got his dad. If he wasn't seeing his dad and wanted to call me dad then fair enough. But he sees his dad on a regular basis so it would be wrong in my opinion for him to start calling me dad.' (Chris)

'I'm just Stan or dad. Well not to my stepchildren. When Sam my son comes over then I'm dad there and then, so we will be sat at the table and having a conversation and it will be dad this, or Stan you see. Sometimes when Sam is over they (stepchildren) have made a mistake, or got the wording wrong if you want erm, when they've called me dad, I mean I've not sort of made a huge deal out of it you know, but I do gently correct them and I say but I'm not your dad am I? You know, just joke it off really.' (Stan)

It is clear then, that for these stepfathers, regardless of their feelings towards or the parenting they provide for the stepchildren, there is simply no room for a second male parent. Children have one father and one father only, and it is the biological father who holds that status. However, in contrast to the middle class stepfathers in Ribbens McCarthy *et al's*, (2003) study, none of the stepfathers make an explicit reference to the importance of biological ties to parenting relationships. Nor do the stepfathers engage in discussions about who is the 'real' father, or make reference to the quality of the actual parenting the biological father provides. Rather, the continued presence of the biological father is enough for him to be considered 'the only father' and this is presented as a self evident fact which needs no further explanation.

To a certain extent, the sentiments expressed by the stepfathers above are similar to those in Marsiglio's (2004b) study. Marsiglio (2004b) found that the stepfathers who also had biological children (resident or non-resident or both) were particularly sensitive to the feelings and status of the non-resident biological father. He argues that stepfathers' refusal to claim the status of 'dad' or 'parent' and their efforts to ensure that children do not call anyone else 'dad' is indicative of their reluctance to 'violate the paternal bond' (Marsiglio, 2004b: 137), and is one of the ways in which

stepfathers act as 'father ally', providing support for the relationship between child and biological father.

Concerns about being 'replaced' are not confined to stepfathers. Prior research has found that some non-resident biological fathers are anxious about the presence of a stepfather, reporting feelings of jealousy and fear that they will be replaced or excluded in their children's lives (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1999, Castelain-Meunier, 2002). The issue of the children calling the stepfather dad seems central to these concerns. In their study of post-divorce parents Smart and Neale (1999b: 74-5) concluded 'What most fathers seemed to dread was the thought of...their children calling another man 'Dad'.'

6.6 Biological fathers' concerns.

Although it was clear from the stepfathers accounts that referring to oneself as a 'dad' or allowing the children to call them 'dad' was viewed as the wrong thing to do, the stepfathers seemed unable to explain why this is the case beyond the fact that the children already had a father. Unfortunately, it proved difficult to elicit the feelings of the non-resident biological fathers towards their children's stepfathers. For those who were non-resident fathers (some of whom were of course also stepfathers), thoughts and feelings about the children having another 'dad' were usually expressed after I had asked if their ex-partners had re-married or re-partnered. Asking the non-resident biological fathers how they felt about the presence of the children's stepfather seemed to cause some discomfort, and only Steven was willing to discuss the issue in any detail. Others such as Tony simply stated,

'He's indicated that he's not trying to invade my territory and take over as a parent'

but then unfortunately declined to discuss the issue further. Stan on the other hand avoided providing a direct answer explaining his own feelings and chose instead to indicate how he thought his *son* felt about his mother's new partner.

‘Er, I dunno, I think my son just sees him as his mum’s new boyfriend really.’

It is difficult to establish why Tony and Stan were both reluctant to discuss their feelings about their children’s stepfather, particularly since neither claimed a hostile or negative relationship with the stepfather. However Tony’s statement suggests that the stepfather has in some way both recognised and acted in such a way to ensure that Tony’s status as father or parent remains secure. Without further elaboration however it is impossible to determine what Tony would consider an ‘invasion’ of his ‘territory’.

In contrast Steven was comfortable discussing his daughter’s potential new stepfather in some detail. At the time of interview Steven’s daughter had just acquired a new co-resident stepfather. When I asked him how he felt about this he replied:

‘Well this has been on my mind a lot recently because one of the things I really don’t want is that er, well my daughter has only got one dad and I really don’t want him thinking he can become a dad to her because he isn’t. I’m her dad and there is only one and that’s me you know. So I don’t want him calling himself dad, or allowing my daughter to call him dad either.’

Thus like the stepfathers discussed above Steven makes it very clear that as far as he is concerned, a child can only have one father, and that the status of ‘father’ belongs to the biological father. Additionally, what seems most important to Steven is the use of the label ‘dad’. He does not express concern over the quality, type or amount of parenting that the stepfather might provide and therefore like the stepfathers in this study, Steven does not consider active parenting as an indication that he is being replaced as his daughters ‘dad’. Rather, it is the act of either the stepfather referring to himself as ‘dad’ or his daughter calling her stepfather ‘dad’ that Steven interprets as indicating his being replaced.

According to Steven using the term ‘stepdad’ is also unsatisfactory.

‘step dad well to me anyway is equated a family where there isn’t a father figure there, or if there is he might be quite distant. Because it’s the fathers place or role that the stepdad then ‘steps’ in to fill’.

However, in a similar way to Chris (see his quote above), who hints that it would be acceptable for his stepson to call him dad if he did not have a continuing relationship with his biological father, Steven explains:

‘but obviously in certain situations if I ran off and never saw her again and she’s got no male authority figure in her life, well in that situation, if you look at it from the perspective of the *needs of the child*, then what the child needs is a father figure there. But I haven’t run off. I haven’t given up my *right* to be her father. When I was a stepfather I was quite happy not to be her dad. I mean I wasn’t there to *come between them*. You know, I understood that *his being there was for her best interests*.’ (My italics)

Whilst firm conclusions cannot be drawn from the account of just one father, Steven’s quote does highlight an issue that is worthy of further investigation. He draws on two inter-related discourses the ‘needs or best interests of the child’ and fathers’ ‘rights’. The discourse of the ‘needs or welfare of the child’ is related to the provisions set out in the Children Act 1989, which state that a child’s best interests are served by a continuing relationship with both parents after separation or divorce (Smart and Neale, 1999b). The discourse of fathers ‘rights’ is one which has been promoted by fathers rights groups such as Fathers4Justice, who have argued with varying degrees of success that the legal system is biased against fathers and that their ‘right’ to a continued relationship with their child is regularly thwarted (Smart, 2006). Smart (2006) has argued that groups such as Fathers4Justice have been particularly successful in combining these two discourses. As a result, the welfare of children is constructed as automatically being guaranteed by extensive contact with the biological father regardless of the quality of the parenting he provides. Thus the rights of biological fathers and the welfare of children are constructed as two sides of the same coin.

Therefore in Steven’s mind at least, a stepfather claiming a parental status is an indication of his intent to replace the biological father, and replacing the biological

father is seen as both a violation of his right to be the only father and a disregard for the welfare of the child. In this respect then, rejecting the status of parent is not just a matter of adherence to a view that a child can only have one father, but a moral consideration. Ribbens McCarthy *et al.* (2003) argue that the stepfathers they interviewed all demonstrated in varying ways the moral obligation to put the needs of the child first. Following this line of reasoning, a stepfather who claimed a parental status would be acting in a morally suspect manner.

6.7 Making space for two 'dads'.

Four of the fathers held the view that a child could have more than one father or male parent. Two non-resident biological fathers, Trevor and Peter spoke in very positive terms about their sons' stepfathers.

'He's a great guy. I couldn't fault him as a stepfather to my son. Lovely chap. I met him. Very friendly, always civilised, yeah no probs. And actually when my son comes to visit all I hear is 'my dad this' and 'my dad that' and I'm thinking 'hey that's not me'. So you know he's made the adjustment well, which is good for him cos he's adapted and survived and he's very well balanced.' (Trevor)

Trevor clearly takes a very different view to that espoused by Steven. Trevor does not regard his son's use of the label 'dad' to describe his stepfather as a threat to his own paternal status and therefore something that should be prevented. Rather, he regards this as a positive sign that his son has adjusted to his new parent and has not suffered any harm from the processes of divorce and his mother re-marrying.

Similarly, Peter indicated that he was happy his ex-wife had re-partnered, pointing out the financial advantages for both his sons and his ex-wife.

'I was happy cos I now knew the boys were gonna be well looked after, cos he's got a good job and that means they wouldn't lose the house and would always have a roof over their heads. I was quite chuffed with it to be honest. You know, you don't always know who

she's gonna end up with or whatever and he's always been as good as gold with em' (Peter)

Like Trevor, Peter was not concerned by his son calling the stepfather 'dad'.

'My youngest son calls him daddy, which doesn't bother me; they know who their dad is and that I'm their dad.' (Peter)

Thus, instead of focussing on preserving an exclusive paternal status, both Trevor and Peter have chosen to focus on the children's welfare, highlighting the benefits of improved financial resources and a positive stepfather-child relationship. As a result, they implicitly accept that children can have more than one male parent and that the children calling the stepfather 'dad' does not signal that they have been replaced as a father.

Robert and Brian were unusual among the stepfathers in that they made a claim to being a 'dad' or a 'stepdad' (in Brian's case both) to the stepchildren, even though their stepchildren remained in contact with their biological fathers. Like Trevor and Peter, Robert and Brian did not subscribe to the view that children could only have one father. However, their accounts also demonstrate a tension between their claims to occupying and fulfilling a paternal role on the one hand, but also a concern to demonstrate that this does not mean that they are actively and intentionally attempting to replace the biological father on the other.

Robert was a co-resident stepfather for four years, and although he was separated at the time of interview he had actively ensured that he remained in contact with his stepson as well as his biological daughter.

There are similarities between Robert's account and that of Darren discussed earlier. Like Darren, Robert discussed how he had grown to love his stepson, and he described in some detail the extent to which he had parented his stepson. However, the key difference is that Robert drew on the parenting he provides and his feelings in order to support his claim that 'I've been more than his father.'

KL: Did you see yourself as father or as having a father-like relationship with your stepson?

Robert: yeah I did, and I still do, and his mum would say the same, y'know I love him as much as I love anybody. He sort of slips into calling me dad, but y'know I'm not his dad. But he sees, to all intents and purposes that I've been more than his father so, I've fathered him to the best of my ability. And I've really enjoyed it and erm still enjoy it y'know, he's gone back to school today, I saw him last night, speak to them every night. Anything I do for my little girl I do for him, erm, practically, presents and a saving plan, taking them on holiday, stuff like that it's the same. Erm, and at the same time I recognise he has a biological father...'

