WHY MARRY? YOUNG WOMEN TALK ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS, MARRIAGE AND LOVE

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ABSTRACT

Young people now are thought to conduct relationships only for as long as they receive satisfaction from them, experiencing confluent love dependent on happiness and temporary contingent commitment (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2005). This transformation in intimacy is evidenced through increasing sexual freedom, a growth in temporary cohabitation and high divorce and separation rates. Yet there is also evidence to suggest that these have come about because of the increasing ease of leaving an unsatisfactory relationship and a substantial growth in freedom for women from traditional relationship paths. Despite these increased freedoms, it is apparent that marriage is still a very popular relationship choice and 'wife' is still a status to aspire to. This research aimed to examine young women's own views of relationships and marriage to determine whether their accounts fitted with the transformation of intimacy and the individualisation process (Giddens, 1992). I also wanted to find out whether and why marriage remains a popular life decision in the context of high divorce rates and the increasing acceptability of alternative lifestyle choices such as cohabitation. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 heterosexual women between the ages of 18 and 30 over the summer of 2008. As a supplementary method I analysed a small selection of articles from Bridal Magazines bought over the same period. The women interviewed were, on the whole, highly conventional (perhaps as a result of sampling bias) and a majority desired traditional futures including lifelong marriage. Love is considered essential in relationships, although an absence of love stories prevailed, and commitment, particularly the fidelity aspect, is central to lasting relationships. There was little evidence among participants that individualised lives alone were longed for and very few mentioned relationships akin to Giddens' (1992) 'pure relationship'. All participants desired long-term, committed relationships and most aspired to marriage.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

An extract from Chapter Five 'The Curious Absence of Love' was presented at the British Sociological Association Conference 2010 in Glasgow. In addition, an abridged version of Chapter Four 'Why Marry?' was presented at the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships Conference 2010 in Edinburgh and published on their website.

1. INTRODUCTION

Until the age of 20, I, like so many other women of my age, assumed that one day I would meet my soul-mate and we would get married and have children. This was such an unquestioned expectation that letting the idea go was a long and confusing process.

While studying for my Masters in Women's Studies and becoming more acquainted with feminist thought and theory it started to dawn on me just how many assumptions I made about everyday life. In relation to marriage, I first decided that I wanted to delay marriage for at least ten years, and subsequently decided that I did not want to marry at all. This resolution was made more solid by others' dismissal of it as a phase that would abate once I wanted to have children or had met 'the right person'. Yet, I could no longer see the appeal of marriage or the point of it. What did marriage add to a relationship? Did it really make coupledom more secure considering the ease and prevalence of divorce?

As these thoughts were taking shape, the enormity of the change in my own beliefs sank in and I wondered whether others would feel the same if they too started to question the supremacy of marriage. After talking to my mother, sister and cousins though, it seemed that marriage, as an institution, was less easy to topple than I had anticipated; not many people shared my view. Thus began my interest and obsession with why women still want to get married. Why are weddings not seen as pointless display? Why do society, and women, not question the practice? Why is it still viewed as a life goal and the ultimate in couple relationships?

When I began reading around the topic it became clear that most recent literature is focussed on alternative family formations, divorce, civil partnerships, cohabitation and so on (see for example Charles et al., 2008; Holmes, 2004b; 2006; Barlow et al., 2005; Jamieson et al., 2002; Weeks, 2007). There was little recent literature on young people's prevalent and continuing desire for marriage. On the contrary, there was a great body of literature that suggested that marriage was no longer desired and young people were rather searching for temporary and

satisfying relationships regardless of commitment and future plans (Giddens, 1991; 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2005) or for alternative forms of relationships. Yet, this did not fit in with my own experiences as a young woman.

When I was 18 years old and at Sixth Form College, one of my school friends became engaged to her boyfriend. The rumour was that he wanted to secure their relationship before she left for university. Although their relationship subsequently broke down, this did make me wonder who would want to be engaged or married at such a young age. A year later my cousin became engaged on her 18th birthday and not long after this her sister also announced her engagement to her then partner. Again, these two relationships were later to fall apart but these were a clear sign to me that marriage was desired, expected and assumed. Now, at the age of 25, my sister and partner's sister have married, my cousin has had another broken engagement, I have two sets of friends who are due to marry next year, a friend from my Masters degree course is married and Facebook has provided me with the opportunity to discover that a significant number of women with whom I went to school are married and having babies. Marriage and the desire to be a wife appear to be widespread.

Despite declining marriage rates and high divorce rates, marriage still appears to be a popular choice among some groups of young women. Moreover, while some theorists are speculating on the process of individualisation and young people's desires for short-term relationships, others are taking a more considered approach. It has been suggested that, rather than young people desiring temporary relationships, there is simply less pressure now to be in a relationship, and greater freedom to end unsatisfactory relationships (Townsend, 1998 and Jamieson, 2002a). There is, therefore, some doubt as to the spread of individualisation and the 'transformation of intimacy' (Giddens, 1992). From my own experience it would seem that young people are not rejecting long-term partnerships in favour of temporary coupling, determined solely by satisfaction with the relationship. This research has, therefore, arisen from the juxtaposition of my experience against the documented transformation of intimacy and culture of individualisation.

Due to the large number of my friends and family members who want to marry, are engaged, or married, I began talking to them about why marriage was still important, what it meant to them and why they thought marriage was still a popular choice among young women. This way of gathering information led to my eventual choice of a qualitative methodology and in-depth interviews as my research method. I wanted to gather young, heterosexual women's views of marriage to determine why marriage was still a popular lifestyle choice for many among this group. Although this does not constitute a representative sample of the population, the aim was to document in-depth reasons why these women felt and behaved in a certain way and created patterns of action, rather than to gather a large amount of representative, superficial data. This qualitative data is complemented by a small discourse analysis of a selection of bridal magazines. These methods are discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three.

The first part of this thesis contextualises my research within wider discussions of relationships, marriage, cohabitation and love. Chapter Two considers these debates and provides the context for my analytical focus. Chapter Three outlines the methods I have chosen to investigate this topic, with reasons and justifications for their use. The latter half of this thesis concentrates on the analysis of the discussions I had with women aged 18 to 30 over the summer of 2008. This is split into six separate chapters. Chapter Four begins by focussing on marriage and the re-traditionalisation of family relationships, including discussions on cultural ambivalence, biological assumptions and popular beliefs about the 'normal' and 'natural'. Chapter Five focuses on love and the absence of spontaneous love stories in participants' accounts. In Chapter Six I explore my participants' views on commitment and cohabitation and develop a new conceptualisation of the slippery notion of commitment. Chapter Seven deals with weddings and their use as a display and representation of marriage and what these mean for young women contemplating marriage. The analytical section finishes with Chapter Eight, in which I discuss identity – sexual identity, married identity and the more general concept of identity – and how this may alter with a change in relationship status. Before the analysis can begin, however, it is necessary to expand on the

relevant literature in order to position the debates within the current climate of thought on marriage, relationships, love and weddings.

2. MARRIAGE, LOVE AND COMMITMENT: CURRENT DEBATES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Families and intimate relationships are increasingly changing and developing. The assertion that people have become more autonomous, individualistic and independent is supported by many sociologists, such as Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995). It is also argued that this increasingly individualistic nature of heterosexual relationships engenders a decreased value placed on commitment and a less romantic vision of love, in short a 'transformation of intimacy' (Giddens, 1992). However, the work of Giddens and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, have encountered much criticism, with a number of recent commentators emphasising the continued importance of kinship (Finch and Mason, 1993), relationality (Smart, 2007; 2009) and 'meaning constitutive' traditions (Gross, 2005) in everyday life. In line with these critiques, this thesis challenges assumptions about the lack of commitment and romantic ideals in modern heterosexual relationships.

Recent literature foregrounds the increasing fluidity, diversity and uncertainty in family relations (Stevi Jackson, 2009; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Williams notes that a transformation in intimacy has 'hastened the move away from examining the structures and obligations of family life' (Williams, 2004: 17). Beck-Gernsheim suggests that the increased freedom of choice over the continuation or termination of personal relationships can apply to family ties, the maintenance of which, 'is no longer a matter of course but a freely chosen act' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 35). These 'elective affinities' indicate the fragile nature of personal relationships, but also imply that relationships that do survive have done so because of great personal care and work. The fragility of family ties can be extended to those within couple relationships and Giddens (1992) suggests that these delicate ties lead to pure relationships, which devalue lifelong commitment and encourage confluent love.

One explanation for this transformation of intimacy is that it emerged from a

gradual shift in social arrangements. High rates of divorce, changes in gender relations, women's increased freedom from reproduction, and the prevalence of cohabitation among young and divorced people have all been associated with this change (Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004; Evans, 2004; Collins, 2004). Others have suggested that it came about because of an increased emphasis on intimacy and a separation of sexuality from reproduction (Langford, 1999; Stevi Jackson, 2009; Giddens, 1992). It is likely that all these factors have played a part in changing the nature of intimate relationships. Second wave feminism and the campaign for women's rights also created a growing level of equality between the sexes in public and private arenas, contributing significantly to women's freedom in intimate relationships and their private lives.

This review provides an outline of relevant debates in the field of intimate relationships, which will be revisited in later chapters in light of my findings. I begin with a brief review of the increased freedom in relationships, and go on to examine the extent to which this is related to a transformation in intimacy, and how far the notion of the pure relationship is accurate. I then explore issues surrounding young women's sexuality considering Giddens' suggestion that plastic sexuality, deriving from the separation of sexuality from reproduction, shifts the focus onto pleasure for individuals. This is followed by an exploration of the meaning and importance of love, before moving on to consider the current state and rates of marriage, how commitment enters into the equation, and possible alternatives to marriage.

2.2   THE TRANSFORMATION OF INTIMACY THESIS AND RELATED DEBATES

According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2005) women entered the individualisation process through their inclusion into the labour market, which increased as family ties grew less necessary. However, since family obligations and commitments have never disappeared entirely for women, their individualisation is incomplete: 'they still take much more responsibility than do men for family tasks and are still much less protected by a stable position in the labour market' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2005: 56). The result is that, as new

opportunities are opening up for women, new types of dependence will also appear; the consequences of which are not yet visible.

For Giddens (1992), the process of individualisation and its consequences seem a lot simpler: modern-day Western society is undergoing a transformation of intimacy as a result of individualisation. Intimate relationships are becoming increasingly temporary and resemble what Giddens calls the 'pure relationship'. This 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. (1992: 58)

When at least one of the partners in the couple is no longer satisfied with the relationship, it will be terminated.

The process of individualisation has also heralded a change in how sexuality is viewed, towards what Giddens terms 'plastic sexuality'. Sexuality is plastic when it is freed from the confines of reproduction and the focus is on pleasure for the individuals involved. Plastic sexuality emerged not just from the revolution in female sexual autonomy and the flourishing of homosexuality, for Giddens it would have emerged regardless because of more 'deep-lying, and irreversible, changes' (Giddens, 1992: 28). Plastic sexuality is an essential element of the pure relationship.