Robert's constant referrals to his stepson's biological father continue throughout his account. Every time Robert refers to himself as a father or a stepfather, or discusses acting in a fatherly way, he either re-iterates that he recognises his stepson has a biological father, or acknowledges that he is not 'his dad'. Robert also seemed concerned to demonstrate that David, his stepson had been made aware that Robert was not his biological father:

Obviously he's been made aware y'know that I'm his stepfather, although to all intents and purposes I'm like a father and he should think like that or however he wants to think of me.'

Thus although Robert drew on his feelings for David and the extent to which he parented him in order to support his claim that he both felt and acted like a 'father', it seemed that Robert could not make a claim to occupying a paternal status in a straightforward manner. Even the dubious quality of parenting provided by the biological father, who according to Robert, had a history of violent behaviour and was frequently 'reluctant to turn up for contact visits', was not sufficient reason to disregard his importance as a father:

'There was a move on to get his father involved because he is his father and he has a right to be involved'.

However, Robert allowing his stepson to call him dad or Uncle Rob became a point of contention, and as a result, the biological father attempted to prevent his son from referring to Robert in a fatherly way.

‘he’d sort of been told that sort of why did he call me dad or uncle Rob, I wasn’t any relation, y’know nothing to do with him, that I had no interest really in him, that I was just interested in his mother for sex. I mean awful things.’

It seems that the biological father did not share Robert’s perception that a child could have more than one male parent, and this resulted in emotional distress for Robert’s stepson.

Brian, is a co-resident stepfather of one stepdaughter and two stepsons. His stepsons have a different biological father from the stepdaughter. Although he stated that he ‘loves all of them’, and he is ‘definitely more of a dad than their real dad’, he makes a distinction between his parental status in relation to his stepdaughter in comparison to his stepsons.

When discussing his relationship with his stepsons, it is clear that Brian bases his claim to being a ‘dad’ on the emotional bond that has developed between himself and the two boys.

‘Alistair, we’re very close me and Alistair, but I really do love Tom, I’m like sort of really close with Tom. But me and Alistair we’ve got a relationship that’s kind of, it’s a different relationship. I dunno it’s like, Tom is a really sweet child and he’s proper cuddly with me and he’s proper lovely. Alistair its more erm, its strange it’s a completely different bond with Alistair and I can’t put me finger on exactly what it is. We get on in a different way. It’s sort of like, I can have conversations with Alistair and do things that I couldn’t do with Tom. Tom is more we go to the park and play and dig in the sand and stuff, whereas Alistair it’s like computer games and I get more of a conversation.’

In this respect then, Brian’s account is indistinguishable from the accounts of the biological fathers discussed in the previous Chapter. The lack of a genetic

relationship has not precluded the formation of an intense emotional bond between Brian and his stepsons, whom he obviously feels reciprocate the feelings of closeness.

However, loving all of the children is not enough for him to be able to claim the status of 'dad' towards all of his stepchildren. He went on to clarify that his being a 'dad' was in relation to his stepsons only, and that with regard to his stepdaughter who has a different biological father to her brothers, 'it would definitely be a stepdad role.' When asked why he made that distinction he stated:

'because of the age difference, she's a lot older than the boys, plus she knows her father and she gets on with her father so, he's, he's always gonna be her dad'.

Whilst Brian draws attention to his stepdaughter's age as being a differentiating factor initially, the key criterion for his not being a 'dad' to her is the quality of her relationship with her biological father.

In contrast he explains that his stepsons have a different type of relationship with their biological father:

'It's a totally different relationship than Susan has with her father. She's closer to her dad than the boys are. They go through stages where they sort of get close to him but then because he's not particularly a nice person and they've seen it so they kind of they swing. They want him to be a dad. They want him to do the dad things, but he doesn't so.

Therefore, Brian does not define himself as a stepdad to his stepdaughter because of a difference in the quality of *their* emotional bond, but makes the distinction based on the quality of his stepdaughter's emotional bond with her biological father.

However, despite Brian's claims to being a 'dad' he explicitly acknowledges that this has created difficulties between himself and the boys' biological father.

I'd like him to be more of a dad to be honest but er, Y'know it's like wanting to be their dad cos I do, I love em all, but they've got a dad y'know. He might be useless but y'know he's their natural father. Yeah that puts me in an awkward situation with him really.

When I asked Brian what he meant by an 'awkward situation', he explained that he did not have a good relationship with his stepson's father who was jealous that the boys referred to Brian as 'Daddy Brian'.

'He has problems with me being the boys dad, so, yeah there's a huge conflict between us. I get on well with Susan's dad, but not the boys dad. Not at all.'

That both Robert and Brian experienced ongoing hostilities from their stepsons' biological fathers as a result of claiming a paternal status, demonstrates just how important labels are and how seriously some fathers consider this issue to be.

6.8 Conclusion.

This chapter has explored one of the factors that fathers negotiate in multi-father families, namely how stepfathers negotiate the label 'dad'. The majority of the stepfathers rejected the label 'dad' and 'stepdad', even though children often referred to them as such. My findings also suggest that although the stepfathers were 'fathering' in much the same way as biological fathers, they were reluctant to characterise it as such. This seems at odds with the argument that fatherhood is increasingly based on the social relationship between 'father' and child and as such is an achieved status (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003).

I would argue that rejecting the label 'dad' is not necessarily an indication of the stepfather rejecting or remaining distanced from the child, but rather is a form of display. In Chapter Two I discussed the work of Finch (2007) who argued that family relationships are not just 'done' but are 'displayed'. In rejecting the label 'dad' stepfathers are displaying that they do not intend to replace the biological father. Displaying their intent is necessary because it is very difficult to live with a child and

not perform at least some parenting. Thus it is very difficult to display their intent through their actions.

In the previous Chapter I highlighted how the interview accounts of the stepfathers were different from those of the biological fathers, in that conscious attempts to construct an intimate relationship were largely absent. Stepfathers did not therefore appear to be working towards a model of intimate fatherhood. Dermott (2008) suggested that stepfathers could be regarded as ‘fragile’ fathers with tenuous emotional relationship with children and that this could preclude them from working towards an intimate fatherhood model. I suggest that conscious attempts by stepfathers to forge an emotionally close relationship with their stepchildren could be interpreted as replacing the biological father in the child’s affections. The stepfathers are parenting in a context where rights and responsibilities are firmly linked to the biological father. As I discussed in Chapter Two, some fathers’ rights groups such as Fathers4Justice have been very successful at promoting the view that a meaningful relationship between biological father and child is essential for the child’s welfare. Therefore in one sense, engaging in any activity which could be construed as ‘replacing’ the biological father would be interpreted as harmful to the child’s welfare.

Whilst the stepfathers in this study are not representative of all stepfathers the findings discussed in this chapter may also partly explain one of the findings in Chapter Four. Stepfathers were significantly less likely to agree with the statement ‘Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother’. Given the importance of labels and language it is possible that stepfathers are interpreting this question in very different ways. If they do not see themselves as a father, then they may be providing a response based on the levels of involvement of the stepchildren’s non-resident biological father.

Whilst this chapter has explored a symbolic aspect of fathering in multi-father families, the next chapter focuses on the actual interactions between the male parents.

Chapter 7 Negotiating Multi-Father Relationships

7.1 Introduction.

In the previous Chapter I explored how stepfathers negotiated the issue of paternal status in the context of the continued presence of the biological father. In this Chapter I discuss another aspect of parenting in multi-father families; how the male parents interact with each other and the extent to which they develop co-parental relationships with each other.

To date academic literature and policy interventions have focussed on how the birth parents negotiate and maintain a co-parental relationship post-divorce and separation (see for example, Smart and Neale, 1999b). As a result virtually nothing is known about the extent to which male parents co-operate with each other in relation to parenting of the children, although as already discussed in Chapter Two Marsiglio's (2004b) study of American stepfathers did explore this issue. Relations between male parents in multi-father families are often characterised as problematic with an underlying assumption that a competitive stance will structure interactions. A publication by Fathers Direct³⁴ (O'Sullivan, 2005: 107) advises stepfathers to 'Avoid falling out with your stepchildren's biological father. You aren't competing for the children, even if you were for their mother.' Families Need Fathers have argued that stepfathers are antagonistic and hostile stating

‘some violence and some threats – ones that our members commonly experience – come from a third quarter. Those responsible are the new partners of the ex. A very common allegation of violence or threats reported by our members is from the new boyfriend of the mother’ (2007: 14).

Unfortunately, the document does not provide any more than anecdotal evidence to support these claims.

³⁴ This organisation has now been renamed the Fatherhood Institute.

In the absence of any detailed exploration of the extent and nature of co-parental relationships between male parents in multi-father families, there are several questions I wish to address in this Chapter. Do the male parents co-operate or compete in relation to the children and their mothers? Is their relationship characterised by indifference, hostility or friendliness? My findings and conclusions are both exploratory and tentative given the small number of fathers interviewed.

Before discussing the fathers' accounts, I will briefly illustrate the number of 'other' male parents the step and biological fathers were in contact with, as well as the amount and nature of the contact between them and the fathers' assessment of how amicable or hostile the relationship with the other male parent is.

7.2 Mapping the fathers' 'relationships'.

Establishing the nature of the relationships and interactions between stepfathers and biological fathers was often a confusing task, primarily because many of the fathers had varying degrees of contact with more than one other male parent. I have therefore provided the key characteristics in Table 7.1. (below).

Only the fathers who are parenting in a multi-father family have been included in Table 7.1. The name of each father is indicated as is the number of other male parents who are, or have been, involved in parenting the same children. For example, we can see that Peter, who has two non-resident biological children and two co-resident stepchildren was parenting alongside two other male parents; the stepfather of his biological children and the biological father of his stepchildren.

The categorisations of the amount of contact are not based on any stringent 'measure' of the amount of times he has met or interacted with the other fathers, but are based on his own assessment. I asked the fathers about the different ways in which they had come into contact with the other male parent(s) and categorised their responses into direct and indirect. Direct contact refers to talking on the telephone with to another father or being in his physical presence. Indirect contact refers to messages from one father being 'passed on' the other, often via mothers and

children. Contact between the 'fathers' was largely determined by the nature of the contact arrangements in place for the children and as a result varied. For some, regular direct face to face contact occurred when the biological father came round for his contact visits or when either the stepfather or biological father were picking up or dropping the children off. Direct contact also frequently occurred when the biological father telephoned the children. Whilst for others, direct contact could be very irregular occurring as a result of accidentally bumping into each other when outside the home for example.

Table 8.1 Relationships between Fathers

No	Name	Number and status of 'Other' Father(s)	Extent of Contact	Type of Contact	Quality of Relationship
1	Peter	1 Co-Resident Stepfather	Regular.	Direct. Telephone and face to face when Peter visits his sons.	Amicable
		2 Non-Resident Biological Father	Irregular	Direct. Telephone and one face to face meeting.	Civil
2	Steven	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	Regular	Direct. Face to face during contact visits in the home.	Civil
		2 Non-Resident Stepfather	Irregular	Indirect. Text messages and messages via the child's mother.	Hostile
3	Paul	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	Regular	Direct. Telephone and Face to face for contact visits.	Hostile at start but improved to Civil.
4	Robert	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	Started off regular but ceased.	Direct. Face to face for contact visits.	Very Hostile
5	Brian	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	Regular	Direct. Face to face for contact visits.	Amicable
		2 Non-Resident Biological Father	Started off regular but ceased.	As above.	Hostile.
6	Jake	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	Started off regular but ceased.	Direct. Face to face meetings in the local area.	Very Hostile.
7	Dave	1 Co-Resident Biological Father	Started off regular but ceased.	Direct. Telephone and face to face during contact visits.	Very Hostile.

Table 8.1 Relationships between Fathers continued.

No	Name	Number and status of 'Other' Father(s)	Extent of Contact	Type of Contact	Quality of Relationship
8	Tony	1 Co-Resident Stepfather	Regular.	Direct. Telephone and face to face during contact visits.	Amicable
9	James	1 Co-Resident Stepfather	Regular	Direct. Face to face during contact visits in the home.	Civil
		2 Co-Resident Stepfather	Regular	As above.	Civil
		3 Co-Resident Stepfather	Regular	As above.	Civil
10	Mark	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	Regular	Direct. Telephone and Face to face for contact visits.	Very Amicable.
11	Leo	1 Non-Resident Stepfather	Irregular.	Direct. Face to face when Leo's daughter visits her mother.	Hostile at start but improved to Civil
12	Nat	1 Co-Resident Stepfather	None.		
		2 Co-Resident Stepfather	None.		
		3 Co-Resident Stepfather	Regular but now ceased.	Direct. Telephone and face to face during contact visits.	Hostile.
13	Adam	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	None.		
		2 Co-Resident Stepfather	None.		
14	Chris	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	Started off regular but now ceased.	Direct. Telephone and face to face during contact visits.	Civil at start became more hostile.

Table 8.1 Relationships between Fathers concluded

No	Name	Number and status of 'Other' Father(s)	Extent of Contact	Type of Contact	Quality of Relationship
15	Stan	1 Co-Resident Stepfather	Irregular.	Direct. Face to face during contact visits and in the local area.	Civil
		2 Non-Resident Biological Father	Regular	As above.	Civil
16	Trevor	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	None		
		2 Co-Resident Stepfather	Regular	Direct. Face to face during contact visits in the home.	Amicable
17	Darren	1 Non-Resident Biological Father	Regular	Direct. Telephone and Face to face for contact visits.	Very Amicable
		2 Non-Resident Stepfather	None		

The nature of the relationships and interactions between the men interviewed and their (biological or step) counterparts varied widely and some were subject to a degree of fluctuation over time. Similarly, given that two male parents are involved in the relationship, one may report acting in a civil manner, whilst the behaviour and actions of the other parent are hostile or aggressive. Thus, it is difficult to categorise relations into neatly segregated categories of hostile or amicable, for example. Thus, I constructed a typology of very hostile, hostile, civil, amicable and very amicable on the basis of the respondents' assessments of the quality of their relationships with the other fathers as well as the nature of the interactions between them, indicating any changes that occurred over time.

It is important to stress that accounts of the nature of the interaction and contact between step and biological parents presented in this Chapter is strictly from the respondent's perspective, and as such 'one sided' since I was unable to secure interviews with the 'other male parent' (either step or biological) of their children. This is important because more of the stepfathers indicated that their stepchildren's biological father had been 'hostile' towards them at some point and in one case the hostility escalated into a series of violent physical attacks. In contrast, only two of the biological fathers indicated that their children's stepfather(s) had been hostile towards them. Thus there was a very clear difference in this regard between the accounts of the step and biological fathers.

7.3 Father's Ally.

In contrast to the assumptions and expectations of conflict and competition mentioned above, some non-resident biological fathers and stepfathers managed to establish positive and amicable relationships with each other. One of the stepfathers, Mark, explained how he had become very friendly with his stepson's father after he received a call from him in the middle of our interview to arrange a night out. Following the phone call I asked him how their relationship had developed he

described how he had been instrumental in persuading his stepson's mother³⁵ to develop a more amicable approach to the biological father.

I think if you communicate, which is what we did continually, well my stepson's mum didn't want to do that because she was angry with the father and she didn't want to involve him in a lot of the things like parent evenings and schooling and things like that. But I said to her 'he is his son, he does see him every week, he needs to be involved in these kinds of things. If you tell him then it's up to him to say yes I'm gonna come to parents evening or whatever or say no. But if you don't inform him in the first place then that is what is likely to cause conflict. Anyway, she still didn't want to do it, so I did'

Here we can see that Mark initially played the role of 'messenger' taking responsibility for passing on information about his stepson to his biological father. This facilitated a direct relationship between Mark and his stepson's father and as Mark acknowledges built up trust.

'I think it's when you say look I'm not gonna say nothing and then they find out something's happened like some sort of an important part of a child's life that they wanted to be a part of...then that's what causes animosity and resentment towards the stepfather'.

However Mark also acknowledges that creating a trusting positive relationship is not something that could be achieved by him alone and that engagement and commitment from the biological father was required.

'I found he was quite laid back and quite easy going, and in the beginning this sort of eased the process along. So him being quite easy going helped a lot'.

Darren, who was his stepson's primary carer also reported a very amicable relationship with his stepson's biological father. Like Mark, he played the role of messenger:

'he would ring pretty much every day. So certainly when I was at home I would have spoken to him briefly almost every day to say "hi how're you doing" and I would feed back to him bits and pieces about my stepsons day particularly as he became a teen, when

³⁵ Mark was no longer in this relationship at the time of interview.

progressively he would get more a series of grunts than a flow of information’.

Darren also sided with the biological father against his partner on occasion.

‘I always sought to support his dad and I think most of the time I did ok, even on occasions siding with his dad over my wife when I thought she was being unfair; which could happen’.

Similarly, like Mark, Darren assumed that if he didn’t offer support to the biological father the relationship would not be a positive one.

‘I mean I had to, I suppose I assume I had to prove myself in his eyes and erm, I don’t know whether I had to prove that I was supportive but I guess I had to show that I wasn’t antagonistic. But erm it wasn’t hard to be encouraging and welcoming at drop offs and pickups and so on’.

Both Mark and Darren managed to forge positive relationships with the biological father, through providing active support for the biological father’s parental relationship and building trust. Both were certainly acting as ‘father ally’ (Marsiglio, 2004b). However, both were also acting in a way that has traditionally been regarded as the responsibility of mothers. Backett (1987) found that mothers were instrumental in assisting and facilitating father-child relationships by telling the father about the child’s day or mood or by mediating in disputes.

The stepfather actively providing support for the biological father’s relationships with mothers and/or children did seem to be a common feature of relationships that were characterised as amicable or very amicable. Two non-resident biological fathers, Tony and Peter both acknowledged that they had benefited from their children’s stepfathers support and assistance.

‘I pick the boys up and go in the house, I have a cup of tea. Christmas mornings I still go there. I knock there 9 o’clock Christmas morning and we have Christmas morning together, so I can be with the kids. He’s never bothered about it, he’s always friendly. Yeah, as good as gold he is.’ (Peter)

‘We get on very well and erm, when I go to visit my daughter I usually stay in his flat. So that makes visiting her a lot easier’.
(Tony)

Whilst there was evidence of some stepfathers providing active support for the biological fathers relationships with mothers and children, there were few indications that this support was actively reciprocated.

7.4 Stepfather’s Ally?

As discussed in Chapter Two, Marsiglio’s (2004b) conception of ‘father ally’ includes a wide range of behaviours and actions but also includes inaction. Not openly criticising the biological father for example, or not deliberately interfering in his relationship with the children in any way is interpreted as an indication of ‘support’. Applying the concept in this manner would suggest that the majority of stepfathers and biological fathers in this study were acting as ‘father or stepfather ally’. Relationships characterised as civil tended to be based on a brief exchange of ‘hello’s’ and pleasantries, but no active support or interference. However, from the interview accounts of the fathers in this study, I would argue that interpreting non-interference or inaction as support is a major weakness in the explanatory power of this concept. I explain my position by way of an example from the interviews.

Stan is the co-resident stepfather of two stepchildren and the non-resident biological father of one son. He is ‘parenting’ these children alongside two other male parents; his son’s co-resident stepfather and his stepchildren’s non-resident biological father. Stan was rather ambivalent about his relationship with both male parents. When I asked about his relationship with his son’s stepfather he replied:

‘I have met him briefly just at the school gate. Erm, but I said hello, I thought nothing else you know. I don’t dislike the guy, I don’t know him. My son tells me things about him and I listen but I don’t pry. If he wants to tell me then he will tell me. But it’s none of my business really. Although, if it was a problem for my son and he told me he wasn’t happy about it, then I wouldn’t be happy about it and I’d probably say something to his mum’.

Stan's comments could be interpreted as being supportive, in the sense that he has not actively interfered in the stepfather-child relationship. Using Marsiglio's (2004b) conception of 'father ally' Stan would be regarded as acting in a supportive manner, albeit indirectly. But I would argue that interpreting Stan's lack of active intervention this way would be misleading. Stan's comment that he would talk to his son's mum, if his son seemed upset by the stepfather suggests that Stan does not see the stepfather's parental relationship as any of his concern and something for his ex-wife to manage instead.

James' account provides a more explicit indication that non-interference or inaction does not equate to support. James' ex-wife had re-married three times and James had been in regular contact with all three stepfathers throughout the duration of each marriage. He characterised his relationship with all three stepfathers as 'ok, you know, we always said hello and that', but then commented that there had been occasional arguments with all the stepfathers because of what they perceived as a lack of support. James acknowledges that his eldest daughter was a 'bit of a rebel', who resented all her stepfathers and was antagonistic towards them. His quote below is from his discussion of his daughters' second stepfather.

'instead of trying to strike a balance he did get it wrong he decided to be a disciplinary dad actually. I never challenged him about it, cos I was confident it wasn't upsetting my daughter. I did witness one of their rows. He was explaining to me something she had done wrong again and I said 'oh well yeah she shouldn't have done that' and was trying to be diplomatic. There she was explaining and he tried to intervene in the conversation and she said to him 'why are you speaking? Why are you wasting your breath trying to get involved in this conversation when its nothing to do with you, now quiet.' And he looked at me for support and I had to turn away cos I was starting to laugh and I didn't say anything.'