Since these temporary relationships are not associated with romantic love, and the link between love and sexuality is no longer pursued through marriage alone, intimacy is increasingly emphasised via the contingent pure relationship and marriages tend to conform to this model. Love and romance are also key features in the formation and development of relationships today, but, according to Giddens, have changed[1]. Romantic love was supposed to transcend mundane

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[1]   For more on debates on romance see Collins, 2004; Stacey and Pearce, 1995; and Sieg, 2007.

everyday compromises in relationships and traditionally, it was the role of the wife to foster this type of love in a marriage. Romantic love 'creates a "shared history" that helps separate out the marital relationship from other aspects of family organisation and give it a special primacy' (Giddens, 1992: 45). It also positions the couple relationship as the ideal; sexual encounters experienced on the path to this eventual love relationship are mere detours along the way. The romantic love complex, which encourages women to strive for the ultimate love relationship while engaging in temporary sexual trysts, paved the way for a new form of love in pure relationships. Therefore, as sexuality is increasingly freed from reproduction due to the increased availability of contraception, women desire temporary sexual relationships for as long as the fun lasts, while they search for their ideal partner.

Giddens argues that there is a difference between romantic love and the love that is experienced in pure relationships: confluent love. This love emerges because romantic, one-and-only type love is in conflict with the nature of pure relationships. Confluent love is active, contingent and dependent on the durability of the relationship. For Giddens, it is the surfacing of confluent love that has caused the recent increase in divorces in Western society. While romantic love implies inequalities of power in a relationship, 'Confluent love presumes equality in emotional give and take' (Giddens, 1992: 62). Love in a pure relationship only develops to the same extent as intimacy and, therefore, the development of confluent love is dependent on the sharing of intimacy[2]. The achievement of intimacy in a pure relationship is also related to trust, which has to be worked at. Since relationships today are stripped of kin-like obligations and qualities, 'personal ties in the pure relationship require novel forms of trust – precisely that trust which is built through intimacy with the other' (Giddens, 1991: 96).

Sexual love is guaranteed by the very nature of romantic love, whereas confluent love introduces sex as the core of the relationship and 'makes the achievement of

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[2]   For more discussion on intimacy in relationships see Bawin-Legros, 2004; Shumway, 2003; Jamieson, 2002a; and Moss and Schwebel, 1993.

reciprocal sexual pleasure a key element in whether the relationship is sustained or dissolved' (Giddens, 1992: 62). The ideal for confluent love is that everyone becomes sexually accomplished and sexual exclusivity is not assumed in a pure relationship: women seek out sexual pleasure as a basic component of their lives. Since pure relationships are not assumed to be sexually exclusive, love is dependent on satisfaction, and commitment is peripheral, it is hard to see how such relationships can be sustained. Giddens proposes that 'What holds the pure relationship together is the acceptance on the part of each partner, "until further notice", that each gains sufficient benefit from the relation to make its continuance worthwhile' (1992: 63).

Bawin-Legros (2004) agrees, suggesting that while couples still aspire to live in nuclear family formations, they want 'not to undergo any frustration as they live to the utmost of their respective desires' (2004: 247). A contradiction arises here, however, because Bawin-Legros' participants also state that life-long, or at least long-lasting, relationships are the ideal. Thus, a slightly different picture from Giddens' pure relationship emerges; couples aspire to be together long-term and the emphasis is on fidelity and honesty for as long as love survives rather than maintaining the relationship while satisfaction lasts (although it may be argued that a relationship would not last long without honesty and fidelity). A difference can begin to be discerned, however, between being individualistic to the point of sacrificing the relationship, and being selfish but stopping short of destroying the partnership entirely for the sake of personal satisfaction.

For Beck-Gernsheim (2002), individualisation generates '*both* a claim to a life of one's own *and* a longing for ties, closeness and community' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 8 emphasis in original). The effects of individualisation on the family mean that this unit becomes more diverse, expanded and negotiated and will be idealised because it represents a refuge from the current, impersonal society. Beck-Gernsheim believes that it is a misunderstanding to contend that people only live according to their needs, creating unstable relationships. She believes it is more accurate to suggest that people will have stable periods in their lives that will alternate with less stable times. There will be times when people play and

juggle with relationships, 'partly because they choose to do so, partly because they are more or less forced into it' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 8). The traditional family is not, therefore, disappearing; rather it losing the monopoly on relationships that it has so long enjoyed. Family lifestyles are becoming more diverse and people are seeking ties of a different nature that can be found among cohabitants, long-distance partners, same-sex partnerships and friends.

Beck-Gernsheim also believes, however, that the nature of commitment within marriage has changed. No longer is this a lifelong partnership, rather people now stay together only for as long as they want to. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2005) note that, by the 1980s, marriage was no longer viewed as the overriding goal in life, although the desire for marriage was still predominant once it was established that the couple was compatible. Marriage now provides emotional support and the fulfilment of inner needs; it is geared towards subjective expectations and individual happiness. Yet as expectations of fulfilment and happiness rise, more marriages appear inadequate and divorce is increasingly contemplated. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2005), a life alone is preferable to a life with someone who does not provide satisfaction and fulfilment. This culture of divorce is leading to individuals entering into relationships preparing for the risk of separation. Rather than being less willing to enter into relationships in the first place, people are simply removing obstacles to an easy break-up that may hinder their eventual separation. Thus, 'The declining inclination both to marry and to bear children, [...] may in this sense be interpreted as a risk-diminishing strategy' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 26). People wish to live in stable, committed relationships while keeping the exit door open.

Townsend (1998) found that women only begin certain relationships on the premise that they will not last; these relationships are seen as temporary until the right man comes along. Women reported doing this in order to feel validated: '*you want to feel like you have a mate, even if you know it's only temporary*' (Townsend, 1998: 149 italicised in original). This may explain why contingent relationships appear to be on the increase: being part of a couple in our society 'is held to be fundamental to our happiness, well-being and sense of place in the

world' (Langford, 1999: 1). With this ever-increasing emphasis on intimate relationships, women feel the pressure to be part of a couple and are therefore more likely to begin a relationship they know will not last. Many of the women in Townsend's research were older (in their thirties) and most were successful in business or were studying for professional qualifications. This raises the question of the variation in women's relationship desires at different stages in their life course. While it may be assumed that pure relationships are more likely to occur between young couples who are not yet ready to settle down, Townsend's study suggests that temporary commitment is also present among older, successful women who either want to have fun while looking for the right man or feel pressure to be in a relationship.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that women today value commitment and love any less than in the past. It is simply that 'the meaning and forms of close relationships are continually being defined and redefined without losing their deeply felt value' (Smock, 2004: 971). Commitment may have always been viewed in the same way but it is only now that people can freely express their views by leaving long-term partnerships or entering into temporary trysts. Stevi Jackson (1995) suggests that an increase in young women's heterosexual activity does not necessarily imply an absence of romantic desire but, rather, it 'may indicate a continued search for romantic fulfilment' (1995: 59). Jackson (2009) later suggests that it is a 'continuing lack of equality that causes much of the strain and instability in contemporary heterosexual relationships' (2009: 13) rather than a change in intimacy ideals. This is supported by Wouters, who explains that men try to appeal to women's 'old identity underneath' in order to avoid a more egalitarian relationship (2004: 160).

Shumway (2003) notes that the transformation in intimacy cannot be as widespread as Giddens suggests because heterosexual marriage remains the predominant relationship type in intimacy advice books. In addition, Lewis (2001) found that making a long-term commitment is central to relationships for married and cohabiting couples; it is just the nature of the commitment that is different. Rather than being committed under the prescriptions of marriage,

cohabiting couples engage in a more individual commitment to one another. This commitment was made for life, not while consciously thinking of separation in the future (Lewis, 2001). Thus, rather than an individualistic outlook and temporary attitude towards relationships, it could be argued that women have more short-term relationships because of pressures to be in one (Townsend, 1998), an increased awareness of not having to stay in an unsatisfactory relationship (Jamieson, 2002a), higher expectations from relationships and a lack of equality (Stevi Jackson, 1995), and a greater freedom within their private lives. Moreover, there may be consequences of the proposed transformation of intimacy other than the emergence of pure relationships. These may include an increased focus on sex in relationships rather than other forms of satisfaction, the permanence of relationships depending on life stages, and the increase in kin-like ties among friends.

Contrary to Giddens, Holmes (2004a) suggests that the choices people make regarding intimate relationships are becoming retraditionalised and are still, to some extent, informed by traditional values. Living apart together (being in a long-term, intimate relationship but living separately, often with long distances between the partners), which could be viewed as lacking in dedication to the partner because careers are prioritised, can involve 'considerable commitment to the relationship' (2004a: 254) because a great deal of effort is needed to maintain intimacy at a distance. In addition, perhaps because the individualisation process is not an even one, relationships involving gendered forms of compromise, leading to women making more sacrifices, still exist; expectations remain that women 'will prioritize caring relationships with others over their own personal fulfilment' (Holmes, 2004a: 256). This may contribute to the continuing prevalence of traditional relationship types, such as couples where women's employment is treated as supplemental to the man's main wage and men are praised for occasional housework. In this type of relationship, 'Love and care as expressed by material gifts is at the crux of their relationship, not a process of mutually discovering and enjoying each other' (Jamieson, 2002a: 142). Jamieson has found no evidence to support the pure relationship as a predominant form of intimacy and she discovered divergences from the pure relationship type, such as

couples who make sacrifices for their common good (Jamieson, 2002b).

Another alternative to the individualistic, self-centred image of the modern family is the concept of new networks and communities of families of choice, made up of close friends and family members. Pahl and Spencer (2004) note that Jeffrey Weeks and others are beginning to recognise that friendships are increasingly being experimented with in terms of replacing family ties (Weeks et al., 2001 in Pahl and Spencer, 2004). It is this introduction of choice over who is within the family-tie network that has led to concerns about transient social bonds. Yet, for Pahl and Spencer, the increase in uncommitted relationships is just as likely to be due to geographical distance between the couple, or a lack of common cultural connections, as it is due to the individualisation process and a lack of obligation and duty. Friends can become family and family can become friends; Spencer and Pahl (2006) define this process as suffusion. In this way, family-like ties remain dominant: 'Contrary to predictions that increasing individualism and choice are necessarily leading to a world of casual, fleeting ties, we argue that suffusion can sometimes lead to stronger rather than weaker social bonds' (Spencer and Pahl, 2006: 109). Thus, far from eroding personal responsibilities, suffusion 'may involve a high degree of commitment and does not necessarily imply a loosening of social bonds' (2006: 125). When family-like friends and friend-like family members are included in the family network, this unit can be strong and stable, only transforming as new relationships are formed or old ones lost; a process that would have happened in the traditional family formation as family members married or died[3].

A fundamental flaw in Giddens' theory is his reliance on self-help texts and manuals as the grounding for his research (Shumway, 2003; Jamieson, 2002a). Giddens does not critique these texts and takes them at face value as reflecting social realities. This could be detrimental to the theory because therapeutic literature of this nature is written and promoted by those who have an interest in sustaining marital and relationship problems (Jamieson, 2002a). These texts,

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[3] For more on friendship see Pahl (2000).

therefore, do not necessarily accurately reflect social changes: the writers have an interest in depicting certain relational problems. This type of material also lacks the grounding in empirical research that would provide a more accurate representation of social beliefs and attitudes. Shumway (2003) also bases his argument on relationship manuals; however, in using these same resources to critique Giddens, he exposes the major flaw in interpreting such data as reflecting the true state of affairs. Despite major flaws in his theory however, Giddens' work remains influential.

2.3 SEXUALITY

Giddens suggests that sexuality today is freed from the confines of reproduction and the focus now is on pleasure for the individuals involved. However, it is questionable to what extent this focus on pleasure has become a reality for young women today and how far sexuality really has become separated from pregnancy and reproduction.