Similarly, when discussing his daughters' third stepfather James commented:

'he seems alright although I've had a difference of opinion with him. He would slag me off, because I wouldn't, because he thought I wasn't living up to my responsibilities. But how the girls behave when they're with him isn't anything to do with me cos I'm not there am I? His relationship with them isn't my responsibility is it? It's between him and their mother'

Clearly then the stepfathers expected James to support their paternal relationship. James however refused to accept this as his responsibility and like Stan perceived support for the stepfather-child relationship to be the mother's responsibility.

Thus, on the whole, active support for parent-child relationships was something provided by the stepfather, often self consciously so, and there were no indications that the non-resident biological fathers felt any obligation to reciprocate.

7.5 Extent and type of Hostility.

Both the type and the extent of the hostility experienced by the stepfathers varied. For Paul the hostility experienced was minimal taking the form of 'a few harsh words to me during phone calls or when the children were picked up', and lasted for only a few months after his moving in with the children. However, others experienced protracted ongoing hostility from their stepchildren's biological father. For Darren, Chris, Robert and Brian, the hostility took the form of threats and threatening behaviour.

'he hates me with a passion. I've had numerous telephone conversations where he's threatened me and at one time apparently he'd had some sort of contract out with a couple of friends to meet me from work and kill me.' (Darren).

'when I first moved in he was fine, quite friendly, but when the divorce went through, he started coming to the door and causing hassle and threatening me outside of court and even outside the police station once. In the confrontation outside the court he blamed me for everything, but I have had nothing to do with his divorce or contact with his son. He has sent threats via my stepson and my partner saying that if I ever laid a finger on my stepson he would kill me.' (Chris)

'There's a huge conflict between us. So. I've been threatened by him quite severely.' (Brian)

'his biological father was er initially well was very negative about us being together and very unhelpful. You know he's a big man and he

used to hit her a lot and so you know she got out of that situation. He was very angry for quite some time and was coming up and shouting in my face and that kind of stuff. He would say to her that erm all I was doing was using her for sex. And he'd impress that on Ryan at times. We went through one period, which was awful emotionally, for the child, for everyone. I'd drop him off on Friday and he'd be a normal happy little boy and kiss him goodbye and erm I'd pick him up on Sunday and he wouldn't talk to me. (Robert)

At the time of interview, outright physical violence between the stepfather and biological father had not yet occurred in any of the situations described above, but Jake was not so fortunate in this regard. After receiving threats delivered through acquaintances, Jake made every attempt to avoid any contact with his stepchildren's biological father, but the biological father actively sought him out.

'He tried to beat me up a couple of times. Basically for the first couple of months of my moving in he would try and beat me up and the second time he actually hit me with a stick. Which I took off of him and obviously twatted him with it. He tried to run me over a couple of times, I actually had to jump over into a garden when he came up on the path and tried to run me over, so I had to go down and beat him up again. So erm, basically that was the end of that.'

It is important to note that in the three cases where hostility towards the stepfather was both prolonged and severe, the biological fathers had been violent towards their children's mothers and that had been the cause of the separation or divorce. Whilst some commentators have pointed out that the promotion of continued contact between biological father and child can be damaging for women and children, particularly when the biological father has a history of domestic violence (Eriksson and Hester, 2001), the fact that the mothers new partners can also be the targets of the biological fathers hostility has been generally ignored. These quotes also demonstrate the extent to which other family members, both mothers and children are also drawn into the hostilities. This can create additional tensions and distress for the stepfathers. Darren was particularly upset about the way in which his stepchildren's biological father involved the children in the disputes.

'And I dislike him as well because of the way he's treated the children. Right from the beginning, even now. Because the children came to the wedding you know, he fell out with them in a major way. He raised his voice, he shouted at em, he swore at em and er, we'd

bought the youngest lad a watch and he was eager to show his dad and his dad says erm 'if you put that on your wrist I'll never speak to you again' and he's is only 10 years old. He uses em as a tool, because he knows it upsets us...to get back at us because he knows it pulls on our heartstrings to hear this sort of behaviour going on.' (Darren)

However, despite his dislike towards and his criticisms of the biological father's treatment of the children, Darren does not implicitly or explicitly suggest that the stepchildren would be better off living with himself and their biological mother. Nor does he explicitly label the biological father as a 'bad dad'. In fact of the stepfathers who had experienced hostility from the biological fathers all except one still maintained that the children should continue to see their biological father, regardless of his behaviour towards either themselves or their partners and stepchildren.

Some still made the effort to actively support the relationship between biological father and child. The biological father of Robert's stepson was, according to Robert, initially unwilling to have contact with his son.

'he was doing stuff like saying he was gonna come and see David and have him for 8 hours while she (ex-partner) did a shift at work, and then wouldn't turn up and stuff. And he was y'know very unhelpful', outspokenly and obviously so for 12 months and still sort of not very trustworthy for a while after that y'know you couldn't count on it'

But despite the hostile reaction he received, Robert continued to promote and facilitate contact visits.

'I was actively promoting visits, er physically taking David there, erm there was a lot of , there was quite a bit of sort of reluctance at times even for him to pick him up and I'd be like well don't worry I'll bring him over y'know. I was trying to facilitate things and I was listening very much to the child's mother she was his parent before I was and I wanted to assist her, I didn't feel it was my right to be making decisions, necessarily but y'know clearly she was encouraging this natural bond that should be there and erm, we persevered with it and I'm glad we did cos now it's better'. (Robert)

Even Jake, who despite claiming that 'their dad was quite brutal, he used to beat her and the children and that was the reason why she left him' went on to state that he

was nevertheless 'a good dad'. When asked if he thought the children would be better off not seeing their biological father, he replied no, stating

'because erm even though their dad was sort of like that, he was alright to the point where she would, she'd pack them off to their dads for the weekend. Cos in spite of everything he were a good dad.'

Perhaps this is surprising given that in the majority of cases discussed above the children had witnessed the hostile outbursts, and from what the stepfathers have recounted, the biological fathers are acting in a way that is entirely incongruent with the current expectations surrounding post divorce behaviour. An amicable co-parenting relationship has been promoted by the government, not just to reduce the amount of parents resorting to legal solutions, but because research has demonstrated the harmful effects of children witnessing hostility and aggression between their parents (Eriksson and Hester, 2001). The stepfathers in effect have been provided with the perfect excuse to condemn the biological father as a parent.

However, only Chris stated that he would like to prevent contact between his stepson and his biological father. Chris and his partner were the only couple who had enlisted the help of outside agencies in managing the biological father's aggressive behaviour, and had succeeded in obtaining an injunction against him coming near the house.

'I hate him, he's just not a very nice or pleasant person and to be honest if I could stop (stepson) from seeing his dad I would, because I do think he's a bad influence on him Adam, I really do. I mean it's crazy really. We have a court order stopping him from coming near the house, so we don't have any contact with him, because he so aggressive, but the court thinks it is fine for Adam to be around someone like that... But now I do actually hate his guts for what he's put us *all* through.' (Chris, emphasis added)

Chris articulates something of a dilemma here. On the one hand the court in granting the injunction has agreed with Chris's perception that the biological fathers behaviour is damaging, but then on the other the court has also granted a contact order to the biological father. Chris's statement 'for what he's put us *all* through',

indicates that he is concerned how they have all been affected as a family unit as well as individuals. However, Chris also indicates his sense of powerlessness:

‘But I can’t see how I can stop him. And Karen won’t stop him because he has got a right to see him and she could end up in trouble.’

So despite his concern for his stepson’s welfare, Chris feels that the only person who could make a legitimate case for the prevention of contact is his stepson’s biological mother. However, she is in turn prevented from taking this course of action for fear of punitive action if she breaches the contact order.

7.6 Conflict resolution?

As already noted above, even when the hostile behaviour of the biological fathers was relatively severe and ongoing, only one stepfather, Chris had resorted to the use of legal action in managing the situation. None of the other stepfathers had reported the biological father’s behaviour to the authorities or enlisted any outside help of any kind. Instead, the stepfathers tended to regard the hostile relations as a private matter, which was for them to sort out.

The stepfathers utilised three main strategies in attempting to manage the conflict, ‘playing the waiting game’, ‘standing up for oneself’ and ‘direct communication’, with varying degrees of success. The strategies adopted seemed to be related to what the stepfathers perceived to be the reasons for the hostility.

Paul, played the ‘waiting game’, being careful not to react in a negative way to the biological father’s outbursts, which he regarded as ‘understandable’ since as he understood it, the biological father was ‘jealous’ and worried that ‘a total stranger and his children are in the same house’. Thus Paul interpreted the biological fathers reaction as a concern for the safety or welfare of his children, rather than competition over the former partner or parenting of the children. This strategy seemed to pay off for Paul, since the hostilities he experienced were both much less severe and of much shorter duration in comparison to the other stepfathers. In addition he was the only

stepfather (out of all those who had experienced conflict) who eventually managed to establish relatively positive relations with his stepchildren's biological father.

In contrast, three of the stepfathers, Robert, Darren, and Jake took a more direct approach, which consisted of 'standing up' to the biological father in some way. As already discussed above, the hostility between Jake and his stepchildren's biological father escalated into physical violence, and as Jake's quote (above) demonstrates, he simply retaliated in kind. His use of the term 'obviously' indicates that as far as Jake was concerned his actions were quite evidently the only appropriate ones to take and that he was acting in self defence. In retaliating violently therefore, Jake achieved the desired response, which was a complete cessation of all forms of contact between himself and the biological father.

Whilst Robert did not resort to threats or violence, he nevertheless responded by what he termed 'not backing down'.

'So I was just like, I just said to him 'y'know you're threatened because you're inadequate...I had to keep showing that er, I was very committed to her and that nothing was going to change that, that I didn't feel any different and that it didn't even bother me the way, the things he was trying to do'.

However, although the threats and hostile behaviour did eventually stop, this only happened once the biological father had re-partnered.

'To be fair though, he does seem to have grown up a lot. Especially once he found another partner. He was less aggressive to all of us almost immediately'. (Robert)

Darren described responding to the biological father's threats of violence in a similar way to Robert.

'I just said to him look, you know where I am if you want me, but he never took me up on it. So we don't talk anymore...'

All three of these stepfathers interpreted the biological father's hostility as a result of them now being with the biological father's former wife or partner, rather than jealousy or concern due to their presence as a parent.

The final strategy of 'direct communication' was adopted by both Steven and Brian. Both of these stepfathers interpreted the biological father's hostility as being caused by his fear or feeling of being replaced as a parent in his children's lives. At the time of the interview, Steven had only just established a relationship with a new partner, and did not regard himself as either a stepfather or parental figure to her daughter because they did not live together and he had minimal contact with the child. However, the child's biological father was very unhappy, a fact which he has communicated via threatening text messages about Steven to the child's mother.

'my current partner, her, the father of her child is, is erm being a bit difficult. Being a bit immature. They have been split up for 2 ½ years. He's reacting to me being on the scene, that's why he's started being difficult... So I said to him, look I'm not expecting to be, step in and become a father of your child, she's not my child. But erm, he didn't listen. I think it's more a case of treading very carefully from now on cos, I think he's a bit immature. And he still sends text messages, you know quite nasty text messages. I think my only choice is just to ignore him.'

Brian has also attempted to end what he termed the 'huge conflict' in which the biological father had 'threatened me on several occasions'. The threats, from Brian's perspective were a result of the biological father 'not doing the dad things', in addition to Brian acting like 'more of a father than their real father'. Like Steven, Brian indicated that he has also tried to communicate directly with the biological father, but that his efforts have not been very well received:

'I have said to him 'look start from today, and just move forward and be good for your kids and whatever happens, happens' sort of thing y'know. But he won't listen, he can't get past that, so I don't think that'll ever change. So.' (Brian)

Since Steven and Brian found their attempts at conciliation thwarted by the biological father's refusal to co-operate, both felt that they had no other option than to simply ignore the biological father and seek to avoid contact wherever possible.

7.7 The Biological Fathers' Accounts.

Only one of the biological fathers reported the direct obstruction of his relationship and contact by the children's new stepfather. Nat has not had any form of contact with his daughters for two and a half years and he attributes this to the influence of his daughter's new stepfather.

'My relationship with my second wife became more strained over the years that she'd met this other guy and moved in with him. She's married this guy who's a millionaire on paper, they are extremely wealthy and have always threatened, he's even said it, if I try or step foot on their property he'd take out an injunction against me for being within a mile of their premises. That was threatened very, very early on...He has certainly taken over. He's the one who over the phone told me that I would never speak to my ex-wife or my daughters again.' (Nat)

Whilst Nat had tried to re-establish contact via the legal system, he had been unsuccessful up to the time of interview. His attempts have been hampered by a lack of financial resources and the fact that his daughters live 400 miles away under a different judicial system. Therefore, Nat feels powerless. He is prevented from going to their home by the threat of the injunction and he cannot pursue extensive legal action to resolve the issue because it would be too expensive. The only choice Nat feels he has is to wait until his daughters reach the age of 16, when he can legally approach them directly.

Leo was in a very different position in comparison to the most of the other biological fathers interviewed in that he was a lone parent and his daughter lived with him full time. Relations between Leo and his daughter's mother's new partner started out as hostile.

'I met him and he was pretty threatening and intimidating to me yeah. I mean he was obviously getting one message from her you know, one side of the story. But anyway like, he had issues with drugs and he'd spent time inside and that so I put a block and said no

overnights you know. I wouldn't allow (daughter) to go back to the house when I had the issues with him'.

Therefore in contrast to the stepfathers who did not make any attempts to prevent contact despite the threats and hostilities, Leo stopped his daughter having contact with her mother, because the stepfather was acting in a hostile manner towards him. However, Leo described how he eventually decided to try and establish better relations.

'but as time went on and contact got better I decided I would try and make peace with her fella. So I went over to meet him and at this stage she'd been off the drink for over a year and he said he'd gone through the 10 steps and all this kind of thing and he'd been off 6 months at that point. He seemed pretty calm and I thought well if I'm trusting her we'll give it a go and see how she goes. So I says we'll draw a line under it and we'll start again from this point. But I still think he's an arsehole and I still don't trust him but she is her mum and she should be involved so I'll do as much as I can to encourage it. Even if it is a little bit against me better judgement like. She's (daughter) not my possession you know...I've got to facilitate this and help this and encourage it as much as I can.'

Therefore Leo rather reluctantly, re-instigated the contact visits.

The accounts of the biological fathers above differ markedly from the accounts given by the stepfathers. None of the stepfathers drew on a 'victims' discourse when recounting their experiences. All were at great pains to demonstrate that they were unaffected by the hostilities from the biological fathers. Additionally, the stepfathers did not seem surprised when the biological father acted in a hostile manner towards them. In contrast the biological fathers seemed outraged that a stepfather should attempt to usurp their position.

7.8 Conclusion.

In this Chapter I have explored the interpersonal dynamics and interactions between stepfathers and biological fathers parenting in multi-father families. As the table outlining the different multi-father relationships demonstrates (Table 7.1) male parents can be negotiating fatherhood with a number of other 'fathers'.

The majority of fathers did manage to establish either positive or at least civil relations with the other male parent. However, in general this appeared to require a considerable amount of work from the stepfather. Whilst the stepfathers generally were acting as 'father ally' (Marsiglio, 2004b) this was a one sided interaction. There were no indications that the biological fathers made conscious or sustained efforts to support the stepfather's parental relationship, or even considered that they should. This is perhaps in part due to the stepfather not being regarded as a 'dad' as discussed in Chapter Six. It may also be a result of the non- resident biological father's relationship with the children being constructed as more vulnerable or prone to disruption (Dermott, 2008). It was clear however, that whilst biological fathers' parenting was regarded as in need of both practical and emotional support, the stepfathers' parenting was not.

The findings presented in this Chapter do not confirm the claims that stepfathers are generally hostile to biological fathers (Families Need Fathers, 2007). The levels of hostility and in some cases, outright physical violence that the stepfathers experienced are a rather worrying finding. It is well documented that domestic violence against women and children can erupt and/or escalate in the post-separation context (Hester and Radford, 1996; Mirlees-Black, 1999). Acknowledging men as victims of domestic violence remains a somewhat contentious issue (Kaganas, 2006), and the stepfathers certainly did not present themselves as victims of domestic violence. However, the abuse and aggression they experienced could be considered domestic violence under the current Home Office definition³⁶. At the very least,

³⁶ *"Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality."* (An adult is defined as any person aged 18 years or over. Family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, and grandparents, whether

these findings do demonstrate a need to acknowledge that stepfathers can become targets for abuse from the biological fathers.

The findings presented here provide further support for a theme that emerged in the previous Chapter, namely, that stepfathers consider the continued involvement of the non-resident biological father as essential. Some of the stepfathers continued to facilitate and promote the involvement of the biological father despite relatively high levels of conflict. Although the stepfathers recognised that children were sometimes drawn into this conflict, and that this impacted negatively on the child, they did not make attempts to prevent contact occurring. This seems at odds with the stepfathers' endorsement of continued contact because it is beneficial for child welfare (see previous Chapter). However, as Chris' account demonstrates, stepfathers may be wary of obstructing contact and breaching court arrangements. Additionally, in lacking any legal status as fathers, some stepfathers may feel that they do not have the 'right' to make decisions about contact arrangements (see Rupert's account).

The next Chapter is the concluding chapter of this thesis. The main findings of the research are re-visited in order to draw out key theoretical implications.

directly related, in laws or stepfamily). <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/dv/dv01.htm> (accessed 23/08/2008)

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction.

This research has examined how male parents make sense of and understand their experiences of fathering in a diverse array of family forms. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been used to explore, the extent to which ‘paternal careers’ have become more diverse and complex, and the consequences of this complexity for fathers as they negotiate fathering in their everyday lives.

Family diversity and by extension, diversity within fathering and fatherhood, are argued to be consequences of broader social changes and processes of individualisation. As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, theorists such as Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2001) claim that family life and parenting are subject to processes of de-traditionalisation. They highlight the provisional, fluid and negotiated character of all forms of contemporary relationships. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim claim that ‘Individualisation is understood as a historical process that increasingly questions and tends to break up people’s traditional rhythm of life – what sociologists call the normal biography.’ (2001: 88). In the absence of traditional norms to guide behaviour, or normatively defined standard ‘biographies’, it is argued that individuals are increasingly ‘forced to choose’ the ways in which they organise their personal and familial relationships. From this perspective, family diversity is both cause and consequence of individualisation. As Irwin (2000) notes, changes in family composition are not just a contextual backdrop for ‘doing’ family, but are part and parcel of changing familial relationships.

However, amidst this ‘de-standardisation’ of fatherhood and fathering, are indications that some normative ‘scripts’ do exist and that they have an important influence on how contemporary fathers understand and make sense of their experiences. The ideology of the ‘biological family’ (Neale, 2000) is one such normative ‘script’. In the Introduction I concluded the discussion of recent policy

developments by pointing out that biology rather than marriage is increasingly the basis upon which rights and responsibilities are allocated to fathers. It is biological fathers who are legally and morally responsible for financial provision, and biological fathers who are constructed as important for child welfare. The linkage of child welfare to the ‘involvement’ of biological fathers has resulted in a moral discourse that the needs of the child are best served by continued contact with their non-resident biological father. As Smart and Neale (1999b) point out, this results in the original ‘family’ remaining intact, albeit stretched across more than one household. Biological fathers occupy a privileged position in comparison to stepfathers, who occupy a rather ambivalent position within the ‘family’, with no clear rights or responsibilities.

Therefore one argument is that current social policies are not in keeping with the ways in which individuals ‘do’ family.

‘Governments are always in danger of presuming a standard model of family life for which they can legislate, by making the assumption that most families do in fact operate in particular ways. In reality it is very difficult to detect a standard model, in either a descriptive sense (what people do) or a normative sense (what they ought to do)’ (Finch 1997: 130, cited in Neale, 2000: 1).

In this concluding Chapter, I return to the main findings of this thesis and argue that whilst there is evidence of considerable diversity in fathering and fatherhood, the ideology of the ‘biological family’ has an important influence on fathers’ understandings and experiences of parenting. I conclude the Chapter with a discussion for future research.

8.2 Layers of complexity.

This research certainly demonstrates that fatherhood and fathering are becoming more complex and diverse. The analysis of the paternal careers of six cohorts of British fathers in Chapter Four shows how the current generation of fathers are far more likely to make multiple transitions into and out of different family forms in

comparison to fathers in older cohorts. As a consequence, they are also more likely to experience episodes of non-resident biological fatherhood and co-resident stepfatherhood. There is certainly substantial evidence to support the assertion that an increasing proportion of fathers are following ‘non-standard’ paternal careers. However, it is important not to overstate the extent of change. The majority of fathers do still follow a ‘traditional’ paternal career, both becoming and remaining fathers within a biologically intact family. Similarly, the biological intact family is still the most common family form within which men parent for at least some part of their paternal career.