The common assumption that young women are entirely free to explore their sexuality and desires is reinforced through magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, which encourage the discussion and celebration of female sexuality and desire (while simultaneously reinforcing the traditional masculine notion of sexuality and positioning coitus and (male) orgasm as the predominant progression and culmination of sexual activity (Jackson and Scott, 1997)[4]. Fine and McClelland (2006) note that, while sex is now splashed all over contemporary culture, desire remains silenced (2006: 300). As Stevi Jackson (2007) comments, 'Ours is a world saturated with sexual imagery, yet one where adults still try to preserve children's "innocence"; [...] where sex education is hedged about with all manner of cautions and prohibitions' (2007: 12). Sexual images are everywhere but talk about real sex is nowhere. Moreover, the stigmatisation of overly sexual women at school and in public perception as sluts or slags is still prevalent and these

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[4] See Sharpe (2004) and Jackson and Scott (2010) for a critique of the notion that sexual behaviour is biologically determined.

women are deemed by newspapers and politicians alike as potential teenage mothers, STI carriers or rape victims. Sue Jackson (2005a), however, found alternative representations of female sexuality in her analysis of teenage magazines and conversations with teenage mothers. While media and politicians alike, portray one representation of 'bad girls' and rampant images of teenage sexuality, these young mothers challenged prevailing negative constructions of women in their situation and instead told stories of personal growth and new directions in life. In addition, letters written in to teen magazines demonstrated a more considered, hesitant approach to sex that is actually adopted by young people.

Jackson and Scott (1997, 2004a) notice a number of tensions concerning women's sexuality in modern society; the celebration of sexual pleasure and experimentation exists alongside a wariness of sexuality 'as a source of anxiety and revulsion' (2004a: 244). The pursuit of sexual pleasure is deemed a rational life goal (see for example the upsurge in young women's internet based sex blogs), and yet sex is continually constructed as unruly and beyond rational management. Women are expected to desire and yet women who are openly sexual are derogated (Cowie and Lees, 1987). Lees draws the conclusion that degrading language (such as slag or slut) is a form of control as it 'steers girls into "acceptable" forms of sexual and social behaviour' (Lees, 1997: 23), such as marriage.

The problematisation of women's sexuality during the Nineteenth Century was characterised by laws such as the Contagious Diseases Act (1864), which controlled and restricted the sexuality and rights of prostitutes (as well as lay women mistaken for prostitutes), and The Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885), which prescribed a new legal sexual age of consent for women. The former illustrates the historic binary division of women into the categories of virgins or whores, eventually wives or tarts (Measor, 1989), as it sought to protect the vulnerable, sexually passive wives of men while on the other hand criminalising and controlling overly sexual women working as prostitutes. The latter contributed to the development of ideas around male and female sexuality being

structured in very gendered ways (Waites, 1999). The heterosexual age of consent creates male sexual agency and positions it as a force requiring control (Thomson, 2004). It was designed to protect women and it limits men's actions rather than liberating women's. However, the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act in 2000 saw sexual acts between men with other men and women and other women legalised at age 16 (Waites, 2003), thus changing the gendered meanings of consent.

Under heterosexuality, male desire and needs are privileged (Holland et al., 1998a; 1998b; Sue Jackson, 2005a), while women are perceived as virgins or whores or, more complexly, objects of men's desires, sexual deviants or sexless mothers (Holland et al., 1998a): all serving male needs. The masculine sexual script is designed so that women have little space for sexual expression and are provided with no effective wording with which to decline sex. Therefore, as Houts comments, 'heterosexual relations exist within a social context of male domination and sexual inequality' (Houts, 2005: 1088; also see Holland et al. 1998b). Moreover, it has been found that the more a girl adheres to feminine ideologies, the less likely she is to demonstrate sexual autonomy, the more disempowered she will feel, and the less safe she will be in sexual relationships (Levine, 2002; Holland et al., 1998b). Young women lack power in dating relationships and this maintains unequal gender relations and gender inequality (Chung, 2005). Young women also exercise little control over their sexual acts, which are controlled by men and society (Tolman, 2002; Holland et al., 1998b), and they are expected to manage the unruliness of their bodies to conform to male desires (Aapola et al., 2005).

Desire is seen as masculine because it is constructed under a male gaze and thus is at odds with femininity (Tolman, 2002). As a result, women's sexual desire is silenced (Holland et al., 1998a; Sue Jackson, 2005b) and the expression of female desire and female sexual autonomy is still largely greeted with resistance and discomfort (Tolman, 2002). However, women may resist this male control by

being 'bad': being a prostitute, becoming a lesbian (desiring the 'wrong' sex) or seducing men and being in control (Johnson, 1988)[5]. Thus, while it is common for young women to deny almost all desire and agency in sexual practices, it also seems as though some women are able to express or act upon desire under exceptional and limited circumstances (Tolman, 2002 and Allen, 2003)[6].

Tolman (2002) found that a few of her young female participants experienced sexual agency but only 'where the dangers of desire can be muted' (Tolman, 2002: 121). For example, one group of girls were able to express sexual desire within the conventions of romance, while another group found refuge for their desires within long-term heterosexual relationships where it was safe enough to openly desire. When Allen (2003) spoke to young people in New Zealand, she found that a significant minority of young women were resisting dominant discourses of sexuality in various ways. One girl accommodated and resisted the subject position of 'slut' by using it to refer to herself. Other women went so far as to articulate their desire and experiences of sexual pleasure, contesting the image of sexually passive females, unable to enjoy 'corporeal pleasures' (Allen, 2003: 222). Nevertheless, such women were a minority and, as Allen points out, these attitudes could only be expressed in 'safe' spaces.

Duits and van Zoonen (2006) note that the overt depiction of female sexuality in the public eye, represented by sexualised women such as Madonna, is a marker of independence and liberation 'from repressive societal codes' (2006: 112). Feminist critics, however, suggest that such representations create only an illusion of liberation, since the autonomous sexual agents seen to be making their own choices, happen to coincide seamlessly with the interests of commercial individualism and capitalism (Duits and van Zoonen 2006). Yet, the public images of strong and sexual women are still useful for girls and young women as examples of female sexual autonomy and (at least perceived) liberation.

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[5] See also Gordon et al. (2005) on the 'good girl' as a key subject for New Labour projects in the UK.
[6] See also Christian-Smith (1993a, 1993b) for women constructing their desires through literacy.

Much research has found that young women talk about the pleasure of sexual desire, although alongside feelings of vulnerability (Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2005; Tolman, 2002). In researching girls' views, Houts found that 44 per cent of those surveyed reported wanting first sex rather than being ambivalent or not wanting it. This demonstrates that young women are affirming their 'wantedness' for sex and desire and are increasingly displaying their active agency as sexual actors (Houts, 2005). Women are attempting to express their autonomous sexuality, regardless of criticism, through more equal sexual relationships and the increasing acceptability of solo sex toys. Nevertheless, becoming sexual remains 'hedged around with cautions, warnings and prohibitions' (Jackson and Scott, 2004a: 235)[7].

Much of the research in this discussion is outdated, with some references dating back to 15 or 20 years ago. The context of these references should be recognised as reflecting the situation at that time but not necessarily accurately representing the current state of affairs. Nevertheless, women are still judged in terms of their sexual reputation: when five women were murdered in Ipswich in December 2006 they were predominantly referred to in media and news reports as prostitutes. It was often overlooked that they were also women, daughters, sisters, perhaps mothers or even simply workers or individuals[8]. As Lees comments, 'A woman's sexuality is central to the way she is judged and seen both in everyday life and by the courts and welfare and law enforcements agencies' (1997: 17). Plastic sexuality, with the focus on pleasure and freedom from pregnancy, cannot exist while becoming sexual is still so constrained by fear and prohibitions. People are certainly sexually freer now than 50 years ago but total sexual freedom remains elusive.

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[7] For more on young women and sexuality, particularly learning and teaching sexuality see Wood (1984), Epstein (2000), Green (2005), Fine (1988), Fine and McClelland (2006), Lees (1986; 1997), Epstein and Johnson (1998), and Measor (1989).

[8] For more on this see Goodyear and Cusick (2007).

2.4 LOVE

Giddens has also suggested that 'In the current era, ideals of romantic love tend to fragment under the pressure of female sexual emancipation and autonomy' (Giddens, 1992: 61). Giddens' definition of romantic love is, however, very narrow and he sees it as one-and-only, forever type love. This has led to confusion and debate around the term 'romantic love' and what this means for relationships, with some theorists upholding the difference between love and romantic love and others equating the two. Giddens distinguishes between romantic love and confluent love, which is active and contingent and jars with romantic, forever love. Confluent love can be experienced in pure relationships and it presumes equality in emotional give and take. Divorces and separations are, according to Giddens, the effect of the emergence of confluent love. Stevi Jackson (1995) also makes a distinction between love and romantic love: 'Romantic love hinges on the idea of "falling in love"' (1995: 53), and being in love can mean something different again. The romance of falling in love is often associated with obstacles to love and the insecurities these create. Therefore, as Jackson notes, once people feel secure in a relationship this type of romantic love wears off. Romantic love can be associated with a struggle for power between a man and a woman within a relationship: 'To be in love is to be powerless, at the mercy of the other, but it also holds out the promise of power, of enslaving the other in the bonds of love' (Stevi Jackson, 1995: 54). However, this power is illusionary and lasts only as long as romantic passion.

Romantic love is therefore different from the type of love experienced in long-term relationships, implying that romantic love is experienced more at the beginning of relationships or in short-term relationships (Stevi Jackson, 1995). Despite these distinctions, a large number of authors view love and romantic love as essentially the same: in general, all love as we know it is '"romantic" love in the sense that it is always necessarily mediated though cultural conditioning – through the stories that societies tell their members about the nature and meaning of desire and attachment' (Langford, 1999: 2). Therefore, for the remainder of this review, I will refer only to love and assume that this includes all types of love.

It has been suggested that love is an evolutionary adaptation: 'love and intimacy in adult sexual relationships are cognitively and emotionally prefigured in early childhood' (Fletcher, 2002: 168). Yet, an evolutionary psychological explanation ignores possible social influences on how people experience love. It is clear that the nature of love has evolved over the years and become increasingly sexualised (Seidman, 1991; Wouters, 2004; Stevi Jackson, 1993; Evans, 2004). The continually shifting and changing meaning of love indicates that it is most likely a cultural construction (Stevi Jackson, 1993, 1995; Stacey and Pearce, 1995; Langford, 1999). Love can only be observed when it is written or talked about and these narratives will have shaped how we understand and feel love (Stevi Jackson, 1995).

Despite Giddens' suggestion of a rise in temporary love, many sociologists still feel that love plays an important part in relationships. Boden (2003) cites Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, who comment that the more individualistic we are, the more we need a significant other with whom to share our hopes and fears. Love becomes *more* important: 'an antidote to modern living' (Boden, 2003: 17). Love can also play a number of other roles for young couples today. As Stevi Jackson (1993) notes, Weber views love as a way of seeking personal salvation, and this idea of love as a form of religion through which one can achieve transcendence is supported by Langford (1999). According to Langford, falling in love is now a form of transcendence and freedom: the 'experience constitutes a personal and social revolution; […] precipitated by some sense of emptiness or dissatisfaction with life as it is' (Langford, 1999: 24). However, like other religions in current society, love is losing its mystery and is turning into a rational system (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim in Langford, 1999). Love is no longer a mysterious force determining our lives but is instead an emotion that can be used in its narrative form to seduce individuals to buy into this religion. Although we may no longer *believe* in love, we still fall for it (Stacey and Pearce, 1995). While the demise of the religion of love from mythical to everyday could symbolise the transformation of love from romantic love to confluent, this is unlikely since love characterised as a religion allows for wider definitions than does romantic love as defined by

Giddens.