The twenty-five fathers interviewed for this study, had also followed diverse paternal careers. Measuring the extent and ways in which different fathers were involved in various aspects of childcare was not the aim of this research. Nevertheless, the interview accounts suggested that fathering practices were also characterised by an enormous degree of variability. Parenting practices were dynamic over time, changing in response to external factors, such as contact arrangements or changes in their own or their partners’ employment, as well as individual fathers’ own wishes and aspirations.

8.3 Involvement, intimacy and ‘good’ fatherhood.

In Chapter Five, I explored the extent to which the male parents in this study regarded the conscious development of an emotionally close father-child relationship as a core component of ‘good’ fathering. The findings provide some limited support for Dermott’s (2003b, 2008) thesis. The salience of the intimate father-child relationship varied according to family structure, with coupled, co-resident biological fathers in full time employment offering accounts supportive of Dermott’s (2003b, 2008) thesis. These fathers were parenting in circumstances that most closely resembled the fathers in Dermott’s (2003b, 2008) study. Whilst non-resident and co-resident biological fathers did foreground the intimate father-child relationship, non-resident fathers also regarded the fulfilment of their financial obligations as important too. The accounts of the primary care-giver fathers differed, in that they did not foreground the emotional relationship between father and child, but drew on

the actual care they provided and the amount of time they spent caring for their children.

That the primary care-giving fathers did not make any reference to their lack of financial provision does suggest that breadwinning alone, is not the moral standard by which fathers are judged 'good' dads. However, that the fathers who had non-resident children seemed concerned to demonstrate that they were both 'good' payers *and* emotionally close to their children, does indicate that financial provision is still salient in specific circumstances. I suggested that this demonstrates the influence of wider social constructions of 'good' and 'bad' dads, particularly the construction of non-resident fathers who do not pay maintenance as 'bad' dads. For the non-resident fathers, sustaining a moral identity as a 'good' father therefore, required more than emphasising the quality of the emotional relationship between father and child.

The findings of this research suggest, that what men draw on in order to establish an identity as a 'good' father varies according to wider social constructions of 'good' and 'bad' fathering, the family circumstances within which they are parenting and their own individual biographies. Therefore, what fathers' regard as 'good' fathering is shifting and fluid as individual circumstances change over time.

That the fathers in this study were negotiating meanings and understandings of 'good' fatherhood in relation to the wider social context and family circumstances is further evidenced in the stepfathers' accounts.

8.4 Stepfathers and the 'biological family'.

The interview accounts of the stepfathers in this study reveal much about the ways in which this under-researched group of male parents 'do' fathering, and demonstrates the limits of individualisation. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2001) and Giddens (1991, 1992) have argued that traditional conceptions of who 'counts' as family have become less important to individuals. Family ties are allegedly becoming more fluid, contingent and provisional. Within this context, it is argued, parental status is

increasingly based on the social relationship between father and child, rather than on notions of marriage and/or biology. Being a 'father' is thus an achieved status rather than one which is ascribed (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). Prior research has found evidence to support this. In their study of stepfamilies, Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, (2003) found that although middle class parents tended to emphasise the importance of the biological relationship as the basis for parental status, working class parents regarded the social relationship as more important. Similarly, there is evidence that children hold sophisticated and nuanced views in relation to kinship, and overwhelmingly foreground the quality of the relationship rather than parental status. Birth parents remain important, but children tend to adopt an inclusive conception who is and is not a parent (Brannen *et al.*, 2000; Gabb, 2005). Thus, Neale (2000) argues that, in promoting the 'biological family', social policy is out of touch with the ways in which individuals 'do' family in the contemporary context.

However, what this research suggests is that Neale (2000) is discounting the extent to which social policy constructions of 'family' influence how individuals understand and experience family life. The discussion of the fathers' accounts in Chapters Six and Seven, suggest that the 'ideology of the biological family', and the construction of biological fathers as essential to child welfare in particular, structure relations between biological and stepfathers in multi-father families.

The stepfathers in this study, on a practical level, exhibited similar varying levels of involvement to biological fathers, either through the daily care they provided, the amount of time they spent with the children, and/or in the intensity of their emotional attachment to the children. Stepfathers were therefore going about the business of 'fathering' in much the same way as biological fathers. Thus in one sense, Neale (2000) is correct; attaching rights and responsibilities to biological fathers is out of touch with the fact that 'fathering' is increasingly performed by multiple male parents, rather than just the biological father.

However, the majority were adamant that their 'fathering' did not make them fathers, or even parents. The social act of fathering, was regarded an insufficient basis upon which to claim the status of 'father'. With only a few exceptions, the importance of biology was a key theme in the fathers' understandings of 'who' is a father. The

majority of the step and biological fathers subscribed to the view that there could be only one father, and that status belonged to the biological father. Central to this view was the understanding that it is the biological father who is beneficial for child welfare. Therefore any attempt to disrupt the biological father's relationship with the child, or replace him as 'the father' was construed as going against the child's best interests.

Exactly what would represent a clear signal that the stepfather intended to replace the biological father was ambiguous. In practice, it is very difficult for co-resident stepfathers to be completely uninvolved in parenting the stepchildren and thus, to signal that they do not intend to replace the biological father through a rejection of parenting. Additionally, few of the male parents in multi-father families directly discussed their co-parental relationship with each other or explicitly discussed their intentions. As a result, the label 'father' took on a particular importance. Rejecting the label 'dad' or 'father' was a clear signal to the biological father that the stepfather did not intend to replace him, or disrupt his relationship with the children.

That the biological father should not be replaced did seem to be a non-negotiable moral obligation for the majority of fathers in this study. Even when the stepfathers' acknowledged that the parenting provided by the biological fathers was not particularly satisfactory, or when promoting contact impacted negatively on their own relationship with the child, many of the stepfathers' still went to great lengths to promote and support the biological father's involvement (see Chapter Seven).

Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, (2003) have highlighted that decisions made by parents in stepfamilies, were not 'freely chosen', but based on the moral imperative to put the needs of the child first. I argue that the stepfathers in this research are engaged in a similar form of moral reasoning. The conception that children have only 'one' father and that it is the biological father who is the guarantor of child welfare, is important to understand this moral reasoning. From this perspective, stepfathers' claims to a paternal status could be interpreted as an attempt to replace the biological father, and a sign that they are not putting the needs of the child first. In *not* claiming a paternal status, stepfathers can maintain a moral identity as 'good' stepfathers. However, in the process of maintain their identities as 'good' stepfathers, these fathers maintained

the 'ideology of the biological family' and the biological fathers' privileged position (Neale, 2000), both of which run counter to the 'families of choice' depicted by the individualisation theorists (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 2001).

However, a minority of fathers were negotiating more inclusive notions of family that did not conform to the heterosexual biological family. Two of the stepfathers did make a claim to occupying a paternal status, basing their claims to 'being a father' on both the fathering they performed and the quality of the emotional relationship with their stepchildren. However, they could not make these claims in a straightforward manner. Their interview accounts repeatedly made reference to their acknowledgement that although they and their children regarded them as 'a' father, they were not 'the' father, and the children had been made aware of this. This demonstrates that the current valorisation of the 'biological family' can result in some stepfathers facing considerable difficulties in claiming what they and the children feel to be a justifiable paternal status.

Two biological fathers also subscribed to an inclusive conception of fathering. For these two fathers, that their children called their stepfather 'dad' was seen as a positive indication that the child had adjusted well to family changes and not been harmed by divorce. The financial stability provided by the stepfather was also regarded as a positive benefit for the children. Therefore, whilst these fathers drew on a discourse of child welfare, they did not position the biological father as the only male parent who could meet the child's needs. Additionally, neither of these fathers interpreted the children's use of the term 'dad' in relation to the stepfather, as a sign that they were being 'replaced'. This inclusive vision of parental relationships represents a significant departure from traditional notions of 'family' and signifies the extent to which male parents can co-operate rather than compete.

8.5 Democratic multi-father families?

In 1998, Giddens made what some considered to be a rather alarming claim, 'There is only story to tell about the family today, and that is of democracy' (Giddens, 1998: 93). He did acknowledge that this was not yet the reality, but argued the

transformations in family life and personal relationships were gradually eroding traditional dimensions of power and authority. In order to encourage democratisation, he argued for the promotion of 'equality, mutual respect, autonomy, decision making through communication and freedom from violence.' (1998: 93).

Do the inter-personal relationships of male parents in multi-father families resemble Giddens' vision? The findings from this study suggest that some male parents are, or are trying, to construct co-operative co-parenting relationships, based on values of respect and autonomy. Leaving aside the experiences of violence and hostility for one moment, it does appear that for the majority of fathers' in this study, the intention is to co-operate, albeit to varying degrees, rather than compete. The assumption that stepfathers in particular, will compete with the biological father over the children and/or their mother is unhelpful (O'Sullivan, 2005).

The birth mother is regarded as particularly influential in either obstructing or facilitating father involvement, either within or across households (O'Brien, 2005). However, the findings of this research underscore the importance of looking beyond the birth couple relationship, in order to examine how other family members can also be influential. What the findings suggest is that stepfathers can also play an important role in facilitating contact. Some of the stepfathers in this study encouraged and supported the biological father's relationship with their children in a variety of ways. Some took the role of mediator, helping to smooth out troubled relations between birth parents, or providing information about the children's lives to biological fathers. Some facilitated contact in more practical ways, in picking up and dropping off children for contact visits for example. To a certain extent therefore, some of the stepfathers were adopting elements of what has traditionally been regarded as the mother's role. Backett (1987) highlighted the extent to which the biological father's relationship was mediated through the mother, with the mother informing the father about the child's mood, preferences etc. Thus some of the stepfathers reported very positive relationships with the children's biological father, characterised by trust, open communication and respect.

There were limits to the extent of this 'democratisation' however. As already discussed, the majority of fathers in this study maintained an exclusive status for the

biological father. Very few stepfathers regarded their position in relation to the children as equal to that of the biological father. That the biological fathers did not seem to regard the stepfather's relationship with the children as requiring their support, demonstrates this inequality. Within both the stepfathers' and the biological fathers' interview accounts there were few indications that the biological fathers actively provided practical and emotional support for the stepfathers' relationships with the children. Some biological fathers refused to provide support even when directly asked by the stepfathers, claiming it was not their responsibility. Thus, whilst some of the stepfathers went to great lengths to act as 'father's ally' (Marsiglio, 2004b), sometimes against the mother's wishes, there were few indications that the biological fathers reciprocated. Support for the stepfather's parental relationship was generally regarded by the biological fathers as the birth mother's responsibility.