The changing nature of love is connected with the change in intimacy and relationships in general. Love will inevitably alter as young women experience freedom within intimate relationships and it is suggested that this freedom will cause uncertainty in the endurance of love. Hochschild (2003) has called this 'the modern Western paradox of love', which invites couples 'to aspire to a richly communicative, intimate, playful, sexually fulfilling love. But, at the same time, the social context itself warns against trusting such a love too much' (2003: 123). On the other hand, increased freedom for young people now does not necessarily mean that the endurance of love in relationships is more uncertain. While love may be experienced more often as young women have more relationships, this love can be as strongly felt as it ever has been. Love merely seems to be less certain because people now have more freedom to leave unsatisfactory relationships. Thus, there appear to be a number of forms of love in society today other than a narrowly defined romantic or confluent love.

2.5   MARRIAGE IN GREAT BRITAIN

Despite the uncertainty regarding the current meaning of love, it appears that marriage remains a popular relationship choice. In 2007 there were around 231,500 marriages in the UK, 194,500 fewer than in 1972 when the number of marriages peaked at 426,000 (Social Trends 40). This peak occurred when the babies born in the post-war boom came to marriageable age and individuals were marrying at a record young age. One factor affecting the drop in marriages may be the number of couples who now marry abroad. Since marriages conducted abroad do not show up on national marriage statistics, these would not be included in the calculated rates of marriage. It is estimated that, since 2002, between 20,000 and 40,000 marriages of UK citizens have not been recorded (Social Trends 39).

In 1965 the average age to marry was 25 for men and 23 for women. This dropped in 1971 to 24 for men and 22 for women and subsequently rose to 31.8

for men and 29.7 for women in 2006 (Social Trends 39, 2009). Despite the apparent decline in the number of marriages, this is still the most common form of partnership: the 'traditional family structure of a married mother and father with a child or children remains the most common family type' (Social Trends 39: 16). Attitudes towards marriage also remain fairly traditional. The British Social Attitudes Survey (2006 in Social Trends 39) found that 56 per cent of adults agree that marriage is still the best type of relationship, 29 per cent believe married couples make better parents than unmarried ones, and 64 per cent felt that marriage is more financially secure than cohabitation. In 1986, 11 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women under 60 cohabited. These rates rose in 2006 to 24 per cent of men and 25 per cent of women in the population cohabiting. In recent years, cohabiting families tend to be much younger than married families: 'In 2001, one-half of cohabiting families in the UK were headed by a person aged under 35, compared with one in ten of married couples' (Social Trends 38: 20).

Since the early 1970s the rate of first marriages has been steadily declining. This has led theorists, social critics and politicians alike to predict the imminent doom of a once thriving and necessary social tradition (see Shumway, 2003; Seidman, 1991). As cultural conservatives such as Patricia Morgan contend: 'marriage, as the corner-stone of a stable and moral society, the guarantor of couple commitment and of proper care of children, is in possibly terminal crisis' (Morgan 1995, in Weeks, 2007: 168). While fewer people are marrying, the statistics may exaggerate the severity of the situation because of the growing numbers of people marrying later (Lewis, 2001) and marrying abroad (Social Trends 39). Other explanations for the diminishing marriage rates include preferences for competing relationship types and an increase in cohabitation as a prelude or alternative to marriage (Lewis, 2001; Barlow et al., 2005). The decline may also have been sparked by the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, which in turn precipitated in a rise in divorce rates (Shumway, 2003). However, this explanation seems rather short-sighted since divorce rates have now begun to fall and marriage continues to retreat.

Seidman (1991) suggests that the decline in marriage rates is due to a change in

women's social status brought about by changing social forces: the rise of mass consumerism, the loosening of kin ties, the widespread use of contraceptives and the increase in non-marital sex (1991: 71). Seidman does concede, however, that this is a decline in marriage in its Victorian form rather than a significant decline in general and that marriage is currently in a state of transition. Smock (2004) considers that the changing roles of men and women within and outside of marriage is also seen as affecting marriage rates: 'declining fertility, increasing age at marriage, high levels of marital disruption, a growing separation between marriage and childbearing […] and the growth of nonmarital cohabitation', (2004: 967) she suggests, have all led to the retreat in marriage. Lewis (2001) agrees, and adds that being alone is no longer stigmatised, marriage is no longer needed for financial security and independence, and there is a growing preference for competing types of intimate relationships, such as cohabitation.

Most social commentators agree that the institution of marriage has changed and is continuing to alter. For Boden (2003), sociological discussions of intimate relationships: 'provide a useful context for the emergence of the wedding as a union of two individuals who *choose* to commit to each other' (2003: 16 emphasis in original). In agreement, Jamieson (2002a) notes that marriage has shifted from being a patriarchal institution to a mutual relationship 'between equals, resulting from a freely made choice, based on love' (2002a: 23). Langford (1999) suggests that marriage is no longer a binding contract fixing one's position in the social structure, it is rather 'an optional and soluble sign of commitment to someone with whom one has fallen in love' (1999: 3). Thus, marriage now has increased emphasis on equality, freedom of choice and love. This change may have come about because of increased opportunities for women and higher expectations of relationships and particularly marriage (Sutton et al., 2003). These heightened expectations result in individuals ending relationships prior to marriage due to a lack of satisfaction; delaying marriage to ensure it is the best possible relationship; or ending marriage because it does not meet expectations.

Castells (2004) notes that the incorporation of women into the paid labour market has increased their bargaining power and 'undermined the legitimacy of men's

domination as providers of the family' (2004: 193). This situation, particularly in most developed countries, has led to the delaying of permanent coupling and an increase in partnerships that do not include marriage (Castells, 2004). Thus, since women have increased access to the labour market and it is now acceptable to live alone or become a single parent, marriage is no longer needed for a woman's independence from her parents, financial security or to start a family[9]. This means that the previous moral imperative element of marriage has become a freely chosen act between a man and a woman (Weeks, 2007). For Weeks, the downfall or transformation of traditional marriage and family forms is welcome since, for him, marriage is a means of reproducing a properly heterosexual, gendered society which excludes homosexuality.

Sutton et al. (2003) found that the increased ease of ending a marriage and the emerging societal freedom was condemned by older participants in their study but greatly valued by younger ones. For all participants, marriage does not have the same status now as it did 30 or 40 years ago. Barlow et al. (2005) go further in suggesting that the institution of marriage has lost all cultural meaning:

> marriage is no longer socially expected for partnership and childbearing, and relations within marriage are conducted in quite different ways from before, but the institution itself survives–emptied of its former social content and now used for something quite different from before. (Barlow et al., 2005: 70)

According to Barlow et al., marriages and weddings today are more about display and performance than a rite of passage into adulthood, independence or controlling female sexuality. The traditional functions of the family are no longer seen as exclusively the domain of married couples and, for some, marriage is not a life-long commitment (Barlow et al., 2005). On the other hand, other research suggests that for many men and women marriage is still a very important institution and a mutual expression of commitment (Sutton et al., 2003). In addition, Lewis (2001) has found that not only marriage but other relationship

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[9]   Although financial independence is more of a reality for some women than for others.

types, such as cohabitation, can contain very high levels of commitment, with some cohabiting couples displaying as much, if not more, commitment than married couples.

Marriage has also enjoyed a revival because of the recent focus on civil partnerships. The emphasis on the importance of equal rights to marriage for gay and lesbian couples indicates that it is still a significant and pressing topic. Moreover, the fact that homosexuals are still not afforded the same marriage status as heterosexuals lends weight to the argument that traditional marriage is used to regulate sexuality among heterosexuals (Ingraham, 1999). Kitzinger and Wilkinson (2004) explain that not only does marriage offer legal benefits that long-distance relationships and cohabitation do not, it also 'accepts the couple as a central organizing feature of citizenship' (2004: 143). The prominence of same-sex marriage and the lengths some homosexual couples go to in order to become married must reflect the remaining importance placed on the union. If marriage was an outdated, useless institution there would surely be no need to protect it so strongly from homosexual couples or for some lesbian and gay couples to demand access to it.

2.6   LOVE, PRESSURES AND COMMITMENT: MOTIVATIONS TO MARRY

Thus marriage is still regarded as an important institution. Reasons given for deciding to marry can generally be divided into external reasons, such as parental pressure and showing off to one's friends, or internal motives such as love and commitment. Sutton et al. (2003) found that, for their participants, love was the main motivation for marrying, although many other reasons based less on emotion and more on practicality were also of importance. Sutton et al. found that while older participants had felt a pressure to marry, the younger generation did not feel the same pressure although they still thought it was the right thing to do (Sutton et al., 2003). The younger participants also stated that they felt their parents were pleased that they had married, even though no direct pressure was experienced. Lewis (2001) found, however, that parental pressure was a direct contributing factor for marrying at all ages. Older participants' motivations involved both

pragmatic and emotional reasons, as well as the idea that marriage was a 'natural progression' (2001: 143). The younger participants also referred to a natural progression but this was in the context of cohabitation rather than marriage. Sutton et al. (2003) found that participants used marriage to progress the relationship to the next stage: it is something to aspire to as the ideal life-long partnership. Lewis found that other motives to marry included companionship, fear of being alone, a make or break stage in the relationship or feeling that it was the right stage in the relationship to make an extra commitment.

There have been many discussions in the literature that attempt to provide definitions or identify the main components of commitment (including Adams and Jones, 1997; Lewis, 2001; and Smart, 2007)[10]. When asked directly, Sutton et al. (2003) found that their participants defined commitment as a glue that cements a relationship and takes work. For older married women, commitment also included dedication to certain marital roles (as carers) and it meant a desire to fulfil these roles and responsibilities (Sutton et al., 2003). Younger people, on the other hand, 'more frequently viewed commitment as a personal act, to be expressed to each other to remain together' (2003: 13). This more personal act of commitment is discussed by Weeks (2007), who asserts that commitments are negotiated now rather than obligatory. In relationships today, individual needs are balanced by commitment to a partner. In addition, commitment in relationships appears to be related to life course stages. If a person is at a transitory stage in their life, for example, they are about to leave for university, or if they are young and not ready to settle down, then they are more likely to enter into a relationship that they know will not last. Thus, the trend for individualism in relationships does not necessarily apply to all people in all cases. It is dependent on the individual's situation in life as well as other factors such as love and upbringing: people are more likely to stay committed to a relationship if love exists and if they have been brought up to believe that commitment and marriage are important.

Sutton et al. (2003) also found external constraints as a reason for marriage:

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[10]   These will be discussed in great depth in Chapter 6.

according to some of their participants, being married makes it harder to leave a relationship and thus the relationship feels and actually becomes more stable. The stability that marriage appears to offer implies that it is the best type of relationship in which to have children. Among their sample, Sutton et al. found that the most common reason for wanting to marry was the intention to have children. Many women expressed concern about having children outside of marriage and the absence of a stable family life was thought to greatly influence a child's upbringing. Similarly, a significant proportion of Jamieson et al. (2002) and Lewis' (2001) respondents thought marriage was better for children. Not only does marriage add security, it means all family members share one family name (Jamieson et al., 2002; Barlow et al., 2005). The respondents were unaware that marriage does not create a legal necessity to change surnames (Barlow et al., 2005).

The notion of a common family name was tied up with issues of 'tidying up' the relationship and, in particular, financial arrangements between the couple. The desire for the legal status afforded to married couples, in legal terms as well as the way married women are treated in society (as opposed to single or cohabiting women), was another motive to marry. Although there are now fewer stigmas associated with being single, there is still a common assumption that it is best to be with a partner and the most effective way to secure this is through marriage.

Marriage means a definite commitment, and the promise has been made in front of a host of witnesses. For Boden (2003), weddings and this public celebration of the day have become disassociated and separated from marriage and married life. Marriages are often no longer religious but are cultural performances (Boden, 2003). Yet, Boden also comments that modern weddings have the potential to become more individualised and the 'changing social and cultural significance of the wedding' includes, 'contemporary understandings of marriage, romantic love and gender' (Boden, 2003: 15). Therefore, it is possible that weddings can now create and display a unique interpretation of marriage through the ceremony. Lewin (2004) studied lesbian marriage ceremonies in the USA, finding that these were often used to represent something more than commitment to the other

person. Some couples used the wedding to claim a place in their communities, 'to situate their bonds in a discourse of nature, and to affirm their connections with either the mainstream culture or with subversions of that culture' (Lewin, 2004: 1001). While these uses of the wedding ceremony may be particular to lesbian couples or American ceremonies, they may have some relevance to couples in Britain looking to find recognition of their relationship in law and in their communities.

Barlow et al. (2005) more cynically describe this public display as altering from the original rite of passage into adulthood to a rite of passage into the ranks of the socially successful. This is achieved through bigger, better and more extravagant weddings as a means of 'keeping up with the Joneses'' (Barlow et al., 2005: 71). Moreover, marriage in the USA, the UK, and elsewhere is 'big money' and is used as a site of consumption and display, the main beneficiaries being the media, films, TV and many other industries and businesses involved in the wedding industry (see Ingraham, 1999).

For Barlow et al. (2005), marriage has become another consumer good available only to those who can afford it. The consequence of this is that marriage is available only to the privileged and it has become reduced to just the extravagant wedding. The show of the wedding becomes the marriage rather than the signifier or beginning of a life-long partnership. This commodification of marriage and the social pressure to have a 'proper' wedding, often costing tens of thousands of pounds, excludes many people who are denied this privilege: 'the wedding market is not addressed to or available to everyone' (Ingraham, 1999: 5). The commercialisation of private affairs is examined by Hochschild (2003) and Illouz (1997). Hochschild notices that weakening family relations create the need for 'a commercialized spirit of domestic life' (2003: 13) in the form of advice books and, in this case, bridal magazines offering advice for brides-to-be. The increasing commercialisation and profit-driven nature of the wedding industry may explain increasing cohabitation rates and delayed marriages as people are required to save up for their ideal wedding.

2.7   COHABITATION AND ALTERNATIVES TO MARRIAGE

Financial costs and the expense of the wedding are major factors determining a couple's decision to marry. Many couples simply cannot afford to marry, or rather to have a 'proper' wedding. Since the emphasis is now on the wedding rather than the marriage, the ceremony has inflated importance resulting in high costs. Some of the couples interviewed by Barlow et al. (2005), however, explained that they would rather use this money for alternative purposes. One couple in particular said that they would rather spend money on buying a house together since this seemed more symbolic of their commitment to one other.

The law and policy regarding cohabitation treat the arrangement as second rate in relation to marriage; cohabitants are afforded few rights regarding their relationship and their commitment is seen as impermanent. Cohabitation can replicate marriage but it does not contain the same constraints and restrictions as the legal arrangement. Not only can cohabitation offer a replication of marriage, it can also be used as a trial marriage situation, again involving no legal ties. This perhaps explains why cohabitation is popular and, for many, the default arrangement prior to any further commitment, particularly when marriage is prevented by obstacles barring the ideal wedding (Jamieson et al., 2002). Yet, cohabitation can also be used as an alternative to marriage when couples want a different option. Barlow et al. (2005) found that a small number of couples were disillusioned with marriage or wished to escape the patriarchal nature of the institution or avoid this form of state control. Lewis (2001) also found that among her sample of couples choosing to do things differently, many would not consider marriage or it was seen as unimportant or pointless after a lengthy period of cohabitation.

Cohabitation may be employed at different stages of a relationship; as a precursor to marriage, it has replaced what used to be unmarried engagement (Barlow et al., 2005). This encompasses many cohabitants since most of those who marry have previously cohabited (Barlow et al., 2005; Lewis, 2001). However, a significant minority of couples use cohabitation as a variation or alternative to marriage: for

example, those who have been together so long that marriage becomes an unnecessary expense. For these couples, marriage would make no difference to their relationship, it would just be an excuse for a party (Jamieson et al., 2002). While Barlow et al. (2005) found that there was no difference in class between cohabitants and married couples, Jamieson et al. notes that cohabiting couples are, objectively, more at risk of splitting than married couples 'because of lower incomes and more uncertain unemployment' (Jamieson et al., 2002: 372). Similarly, Lewis (2001) suggests that for younger, poorer cohabitants with children, the sense of drift that characterises the nature of their relationship means that commitment does not transform into the kind of 'private cohabitation commitment' (2001: 142) that was observed within other cohabiting relationships.

Cohabitation can represent a point on the continuum between dating and marriage (Barlow et al., 2005), where it can be utilised as a pre-marriage arrangement to test the strength of a relationship, or a variety of marriage where the couple plan to marry eventually but there are obstacles to overcome first. Cohabitation can be represented on a scale, with cohabitation involving little or no commitment at one end ('shotgun' cohabitation according to Barlow et al., 2005) and cohabitation as a variety or alternative to marriage at the other end involving very high levels of commitment. When viewed in these terms, it may be more appropriate to say that marriage has become a form of cohabitation (Barlow et al., 2005) rather than seeing cohabitation as a type of marriage. This also implies that talking of cohabitation as a single concept is impossible since the term covers such a wide variety of types of relationships involving endless forms and levels of commitment.

The change in commitment formation has led to the assumption that relationships are less committed today than in the past, and the growth in cohabitation is used as an example of this. Cohabitants themselves, however, do not feel this lack of commitment and Jamieson et al.'s (2002) conclusions do not support 'the pessimistic view that a growth in cohabitation reflects selfish unwillingness to make significant investments in family relationships' (2002: 370). Although over half of married couples saw marriage as a greater commitment in Jamieson et al.'s

study, marriage is not the point at which cohabitants commit to each other. They are already committed and marriage is seen as an added extra. Barlow et al.'s study (2005) went further than this, as they found that 'some cohabitants claimed that the lack of a formal, legal union demands greater commitment on their part, and more attention to their partner and the relationship' (2005: 58). For these participants, cohabitation was seen as a more honest relationship where couples stayed together for love rather than because of a legal contract.

Barlow et al. (2005) demonstrate that the statistical evidence suggesting less commitment among cohabitants compared with married couples does not compare like for like and is, therefore, not valid. Moreover, as Lewis (2001) demonstrates in her study, cohabitation can cover a diverse range of relationships, from those enacting a trial period to see how it goes, to those who have been together for 20 years and more. To compare all couples within this range would unfairly represent the couples who are committed and do use the arrangement as a variety or alternative to marriage. Barlow et al. (2005) elaborate: married couples are on average older than the cohabiting population, with only 20 per cent of the married population under 35 compared with 70 per cent of the cohabiting population. If cohabiting and married populations had the same age structures this would reduce the unevenness. Other factors that can affect the statistics are the presence of children, the type of cohabitation (for example, it being used as a precursor to marriage or variety of marriage), and the inclusion of married couples who cannot separate because of external pressures such as family or religion. Barlow et al. suggest that if the statistics compared like for like, 'there would probably be little difference between separation rates for cohabiting and married couples' (2005: 59). There is no way to compare the break-down rates, like for like, of marriage and cohabitation. Therefore, the relative stability and long-term durability of cohabitation is difficult to determine. Statistics are often used to demonstrate the weakening of marriage or the instability of cohabitation and we must remain aware of how statistics are presented and for what purpose they are utilised.

VanEvery (1995) talked to women choosing to live in a variety of unconventional households and found that women have many, varied relationships with men and

it was important to her sample that they could maintain their own space in order to resist being constructed as subordinate. Some women felt that maintaining their own space and remaining independent was more important to their identities than being married. Not only were women having different relationships in the form of cohabitation but many women were 'refusing to be a wife' and rejecting the social conventions associated with being a wife and mother. In addition to maintaining their own space, housework and childcare were shared out equally between the partners. VanEvery found that it was easier to maintain equality in a heterosexual relationship when a woman earned a higher income than her male partner. There is clearly still a delicate and fragile balance of power between couples and a continuous battle against traditional gender roles and societal norms.

Budgeon and Roseneil (2004) comment that more couples in relationships are living apart through choice or necessity and the individualisation process is causing intimacy to spread beyond conventional family formations[11]. For Budgeon and Roseneil, couple formations are becoming less central as intimacy and closeness become ever more significant and accessible for partners living apart or among friends. Beck-Gernsheim (2002) notes that there is greater fluidity and uncertainty in family relations and couples, and families can now choose whether or not to keep kinship ties after a divorce.

Thus, there is greater fluidity now in organising intimate relationships, and cohabitation as a precursor or trial marriage is common. Yet it is also evident that even when the arrangement is not necessarily thought to be permanent, high levels of commitment must exist between the couple. When used as a form of marriage, couples show very high levels of commitment and reject the assumption that cohabitation presupposes less commitment than marriage. Couples have different levels of commitment when entering a relationship, whether marriage or cohabitation, and the increased ease of leaving any form of relationship does not necessarily indicate a profound change in ideals (Jamieson et al., 2002). For a majority of people, long-term commitment is still the ideal relationship type,

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[11] For more on long-distance relationships see Holmes (2006) and Holmes (2004b).

whether this involves marriage or cohabitation (Stevi Jackson, 2009; Smock, 2004; Bawin-Legros, 2004). The fact that commitment does have a fluid nature and definitions of it vary, implies that relationships would not and will not continue to take the same shape over long periods of time. This does not mean that commitment is lacking, merely that it is fluid and changing.

3. RESEARCHING MARRIAGE AND INTIMACY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to discover young women's views on love, commitment, marriage and cohabitation, I conducted qualitative interviews with women between the ages of 18 and 30 and, as a supplementary method, I collected and analysed a set of bridal magazines. The interviews were designed to offer insight into the thoughts and beliefs of young women, while the analysis of bridal magazines addressed the wider discourses of weddings and marriage that circulate in society within the arena of consumption. In the interviews, I asked women their views on bridal magazines, and reflection on these responses gave some indication of how women locate themselves within the discourses presented in the magazines. Talking about the magazines also raised issues of agency and to what extent women read the texts with adherence to, or distance from, the content. While the magazine analysis is important, it is primarily being utilised as an adjunct to the interviews, since it is the stories of young women that address and answer my research questions most appropriately. Therefore, the following chapters focus primarily on the responses of my interviewees.