Whilst there were few indications of the biological fathers supporting the stepfather's parental relationship, there were indications that biological fathers could be obstructive. One of the key findings of this research is that contrary to claims from some father's rights groups (Families Need Fathers, 2007), hostilities, when they did occur, originated from the biological father. Some of the stepfathers had experienced a wide range of hostile and aggressive acts, from threatening text messages and phone calls, to outright physical violence. What was surprising was that none of the stepfathers articulated a 'victim' discourse when recounting these events, even though, as I pointed out in Chapter Seven, these actions do fit current official definitions of domestic violence. None of the stepfathers had reported these incidents to the authorities, preferring often unsuccessfully, to try and sort it out on their own. These experiences certainly demonstrate the limits of democratisation. But perhaps more importantly, they highlight how the inequalities between step and biological fathers can have a negative impact on the children, birth mothers and the stepfathers. As some of the stepfathers acknowledged, children and birth mothers were often caught up in these hostilities, and the emotional impacts on the children were a cause for concern. However, none of the stepfathers made attempts to stop or curtail contact.

To understand this, it is necessary to realise that with only one exception, none of the stepfathers in this study had the same legal rights as the biological fathers. Therefore,

the extent to which they could take action against biological fathers who had contact orders was limited. Additionally, some of the stepfathers acknowledged that ultimately the decision to prevent contact rested with the child's biological mother, and that they did not feel that they had a right to interfere. Without interviewing the mothers it is impossible to establish why they continued to allow contact. However, there is a wealth of literature documenting the extent to which, the current contact culture places mothers in a difficult and often dangerous position (see for example, Eriksson and Hester, 2001; Harrison, 2008). This is a point I return to in the final section of this conclusion.

8.6 Future directions – Where do we go from here?

This research has demonstrated that fatherhood and fathering are characterised by considerable diversity and complexity. However, there are limits to the extent to which individual male parents, as they go about the business of 'doing' fatherhood and fathering, are acting as autonomous actors exercising free choice. Whilst some are actively creating and maintaining 'inclusive' families, and co-operative multi-father relationships, this research suggests that current moral imperatives are restricting the opportunities for fathers who may be attempting to parent outside of the 'ideology of the biological family' (Neale, 2000).

Morgan (2002) and Lewis and Lamb (2007) have drawn attention to the importance of exploring the influence of the social and familial contexts within which contemporary fathers are situated. This research has highlighted the influence of the wider social context and in particular, current policy constructions, on individual fathers' understandings of 'good' fatherhood, their status in relation to the children, and subsequent negotiation of fathering in multi-father families. There are several issues raised by this research that require further exploration.

Firstly, there needs to be far more research on stepfathering and stepfatherhood. Stepfatherhood is an increasingly common experience, and the experiences and understandings of stepfathers needs to be explored in relation to the dynamics of parenting in multi-father families. Whilst this research has provided an exploratory

account of aspects of parenting in multi-father families, it is based on a small sample. This places limits on the degree to which generalisations can be made. Thus, more research, with larger samples will assist in establishing if the experiences of the fathers in this study are applicable to the majority of stepfathers. Additionally, I was unsuccessful in obtaining interviews with the 'other' male parent(s) in the multi-father families. This places limitations on the extent to which the dynamics between male parents could be explored. Research designed to overcome this limitation would provide a more detailed and thorough exploration of the extent to which biological and stepfathers negotiate parenting practices in relation to each other.

This research did not seek to make contact with and interview birth mothers. As discussed in Chapter Three, this was due to the anticipated difficulties involved in obtaining agreement from the current and multiple ex-partners of some of the fathers. However, some of the interview accounts raise interesting and important questions that warrant further exploration. Some of the biological fathers stated that if their children disclosed 'problems' with their current stepfathers that they would talk to the mother about this. This raises the question as to the extent and ways in which mothers are managing the relational and emotional dynamics in multi-father families. Further, some of the stepfathers were actively facilitating and mediating contact with the biological father against the mother's wishes. How do mothers experience this? Do they welcome this mediation? Or do some prefer that the stepfather acts in accordance with their wishes? Exploring these issues in more detail would reveal much about the operation of power dynamics in complex stepfamilies. Similarly, the voices of children are also absent from this research. There is a growing recognition that children should be consulted about their needs and experiences (Featherstone, 2004a). This has resulted in an increasing amount of research on children's understandings and perceptions of family life (see for example, Brannen *et al.*, 2000; Smart *et al.*, 2001). The finding that some stepfathers actively prevented stepchildren calling them 'dad' raises questions about the extent to which children may feel that their ability to verbally validate relationships which they regard as significant is constrained. Future research that includes a consideration of children's perceptions, needs and wishes in relation to fathers and other male parents would further enhance understandings of family dynamics in multi-father families.

Making policy recommendations was not a key aim of this research. However, there are three related issues I would like to draw attention to by way of a conclusion to this Chapter. Developing father inclusive services is currently a key priority for the current government. Greater recognition that children may be ‘fathered’ by more than one male parent is an important, but often overlooked aspect of contemporary family life by policy makers and parenting organisations. Organisations such as the Fatherhood Institute devote very little attention to stepfathers. The inclusion of a section for stepfathers on their website for example, would go some way to addressing this lack of attention. This research also highlights the need to pay greater attention to the language used by both policy makers and service providers in order to ensure that all male parents feel able to make use of the support services available to them. The use of the term ‘father’ may serve to exclude some male parents, who for the reasons outlined above, may not consider or recognise themselves as ‘fathers’. The use of ‘male parents’ or ‘male carers’ would open up opportunities for the greater participation and inclusion of all male parents.

Additionally, family support policies and services need to be attuned to and offer support for the unique challenges stepfathers may face. The issue of hostility and violence between male parents is important and demands attention. It is recognised in the literature that the current ‘pro-contact culture’ can be detrimental for mothers and children where there is a history of violence from the biological father (Harrison, 2008). However, to date, policy responses have been rather limited in implementing measures to strengthen child protection and prevent their exposure to ongoing violence (Eriksson and Hester, 2001; Harrison, 2008). This research suggests that stepfathers are also targeted, and that the presence of a stepfather can result in a re-emergence of hostility and aggression from the biological father. That stepfathers can also be the victims of domestic violence deserves greater recognition so that support can be offered to those experiencing this. There also needs to be greater recognition, that stepfathers may face constraints in exercising their duty of care. That the stepfathers felt unable to raise concerns about child welfare due to the legal contact arrangements that were in place, is particularly concerning given the recent implementation of measures to enforce contact orders in the Child Contact and Adoption Act 2006. Due to their lack of legal and socially recognised parental status, stepfathers may feel powerless to act in the best interests of the child. Again, the

problems inherent in the current pro-contact culture are important here. Stepfathers may be in a similar position as birth mothers, who are often labelled ‘implacably hostile’ or ‘bad’ parents if they attempt to disrupt contact arrangements (Kaganas and Day-Sclater, 2004). The fear of this may be particularly acute for stepfathers, given the negative social stereotypes of stepfathers as abusive and the assumption that they will adopt a competitive stance in relation to the biological father. Stepfathers may face both similar and unique constraints on their parenting practices in comparison to birth mothers. Policy makers need to acknowledge this, and develop more inclusive family support policies that do not privilege the position of the biological father solely on the basis of his genetic relationship to the children.

Lastly, this research underscores the need for a thorough interrogation of post-separation parenting that goes beyond a focus on the dynamics between the birth couple. Whilst policy has been concerned to promote fathers’ responsibilities to their children, much can and should be done to reinforce non-resident biological fathers’ responsibilities towards birth mothers and stepfathers. Some stepfathers and birth mothers are going to great lengths to ensure the continuance of a meaningful relationship between the non-resident biological father and child. Unfortunately, in some instances, this is not reciprocated by the biological father. Therefore, policy needs to reinforce that non-resident biological fathers also have a responsibility not to obstruct the child’s relationships with the co-resident parents.

With the current ‘politicisation’ of fatherhood (Collier, 2005) these aims may be vigorously contested. However, if the government is committed to the notion that ‘every parent matters’ for child welfare, then policies need to start promoting and supporting a more ‘inclusive’ vision of families.

Table A.1 Attitude Questions asked in the BHPS.

Attitude Statement	Available in Waves	Selected for Analysis - Y/N
A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.	A, C, E, G, I, K, M	N
All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job	A, C, E, G, I, K, M	N
A woman and her family would all be happier if she goes out to work	A, C, E, G, I, K, M	N
Both the husband and wife should contribute to the household income	A, C, E, G, I, K, M	N
Having a full-time job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person	A, C, E, G, I, K, M	N
A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family	A, C, E, G, I, K, M	Y (Wave M)
Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother	A, C, E, G, I, K, M	Y (All Waves)
Employers should make special arrangements to help mothers combine jobs and childcare	A, C, E, G, I, K, M	N
A single parent can bring up children as well as a couple	A, C, E, G, I, K, M	Y (Wave M)
The Bible is God's word and every word in it is true	B, D, F	N
The Man should be the head of the household	B, D, F	N
Living together outside of marriage is always wrong	B, D, F	N
It is alright for people to live together even if they have no interest in considering marriage	H, J, L, N	N
It makes no difference to children whether their parents are married to each other or just living together	H, J, L, N	N
When there are children in the family, parents should stay together even if they don't get along	H, J, L, N	N
Adult children have an obligation to look after their elderly parents	B, D, F, H, J, L, N	N
It is better to divorce than continue an unhappy marriage	B, D, F, H, J, L, N	N

Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer.



Are you a father living with or apart from your children? A male lone parent? Or perhaps a stepfather or stay at home dad?

Would you be willing to spare an hour to be interviewed for a study about male parents?

The central aim of the research is to explore how men experience parenthood in different family situations. So if you are or have ever been a father living either with or apart from his children, a stepfather, a lone parent, or a stay at home father, who has at least one child or stepchild aged 16 or under, we would very much like to hear from you.

- The interviews are up to one hour long.
- All questions are about how you have experienced parenthood.
- Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed.
- Appointments for interviews can be made at a time to fit in with your work/family commitments.
- Any travel expenses or childcare costs will be refunded.

If you would like to participate, or if you require any further details then please don't hesitate to contact **Kerry Lee** via one of the methods below:

Telephone: XXXX XXX XXXX
Email: K.J.Lee-1@city.ac.uk

Mobile: XXXXX XXX XXX

Appendix C

Interview Schedule.