Before progressing further, I would like to clarify the difference between the terms 'wedding' and 'marriage'. While marriage and weddings may sometimes be used interchangeably to refer to the process of marrying, the two terms do, in reality, reflect very different practices with different sets of traditions and understandings. It is perfectly possible to marry without a wedding and even to have a wedding without marrying. Therefore, in this thesis, marriage refers to the legal binding of a couple: 'the institution whereby a man and a woman are joined in a special kind of social and legal dependence' (*Penguin Student Dictionary*, 2006: 541). Traditionally, the wedding is the ceremony through which a marriage takes place and a couple become married. In recent times, however, the wedding has come to mean more than the simple legal joining of two people. The wedding today invokes images of a white dress, bridesmaids, flowers and a cake, festivities, music, dancing and drinking. The term 'wedding' now has a whole industry

dedicated to celebrating its importance.

This chapter begins with an outline of my first set of research questions, followed by an in-depth discussion of the interview process; including sampling methods, processes and ethics of interviewing, and transcription and analysis procedures. This is followed by my second set of research questions, focussing on the analysis of bridal magazines and a discussion of textual analysis.

3.2   APPROACH

Many claims regarding marriage and relationships are based on statistics produced by various independent and government-funded bodies, such as the National Centre for Social Research or the Office for National Research. This thesis aims to look beyond the statistics, to delve into the real lives of young women and to find out the motivations behind the numbers. Accordingly, I believe that it is real lives and real stories that matter and, therefore, that there is no single truth in the social sciences. Reality is not single or regular: 'there are multiple realities and therefore multiple truths' (Taylor, 2001: 12).

Regarding my ontological stance, I would argue that the social world is not external to social actors; individuals fashion, and are therefore responsible, for the social world in which we live (Bryman, 2004). The institution of marriage and marriage practices do not have meaning outside of those which we, as individuals, place on them. Therefore, I believe that meaningful knowledge can be gained by talking to people and finding out what importance they place on such constructions, and why they do this. People's own reflections on the social world are valid resources for its study. Thus, marriage is continually constructed and reconstructed and given meaning by individual actors, and their views on marriage are the processes by which it is reinforced and maintained.

This is the reasoning behind choosing semi-structured interviews as my primary method of data collection, and selecting the discursive analysis of bridal magazine articles as a secondary focus. I also stayed up-to-date with trends in marriage and

marriage statistics. It is important, for this research, to remain aware of such statistics in order to include the most recent information in the discussion, and to question participants about relevant trends.

My research largely took an inductive approach, aiming to generate theories and findings from the semi-structured interviews and analysis of bridal magazines. This also included some deductive processes, however, in terms of evaluating the theories of Giddens and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim on the impact of the individualisation process. Throughout the analysis chapters, it will become clear that a deductive approach has also been used to evaluate certain theories in relation to commitment (Barlow et al., 2005), the pure relationship (Giddens, 1992) as well as other major theories in the area. Nevertheless, the main aim of this research is to generate independent theories and ideas that emerge from the data, in relation to young women's perceptions of marriage and commitment today.

3.3   INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG WOMEN

3.3.1   *Research Questions*

The main research question I considered was: to what extent do young women's perceptions of marriage and marital aspirations conform to the individualisation thesis (Beck-Gernsheim, 2005) and the notion of a democratic 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1991)? This entailed sub-questions on three themes as follows:

The meaning of marriage: How do young women perceive marriage? Do they have more traditional views of love and honour or more 'anti-sexist' perceptions of the bond? What are the perceived costs and benefits of marriage? Is cohabitation seen as an alternative or precursor to marriage or both? How does a rise in cohabitation affect women's views of marriage and modern morality? How are women's perceptions of marriage shaped by their experiences of heterosexual relationships? How might heterosexual norms be changing and with what consequences? How do ideas of love figure in the meaning of marriage?

Marital aspirations: Do women still aspire to be married? What do young women consider to be the ideal age at first marriage? To what extent is the ideal age at first marriage related to their marriage and/or career aspirations? What do they see as influencing their choices for marriage – e.g. love, social expectations, children, their careers?

Expectations of marriage: What do young women expect from marriage? Has greater equality in public life led them to expect an increase in equality in the home? How do they envisage marital intimacy, love and companionship? What are their attitudes to domestic labour and childcare? What impact is marriage expected to have on their identities? How permanent do they expect marriage to be?

These research questions required a level of depth and complexity in the accounts given by young women of their intimate lives. Therefore, in accordance with my ontological and epistemological stance, qualitative methods were most suitable. Qualitative interviewing, for example, may be 'more likely to generate a fairer and fuller representation of the interviewees' perspectives' (Mason, 2002: 66), when compared with other methods such as questionnaires or observation. Open-ended discussions are the most appropriate method of producing relevant data, since my research requires in-depth knowledge of people's situated and contextual accounts. This method elicits a roundness of understanding, which takes into account the context in which the talk was produced, and the temporal relevance of the talk: how it fits in with the life course of the individual. Interviews explore participants' understandings and interpretations of their social reality, the meaning underpinning their lives and the internal logic of their own particular social settings.

Young women's perceptions are essential for my data collection, although it must be remembered that, rather than reflections of social reality, these accounts are always reworked and reinterpreted in the participant's mind; even the process of talking will have involved the reworking of a narrative. Moreover, my own analysis and interpretation of the participants' stories is yet another reworking of

the information, with my own reflections and emphases becoming apparent. By making these assumptions and complexities clear, I can reflect on them and attempt to produce a more balanced account of the responses given, and my own interpretation of these. It is also important to contextualise the accounts given and situate the responses within the participants' lived experiences. Understanding the situation, circumstances and ways in which responses are produced, helped to ground them within wider social contexts.

3.3.2   Sampling and methods

Participants for pilot interviews were sampled from an undergraduate class in the Department of Social Policy at the University of York. While I initially received eight contact details, only two responded to follow-up emails and just one took part in a pilot interview. This participant passed on the contact details of her four house-mates and I went on to interview two of these young women. Another pilot participant was recruited from the group of Masters students studying in the Centre for Women's Studies at the time of my data collection. I originally set out to conduct pilot interviews in order to test my topic guide and related questions. The arrangement of this guide and the types of questions I asked in subsequent interviews, however, changed relatively little, so the distinction between pilot interviews and further interviews became unnecessary.

I sampled participants using non-probability sampling, meaning the participants were not chosen randomly from a sample frame and are, therefore, not representative of a wider population. These non-random methods were chosen primarily because random sampling is of little use for a small qualitative study such as this, and implementing random sampling would have been impractical, costly and time-consuming. The original intention was to utilise convenience and snowball sampling, although, in reality, a whole range of methods were employed. Convenience sampling makes use of the researcher's existing contacts, and when these contacts put the researcher in touch with further participants, this is known as snowballing. These methods are highly practical and efficient, and particularly useful for qualitative research that is not reliant upon representation and generalising findings (see Bryman, 2004).

Convenience and snowball sampling are, however, limited in a number of respects. While some effort was made to vary the sample through starting snowballing in different ways, interviewing people who are 'convenient' to the researcher will often result in analogous participants. These will be friends, colleagues or acquaintances of the interviewer and are therefore likely to share certain beliefs, views and characteristics. Moreover, if further participants are snowballed from the original convenience sample, the additional participants are also likely to share certain features. My sample contained a large proportion of university graduates, which is almost certainly a result of these sampling methods. In addition, if participants know each other, they may converse about the interview and questions asked and future interviewees may have prepared answers in advance and conditioned their responses. One major drawback of these methods is that decisions about who to include and exclude in the interviews is taken out of the researcher's hands and placed into the hands of the participants. When asking interviewees for further respondents, they decided who I could interview and not interview and who they thought would be most appropriate (see Mason, 2002). I did not have any part in this decision and often I was put in touch with people who were interested in marriage and was not put in touch with those who were not. This might have had the result of creating a sample of women who are disproportionately interested in, or pro-, marriage.

In order to begin sampling, personal contacts provided me with details of women aged between 18 and 30 happy to take part in interviews. In addition, participants throughout the process put me in touch with their friends and family. My own friends who were not able to take part (due to time and location constraints) were able to put me in touch with three women who were able to participate. One of these participants mentioned my research to her sister who also decided to take part. The Masters student mentioned earlier passed my details on to her friend, whom I interviewed at a later date, and a member of staff recruited from the university was also a source of snowballed participants.

I displayed leaflets advertising for participants in a number of establishments in

York city centre, such as the City Screen cinema, York central library and H&M clothes shop. This method elicited three participants, one of whom brought along her sister who was also willing to take part. I advertised for participants around The University of York campus, which attracted one respondent who later put me in touch with three further candidates. In addition, I was able to enlist four women from a local amateur orchestra I attend on a weekly basis. I displayed a leaflet on the notice board in the hall where we practice, and I made an announcement before a rehearsal that I required participants for a study about marriage and relationships.

Two further participants were recruited via slightly different methods. One was an acquaintance from school whom I contacted via the internet-based social networking group Facebook. The final participant was my hairdresser in York who expressed an interest in the research while cutting my hair. She agreed to an interview, which took place two days before she emigrated to Australia. The most successful method of recruitment was snowballing from personal contacts and previous participants. This elicited eleven further interviewees. The leaflets placed around York city centre and the university together produced four participants, as did recruiting from my local orchestra. A full profile of respondents, including their method of recruitment, can be seen in Table 1, below.

My original intention was to obtain a sample equally balanced between those who had gone to university and those who had not. There is likely to be a difference in the way marriage and relationships are viewed by those who have attended university and those who have not. University is designed for, and used by, young people as a way to move out from the family home, to explore other parts of the country, and to broaden horizons. The nature of this environment does not lend itself to ideas of settling down, and most students delay thoughts of marriage and children until after completing their degree. Therefore, for those who have not attended university, thoughts about marriage may be more imminent and realistic, while for students or graduates, it is something they may consider later in life. This is an assumption and a generalisation, however, to which there will undoubtedly be exceptions.

Table 1 Participant Profiles

Name	Age	Marital status	Level of Education	Method of recruitment
Zoe	19	Single	University student	Snowballed (from Amy)
Catriona	19	Relationship	University student	Snowballed (from Amy)
Amy	20	Single	University student	Social Policy class
Susan	20	Engaged	School	Snowballed (from contact)
Abigail	21	Engaged	School	Snowballed (from contact)
Helen	21	Relationship	School	Hairdresser
Lauren	22	Relationship	University graduate	Masters student
Fiona	23	Married	University graduate	Facebook
Eva	23	Single	University graduate	Snowballed (from Lauren)
Claire	24	Engaged	University graduate	Orchestra
Grace	24	Cohabiting	University graduate	Orchestra
Rebecca	24	Relationship	School	Leaflet in library
Alice	25	Single	School	Snowballed (from Penny)
Elizabeth	25	Engaged	University graduate	Leaflet (unknown)
Eleanor	26	Cohabiting	University graduate	Orchestra
Adele	27	Single	School	Leaflet in town
Shirley	27	Relationship	University graduate	Orchestra
Penny	27	Engaged	School	Snowballed (from contact)
Ruth	27	Relationship	University graduate	Snowballed (from Mandy)
Hermione	29	Married	School	Snowballed (from Adele)
Michelle	29	Cohabiting	PhD graduate	Snowballed (from Mandy)
Mandy	30	Married	University graduate	Leaflet in University
Lucy	30	Relationship	University graduate	Snowballed (from Mandy)

While I primarily intended to attain a balanced, diverse sample of heterosexual young women with different backgrounds, schooling, ethnicities, ages and relationship statuses, this was difficult to achieve. The greatest difficulty was in accessing women from non-university backgrounds. I originally attempted to access such women via the leaflet placing and contacts outside of university, but these yielded few results. In total, I interviewed eight women who had not attended university and 15 who had. Other factors that have had an impact on the diversity and character of my sample include age, location, profession, relationship status, upbringing, religion, and life stage.