Fatherhood in Different Family Contexts.

Introduction to the study.

Firstly, I'd like to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. The main aim of this project is to explore how fatherhood is experienced across a range of different family situations. All of the questions during this interview are about your experience of parenting. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions as the intention is record your experience of fatherhood in your own words.

If you have no objections, I would like to record this interview. This is because I need to make sure that I do not miss anything that you say. Everything you say will be kept confidential. Both the recording and the full interview transcript will be seen and heard only by myself, and all records will be kept in a locked cabinet, to which only I have access. Extracts from some of the interviews will be used in journal articles and the final PhD thesis. To ensure that you remain anonymous, all references to the names of your partner(s) and children or any other information which may identify you will be removed from the transcript.

There are three sections to this interview:

Firstly, I would like to ask you some questions about yourself, educational qualifications, income etc. This information is collected so that I can determine if the group of men I have interviewed is representative of the wider population of men in Britain.

The second section is based around the life grid, which will allow me to establish which questions from the interview are applicable to you.

And lastly, I would like to ask you some questions about your experience of fatherhood.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have at any time during the interview and if there are any questions you do not wish to answer you are under no obligation to do so.

Section One.

If we could begin with some questions about yourself please:

Respondents Initials:

Interview No.

Date of Birth:

Ethnicity:

Highest Qualification:

**Current Annual Household
Income:**

Tenure:

Current Employment:

Respondent:

Partner:

Parents Employment:

Mother:

Father:

Were parents still together when respondent 16? Y/N

If N ask why not (separated, divorced, bereavement etc.)

Date of interview:

Time start:

Finish:

Location:

Expenses:

Respondent wants to see a copy of transcript?

Y/N

Highest Educational/Academic Qualifications.

1. Any other Technical, Professional or Higher Qualifications
2. Higher Degree (University)
3. First Degree (University)
4. University Diploma
5. Teaching Qualification (non degree)
6. Nursing Qualifications (non degree)
7. HNC/HND
8. BEC/TEC/BTEC
9. GCE A levels
10. AS Levels
11. GCE O levels/GCSE/CSE
12. City & Guilds Certificate
13. Recognised Trade Apprenticeship/Youth Training Certificate
14. Any Other Qualifications/Certificates.
15. None of these.

Ethnicity.

White

British

Irish

Welsh

Scottish

Any Other White Background

Mixed

White & Black Caribbean

White & Black African

White & Asian

Any Other Mixed Background

Asian or Asian British

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Any other Asian Background

Black or Black British

Caribbean

African

Any other Black Background

Chinese

Any Other Ethnic Group

Current Annual Household Income (before tax).

- A. Up to £15,000
- B. £15,001 - £20,000
- C. £20,001 - £30,000
- D. £30,001 - £40,000
- E. £40,001 - £50,000
- F. £50,001 - £60,000
- G. Over £60,000

Section Two: Paternal Career Grid.

AGE	CHILDREN	MARITAL STATUS	EMPLOYMENT/HOURS/SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Section Three: Themes to explore

Expectations of what fatherhood would be like

- in all fathering situations

Social Expectations of Fathers and Fathering

- tease out if the respondent feels there are different expectations for fathers in different situations e.g. non-resident, stepfather, lone etc.

Similarities and differences in how they parent in contrast to their own father.

Similarities and differences in how they parent in contrast to their female partner(s)

Employment

- Have they changed their employment practices since becoming a parent?
- Used any flexible working schemes or paternity Leave etc.
- Has work become more or less important to them

If currently or has been a Primary Carer:

- Explore circumstances and factors which led to that decision/arrangement.
- If no longer a stay at home dad – explore why not
- Explore the reactions of other people – school, wider family etc.

Transitions:

To non-resident:

- Explore respondents experience of this, especially negotiation of contact and financial arrangements, any use of the legal system, legal status etc.
- Explore how they feel their fathering and/or relationship with their children did or did not change
- Ask if their children's mother has re-partnered, and if so, their thoughts and feelings about this.

To stepfather:

- Explore experience of establishing their relationship with the stepchildren
- Explore issue of 'names'
- Explore their legal status in relation to their stepchildren
- If both biological children and stepchildren – explore the respondents experience of this

To Lone Parent:

- Explore experience of this, especially negotiation of contact/financial arrangements with the children's mother, any use of the legal system etc.
- Explore what if any means of support (family etc)
- Explore any changes to their working practices.
- Have they re-partnered? If so, explore if and how they have negotiated parenting with their new partner, expectations of her role in relation to the children etc.

For non-resident, lone and stepfathers:

- Explore their relationship with the 'other' male parent (if there is another male parent)

Father's Rights Groups.

Explore if they support their general aims, or are members etc.

Appendix D

Raw Data Tables for Figures in Chapter 4.

Table D.1 Percentage of men who are non-fathers and age at first fatherhood.

	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Never dad	70	19	52	15	51	10	86	16	112	23	208	59
16-19	1	<1	4	1	9	2	16	3	14	3	14	4
220-24	82	22	95	27	144	29	112	21	83	17	44	13
25-29	120	32	123	35	186	37	149	28	143	29	56	16
30-34	70	19	54	15	78	16	104	20	104	21	19	5
35-39	23	6	19	5	21	4	49	9	30	6	0	0
40+	8	2	7	2	12	2	10	2	3	<1	0	0
Missing	1	<1	2	<1	0	0	1	<1	1	<1	10	3
Base	375	100	356	100	501	100	527	100	490	100	351	100

Table D.2 Fertility Intentions of 1950s, 60s and 70s Birth Cohort 'never dads'.

	1950s	1960s	1970s
Don't Know	7	13	24
Yes	4	25	147
No	70	70	35
Missing	1	2	1
Base (all = 399)	82	110	207
BHPS variable mlchmor. Question: Do you think you will have any (more) children?			

Table D.3 Number of Transitions by Cohort.

	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0	267	87	259	85	336	75	312	71	243	64	97	68
1	20	7	23	8	63	14	68	15	69	18	29	20
2	11	4	16	5	33	7	40	9	46	12	11	8
3+	7	2	6	2	18	4	21	5	20	6	6	4
Base	305	100	304	100	450	100	441	100	378	100	143	100

Table D.4. Length of time before those starting their Paternal Careers as Non-Resident Biological Fathers joined their children's household.

	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s
Up to 1 year	1	3	5	7	10	11
Between 1 and 2 years	3	0	2	0	2	4
Over 2 years	0	1	2	2	1	1
Never Joined	1	1	3	3	5	11
Base	5	5	12	12	18	27

Table D.5 Proportion experiencing the dissolution of their first coupled relationship.

	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Divorce/Separation	21	7	27	9	90	20	105	24	109	29	27	20
Widowed	10	3	5	2	5	1	4	1	0	0	0	0
Remained Intact	274	90	272	89	356	79	330	75	266	71	106	80
Base	305	100	304	100	451	100	439	100	375	100	133	100

Table D.6 Parenting and partnering behaviours of fathers available to form a second family commitment.

	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Single	9	27	7	21	23	22	47	40	46	39	18	43
Repartner 0 Children	9	27	10	29	37	36	22	19	25	21	11	27
Steps only	5	14	8	25	17	16	27	22	20	18	3	7
More Bios	10	32	8	25	27	26	22	19	26	22	10	23
Base	32	100	33	100	104	100	118	100	117	100	42	100

Table D.7 Fathers who have experienced co-resident biological, step, non-resident and/or lone fatherhood.

	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Biological Intact	292	97	276	91	419	93	416	94	336	89	108	75
Non-Resident	18	6	24	8	80	18	97	22	113	30	43	30
Step	12	4	27	9	40	9	54	12	64	17	30	21
Lone	12	4	12	4	23	5	27	6	11	3	3	2
*Totals add up to more than 100% and more than the number of men in each cohort because the men can be included in more than one category.												

Table D.8 Percentage of fathers in each birth cohort agreeing with ‘Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother’ each time the statement was included.

*Statistically significant figures are marked bold.

1991 (Wave A)	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agree	177	97	229	94	363	91	372	92	324	93	95	89
Neither	4	2	10	4	26	7	17	4	21	6	11	10
Disagree	2	1	6	2	8	2	17	4	4	1	1	1
Base (all = 1687)	183	100	245	100	397	100	406	100	349	100	107	100

χ^2 22.875 d.f 10 p < .011

1993 (Wave C)	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agree	179	98	237	96	357	91	365	90	329	93	101	88
Neither	2	1	9	3	22	6	29	7	14	4	1	10
Disagree	1	1	2	1	12	3	13	3	12	3	3	2
Base (all = 1698)	182	100	248	100	391	100	407	100	355	100	115	100

χ^2 25.112 d.f 10 p < .005

1995 (Wave E)	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agree	181	98	236	95	361	91	342	84	320	90	115	89
Neither	3	2	7	3	28	7	46	11	26	7	12	9
Disagree	0	0	6	2	6	2	20	5	9	3	2	2
Base (all = 1720)	184	100	249	100	395	100	408	100	355	100	129	100

χ^2 45.001 d.f 10 p < .000

1997 (Wave G)	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agree	176	96	233	94	369	93	359	87	321	89	112	84
Neither	7	4	11	4	23	6	34	8	33	9	16	12
Disagree	0	0	5	2	6	1	19	5	8	2	5	4
Base (all = 1737)	183	100	249	100	398	100	412	100	362	100	133	100

χ^2 30.781 d.f 10 p < .001

1999 (Wave I)	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agree	182	97	232	92	364	91	349	85	321	89	117	91
Neither	3	2	12	5	32	8	43	11	30	8	8	6
Disagree	2	1	7	3	5	1	18	4	11	3	4	3
Base (all = 1740)	187	100	251	100	401	100	410	100	362	100	129	100

χ^2 29.030 d.f 10 p < .001

2001 (Wave K)	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agree	166	91	238	96	365	91	349	85	312	87	115	86
Neither	12	7	6	2	28	7	40	10	39	11	13	10
Disagree	4	2	5	2	8	2	19	5	8	2	5	4
Base (all = 1732)	182	100	249	100	401	100	408	100	359	100	133	100

χ^2 26.447 d.f 10 p < .003

2003 (Wave M)	1920s		1930s		1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agree	175	96	233	95	358	90	338	82	312	88	112	85
Neither	5	3	9	4	32	8	48	12	36	10	18	14
Disagree	2	1	4	1	9	2	23	6	6	2	1	1
Base (all = 1721)	182	100	246	100	399	100	409	100	354	100	131	100

χ^2 47.888 d.f 10 p < .000

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