The age range of 18 to 30 was selected because the research is concerned with young women's perceptions of marriage and relationships and women between

these ages may be considered as one generation. It could be argued that women over the age of 30 are from another generation, involving perhaps different values and morals, emerging from the different time periods in which they grew up. Therefore, in order to obtain a sample who would identify with similar values and world views, these age limits were selected. The ages of my actual participants ranged from 19 to 30 and the mean age was 25.

Participants originated from all over the country, although a majority lived in York at the time of the interview (17 participants). Of this group, only two participants were born and brought up in York, the others having moved to the area for university or career changes. One interviewee had lived in Leeds her whole life and the remaining participants were from Hampshire and had all lived in the area since birth. Location has an influence on people's views and where the participants were brought up and what type of schools they attended will inevitably impact on their opinions (particularly for younger participants who not long ago left compulsory education).

The recruitment methods used may have limited participant diversity. Much of my data collection took place in York, explaining why a majority of participants were located here at the time of interviewing. Despite residents not necessarily being born and brought up in York, the city has a large middle class population and seems to attract people from similar backgrounds. By attempting to sample equal numbers of young women from university and non-university backgrounds, I was hoping to acquire equal numbers of women from working and middle class upbringings. This, however, relies upon the assumption that a majority of university students are middle class and non-university students are working class which, as became evident during the interviews, was sometimes not the case. Although I did not ask participants directly what they perceived their class background to be, I made assumptions from their stories of upbringing and future aspirations, to place them in roughly designated class groupings. A majority of university students or graduates I interpreted as middle class because their parents had attended university or were in middle class professions. In addition, a majority of the interviewees who had not attended university were designated

working class because of the professions they had undertaken and backgrounds they were from. There were, however, very clear exceptions to these patterns. Of the young women who did not go to university, one was clearly from a middle class background, and one other had a very wealthy and privileged upbringing. In addition, from the group of women who had attended university there were a few who were the first in their families to go on to higher education and would perhaps view themselves as coming from a working class background. When categorised into rough class groupings based on parents' occupation, upbringing, education and background, I would estimate that 16 participants were middle class and seven were working class.

The participants from university backgrounds are likely to share certain characteristics and similar views, which are engendered in such an environment. In addition, a number of interviewees were recruited through snowballing and thus are likely to share characteristics with participants already recruited. A few young women responded to my leaflets asking for participants, and it is probable that the kind of person responding to this form of advertising is going to be interested in research and/or talking about relationships and marriage. This recruitment method, therefore, limits the potential uptake to those who are interested in helping a PhD student with her research, or enjoy talking about their views on this topic.

My participants were all brought up in Britain and therefore share some of the same cultural beliefs and attitudes. Only one participant had mixed-race parents and the remaining were from all-white families. It also became apparent, when I asked about religion, that most people who were religious were Christian of various denominations, though one was a Buddhist. Therefore, considering the multicultural diversity of the society in which we now live, my sample was ethnically limited. This is largely due to the recruitment process taking place in York, an almost exclusively white British population, and the nature of snowball sampling, which will often produce people from similar ethnicities to one other.

In addition, as I am specifically interested in heterosexual women's views, I am

primarily looking at heterosexual issues of straight marriage, partnerships and relationships as well as heterosexual love and commitment. Therefore, of the 23 interviewees 22 identified as heterosexual. One participant prior to the interview informed me that she was bisexual although this did not become apparent during the interview, and while talking about her previous relationships she refers only to men. While deliberately confined in terms of the young women's sexuality, my data is also limited in terms of location, education, class and ethnicity. Due to these limitations and the nature of the sampling, the resulting narratives and stories of these women cannot be generalised to wider populations of young women or across classes and ethnicities.

There were, however, also significant strengths to this sample. Having set out to sample a group of women in the age range 18-30, I achieved a very varied mixture of ages. The childhood experiences and upbringing of participants were very influential and views differed considerably between those who had been brought up with married or remarried parents and those whose parents had divorced and not remarried. Siblings seem to have an impact as well, and women whose siblings had progressed through life in the 'right order' (i.e. had a relationship, then married, then had children), felt the pressure to follow in their footsteps. Additionally, those who held strong religious views were more likely to express traditional opinions regarding marriage, weddings and gender roles than those who identified as spiritually curious or non-religious.

The relationship status of the participants also significantly altered the way they would talk about relationships, marriage, love and weddings. Those who were engaged or in long-term relationships talked of the imminence and romance of the wedding and marriage process whereas those who were single or in more short-term relationships idealised marriage and weddings but talked about them with distance in relation to themselves.

The interviewee's stage in life also had an impact on how she talked about marriage, commitment and weddings. For some, a career was more important than settling down and this had to be worked at and established before finding a

partner became a priority. Others felt too young to be considering marriage and intended to put off thoughts of this until later in life. Still others felt that they had come to that stage in life where marriage was the next step, the logical progression and felt ready to make a commitment. While the methods used to sample this complex group of young women mean that results cannot be generalised to any wider societal group, the conclusions obtained can nevertheless highlight issues for the women concerned, and demonstrate how meanings, views and opinions are changing and emerging for the current generation of young people.

3.3.3   *The process, problems and ethics of interviewing*

Interviews were conducted over a period of seven months, beginning in March 2008, and my last interview took place in September of the same year. Interviews were semi-structured and took the form of guided conversations. I used a set of predetermined topics and loosely defined questions to direct the talk to important areas. Mason (2002) advises against having a strictly defined set of questions that could restrict the flow of conversation. Alternatively, she suggests designing a plan for the interviews, outlining how it would ideally progress. Kvale (1996) also suggests that, for semi-structured interviews, a topic guide should contain an outline of subjects to cover and suggested questions. My interview guide reflected this advice and on one side of A4 paper I sketched the main topics to cover and vital questions to ask. The goal of this type of interview is to 'generate depth of understanding, rather than breadth' (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 30). I required in-depth responses to my questions and topics rather than a number of broad answers in reply to many questions. Once this depth and detail is achieved, it reveals the specific perspective of the participant and their own understanding of the social world (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

All interviewers have different styles of interviewing and over the course of the discussions I found that my own style was to ensure the participant felt at ease before and during the interview by making small talk at the beginning and jokes throughout. This also involved building rapport with the participants in order to encourage them to feel comfortable talking to me, although this worked better

with some participants than with others, and certainly improved with each interview. I took a back seat as the interview progressed, to encourage the interviewee to talk and produce her own narratives and, while this worked for some, others needed further prompting and encouragement. I also assured the participants that there were no right or wrong answers to my questions in the hope that they did not feel compelled to say what was expected of them or what they thought would please me. During the interviews I attempted to minimise my own involvement, keeping my opinions to myself so as not to influence their answers and asking no confrontational and few challenging questions. I did not ask the participants to disclose any personal or sensitive thoughts or emotions unless they felt comfortable doing so and I encouraged them to ask me questions or raise topics that they felt were important to them at the end of the interview.

Despite assurances that I was solely interested in the women's own views and thoughts, it is likely that some interviewees presented demand characteristics when answering questions (see e.g. Wooffitt, 2007). Demand characteristics occur when participants give answers they think, unconsciously or otherwise, the researcher wants, or is expecting. Interviewees may, therefore, have come to their own conclusions about my expectations and given responses according to what they thought I wanted to hear. Moreover, Wooffitt (2007) explains the impact of slight differences in the way responses are received by the researcher. Respondents who receive an affirmative response to their answer, such as 'okay', accept this and move on, whereas respondents who receive a less affirmative response, such as 'mm hmm', feel the need to expand on their answers and provide further details. Therefore, not only may participants have altered their responses to fit what they perceived my purposes to be, the way that I responded to their talk may also have influenced the answers given. Therefore, my own position in the interviews should be carefully considered, while also acknowledging that it is impossible not to affect the participant in some way during our interaction.

By remaining aware of my own position within the interview process, I understand that my own views and opinions may affect the questions that I ask

and how I ask them, as well as how I listen to and interpret participants' responses. As a feminist I was aware that I may have interrogated respondents further when they gave answers that jarred with my beliefs, such as the desire to be a traditional housewife or taking their husband's surname without question. As such, I tried to continually reflect on how my personal experiences and opinions were affecting the way I listened to answers and I tried to remain impartial and to see the topic from all viewpoints. In reviewing the interviews during the transcription process I was able to evaluate my own involvement and interview style and to modify my behaviour for future interviews, if necessary.

I found it hard to listen to those women who did not question marriage, who still aspired to the traditional, patriarchal family. It was difficult not to openly disagree with what they were saying (since I had so recently undergone my own personal revolution) and highlight the other sides to the arguments. I also found it challenging listening to stories of 'perfect' relationships; when women recounted romantic incidents I sometimes found these too saccharine to endure, yet I felt I should respond in a positive way in order to encourage their disclosures. In these instances, I found it difficult to listen largely because I reject the romantic, sweet notions they were advocating, yet partly because I envied their stable, loving, romantic relationships.

I was aware during the interviews of my own status as a researcher and having more information about the topic than the participants. As a result, I had more power than the participants, although by being aware of these power relations, I was able to recognise when and where these might influence the responses. I also endeavoured to ensure my own personal safety while conducting the research, by making sure that all research environments were safe, and two separate people knew where I was at all times.

The length of the interviews varied from 38 minutes as my shortest, to 1 hour and 35 minutes as the longest. The longer interviews were usually those where the participant felt most comfortable (in their homes, knew what they were talking about and so on) and was not pressed for time. Participants who were being

interviewed in their lunch break, were about to go out, or had someone waiting for them were much more likely to give shorter interviews. In these cases, both the participant and I were aware of minimising the length of the interview and so questions were answered more concisely than they may otherwise have been, and I did not prolong the interview with additional questions.

The participants who gave shorter interviews often seemed less comfortable in the situation or environment, being away from home or somewhere they knew, and being questioned by someone they did not know. In order to minimise this discomfort, I offered the respondents a drink and chatted to them before the interview commenced, trying to make them feel comfortable and safe in their surroundings. Where possible, I ensured that the location was private, although issues of lack of privacy arose nonetheless. It also became apparent during interviewing that some participants were simply shyer than others and not used to or comfortable talking about their personal intimate relationships. In these situations I tried to be as encouraging and open as possible, making agreeing noises and comments.

The interview schedule was also designed to position the easy-to-answer questions at the beginning, to ensure the participant was as comfortable as possible before answering the more challenging questions towards the end. While this worked to some extent, and often participants opened up towards the latter part of interviews, some were still shy and reluctant to talk for any length of time. There was also one situation in which I felt uncomfortable as an interviewer, which led to a very short interview. I interviewed this participant in her home, where a friend of mine was also living at the time. While the interview took place, my friend was in the next room and a couple of times he walked through the interview. Although this did not seem to concern the interviewee, it made me feel very uncomfortable and conscious of what questions I asked at particular times. This also meant I became flustered during the interview and, although all questions were covered, I perhaps did not ask enough follow up questions to gain more detailed information. As I worked my way through successive interviews, each of these problems became less significant as I grew more adept at drawing

out responses from participants, putting them at ease, securing private locations and feeling comfortable in asking for more detailed responses.

In addition, as the interviews progressed I found that the way I asked the questions, the order in which I asked them, and what I actually asked, changed with experience. My interviewing style became clearer and more concise as my technique developed and I found it increasingly easy to build rapport. After certain interviews, it became clear that my interview schedule required reshuffling, as certain questions were naturally leading on from others and were being covered before the topic arose in the schedule. For example, questions of commitment needed to be asked earlier in the interview as this emerged as a central theme in the women's talk. Therefore, the ordering of questions changed and developed as the interviews progressed and it became clear that the schedule should perform as a guide for conversation, rather than an exact order of talk.

Some interviewees waited for each question and answered them in order, and others talked more freely and covered a range of subjects in answer to one question. While unsettled by this at first, I later came to see it as allowing participants to have more control and to determine what they felt to be the important issues (while ensuring the main points were covered). This emphasis on the participants' own take on the subject resulted in the questions I asked altering from the beginning to the end of the process. Initially, I did not deviate from prompts on the topic guide, but as the interviews continued, participants would bring in their own thoughts and ideas and these would be included in later interviews.

In order to investigate how people tell stories, I took field notes after each interview describing how the interviewees talked. This formed part of the process of reflecting on my interviews and data, which ensures that I do not impose my own interpretations on the findings inappropriately or without justification (Mason, 2002). This method guarantees that any decision I come to about the data is taken in the context of how it was said and meant by the interviewee. In addition, as Kvale (1996) points out, 'The lived interview situation, with the

interviewee's voice and facial and bodily expressions accompanying the statements, provides a richer access to the subjects' meanings than the transcribed texts will later' ([sic]1996: 129).

These important details provide valuable context for future analysis and, together with the recorded interview, they illustrate a full picture of the interview after the event (Wengraf, 2001). I tried to ensure that I took field notes as soon as possible after the interview since, as Wengraf comments, 'You have only one opportunity to get the maximum benefit and the data from your brain: immediately after the interview before you do, or think about, anything else' (2001: 143). On a number of occasions, however, I was only able to sit down and write after driving home from the interview or after another interview had already taken place. As well as general impressions from the interviews, body language and non-verbal signals from participants, the notes also contained what went well in the interview and what did not. This was helpful in informing me how I should conduct future interviews, and I recorded my own thoughts and emotions in order to remain aware of my position within the interview. This latter practice demonstrated how I reacted differently to different people and, overall, the exercise enabled a systematic review of the topic guide throughout. By commenting on the questions that were successful and those that were not, as well as added or amended questions during the interviews, my topic guide became refined and more efficient. In addition, questions were added throughout the interviews as my research developed and I inserted questions about marriage trends and bridal magazines as these themes became central to my research.

While conducting the interviews, I explained that any opinions expressed by me were to aid discussion, rather than representing my own views and, in order to keep psychological harm to a minimum, I informed them that if they felt uncomfortable at any time throughout the interview, to let me know and we would move the discussion on. This happened in just one interview when I asked the participant about her previous relationships and she gestured to me to move on, as her current partner was waiting in the adjoining room.

This raises the issue of privacy during the interview process. Throughout interviewing, it became apparent that the privacy of the location was vital to respondents feeling relaxed and free to talk. A majority of interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes, which I initially thought to be an ideal location, yet, often the partner of the participant was at home in the next room, just about to leave, or returned home during the interview, which would cut the interview short or prevent the participant from talking freely. In these cases, participants would become obviously uncomfortable, fidgeting or looking around, or would lower their voice if someone else was in the house or could be heard walking past. A couple of interviews took place in more public locations and the setting did not seem to concern these participants greatly. Indeed, public locations can, in some cases, provide more privacy than private ones. Thus, in negotiating a comfortable, quiet setting for the interview, the importance of privacy was not fully understood by me or the participant at the outset. This issue was also not clear to partners, siblings and friends who, on a number of occasions, interrupted the interview, walked through repeatedly, or were waiting in an adjoining room.

Locations of other interviews included my own home, an office in my department at the University of York, the participant's office, or a bar or local pub. The choice was left to the participant as to where they would feel most comfortable while being interviewed, and where was most convenient for them. Location, as well as privacy, was an important factor in ensuring the participant felt at ease. In addition, the two interviews that took place in a public space, while suitable in terms of privacy and putting the participant at ease, were far more difficult to transcribe due to the high level of background noise. Therefore, the most successful interviews were those conducted in a private, quiet, undisturbed setting, where the participant was comfortable and able to talk freely.

I asked the participants' permission to record the interviews and all agreed to this. In addition, all signed consent forms (see Appendix A) allowing their interviews and transcripts to be used in my research and their identities to be anonymous. Nevertheless, I have a duty to the participants to represent their views and responses as accurately and fairly as possible.

3.3.4   Transcription and analysis

I transcribed the interviews with the aid of a home designed computer program that automatically plays the recording for a specified number of seconds, pauses while I type, and then continues for a further number of seconds. The number of seconds the program plays for, and then pauses, can be input manually. I initially transcribed after each interview while it was still fresh in my mind but, as the interviews became more frequent, this was no longer possible. The transcription process lasted from March 2008, when my first interview took place, until December of the same year. As the number of interviews waiting to be transcribed piled up, my transcription style changed from being very detailed and recording every interruption and every bit of laughter according to length, to being less detailed but more efficient: stutters and repetitions in my own speech were not recorded.

Since my aim was to investigate what marriage currently means to young women, I used comparative arguments in my analysis. This involved comparing differing views in the interviews, and, in the exploration of this difference, insight into social attitudes emerged. This method is particularly relevant for qualitative research because, as Mason explains, 'its sensitivity to context maximizes the chances of developing fully meaningful points of comparison' (2002: 175). These sets of comparisons took place in the context of certain themes and I implemented a thematic analysis to code recurrent topics emerging from the discussions. I coded the texts manually by reading them thoroughly and highlighting important topics from the data. As themes emerged, I created new documents with the themes as headings and selected relevant quotes from transcripts to place under these headings. The main quotes were ordered in a Microsoft Word document so they could be easily referred to and because, as Stanley and Temple (1995) comment, this software provides 'excellent facilities' (1995: 186) for the management tasks involved in data analysis.

The themes that emerged from the data were collated and analysed in relation to arguments and debates discussed in the literature review, as well as my own aims

and research questions. The resulting ideas represent the thoughts and beliefs of this particular group of young people, as related through personal narratives and with regard to current debates. While it was my initial intention to use case studies, inspired by Tolman's (2002) *Dilemmas of Desire* and Plummer's (1995) assertion that human life cannot be reduced to text, this was abandoned due to word constraints. Nevertheless, I remained conscious of Plummer's concern with capturing the voices of people who try to relate their intimate life through their stories about it. These stories are not just texts or discourses, they must be seen to be '*socially produced in social contexts by embodied concrete people experiencing the thoughts and feelings of everyday life*' (Plummer, 1995: 16 emphasis in original). The contexts and experiences in which stories are produced cannot be ignored, since they must influence what is being told.

3.4   RESEARCHING BRIDAL MAGAZINES

Interviews provided an in-depth, individualised view of prevailing notions of relationships, marriage and weddings. In order to gain insight into wider discourses and norms, I also examined and analysed bridal magazines. Such magazines offer women subject positions in a broader cultural context. They display a particular stance on weddings and marriage and the importance of this is twofold: first the extent to which the magazines construct images of weddings and marriage; and second the extent to which young women actually buy into, or reject, these constructions of weddings and marriage.

3.4.1   Research Questions
My second main research question, therefore, is: to what extent do bridal magazines reinforce dominant discourses relating to marriage, weddings and relationships? This entails three subsets of questions:

What kind of normatively acceptable behaviour is being constructed? To what extent are traditional roles within marriage represented or contested? How is marriage presented? In what ways do bridal magazines uphold and maintain dominant discourses associated with weddings? How far does the content of

bridal magazines contribute to the commercialization of weddings and emotion?

<u>What categories of persons are referred to or invoked?</u> How are traditional images of the bride and groom and other wedding or relationship categories maintained through such magazines?

<u>What moral or political concerns are addressed through these discourses?</u> What do bridal magazines emphasise as being important about relationships and marriage? To what extent are traditional ideas regarding gender evident in these magazines? Do any magazines contain sites of resistance to traditional gender ideas or traditional processes of the wedding and marriage?

3.4.2 *Studying Bridal Magazines: An Introduction*

These magazines are common and are becoming ever more popular for women planning a wedding. Since such magazines are read by women thinking about or participating in a wedding, they should display normative practices, attitudes, and behaviours associated with weddings and how these behaviours are displayed and reinforced. Women are the focus and the consumers and any discourses revealed in the magazines should therefore be relevant mainly for women. The magazines also position their female readers in wider social and cultural contexts so female readers have a sense of belonging (or exclusion) when reading the magazines.

In analysing bridal magazines, I aimed to 'identify patterns of language and related practices and to show how these constitute aspects of society and the people within it' (Taylor, 2001: 9). From studying the language and discourses used in bridal magazines, I hoped to discover how these (re)produced current trends in weddings, how they constructed marriage and to what extent they represented acceptable behaviours for brides and grooms.

The articles chosen for analysis represent a small sample of such resources and cannot reflect accurately all articles in bridal magazines since the texts were chosen for their specific content and in relation to the prevalence of similar texts. The selection of documents is not made to represent the whole population of such

documents but rather a particular category within it. These texts were chosen for discourse analysis because they were typical rather than exceptional.

3.4.3 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis focuses on how texts are organised to reproduce beliefs and value systems within a specific context (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). This type of analysis focuses on *how* norms and values are organised and appropriated, and this complements my interviews, which are designed to discover *what* individuals think about marriage, weddings, and relationships. These two methods combine to uncover wider discourses of love and weddings, and how my participants find ways to locate themselves within these discourses or are resistant to them. Certain types of discourse analysis are compatible with feminist projects, since this method can be used to analyse how social and political inequalities are manifested in, and reproduced through, discourse. Therefore, this type of analysis can apply meaning to all aspects of social life and power relations, and inequalities can be identified in otherwise ignored or invisible areas of everyday life.

Discourse analysis arose out of dissatisfaction with the way that social scientists reported and examined data gathered from participants. The main areas of discontent included the tendency of analysts to subsume the pronouncements made by participants under more general concepts, and the way researchers made generalised statements about particular actors or actions to whole classes of actors or actions. Certain sociologists were also unhappy about researchers using only particular segments of discourse that were regarded as 'accurately representing important social processes' (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 6), while ignoring other parts of participants' discourse that would be regarded as inaccurate or not supporting their argument (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). Discourse is a medium through which objects and subjects are created, and texts should be approached in their own right (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Objects created through discourse acquire a certain status through the use of particular vocabularies, words and phrases. These particular vocabularies produce dominant discourses that are used to represent expectations and constraints within that discourse. These discourses then privilege the way we see and act in the world, as we are subject to the

constraints of these expectations.

Discourses found in the magazines can help to explain how certain behaviours have come to be viewed as normal or 'natural' and why this has led to moral expectations associated with marriage. Parker (1994 in Wooffitt, 2005) argues that discourses can 'constitute and reaffirm a set of normative expectations about "appropriate" or "natural" ways of categorising human beings, the relationship between these categories of people, and moral expectations about behaviour attendant upon those categorisations and relationships' (Wooffitt, 2005: 149). Dominant discourses do not necessarily limit our thoughts to within set parameters; rather they just make it difficult to act outside of moral expectations, to behave inappropriately, to 'think outside of the box'. My analysis should uncover what these moral expectations and appropriate behaviours consist of as well as the attendant regimes of truth constructed around marriage and weddings (see Foucault 1972; 1980 and Hall, 2001). I also considered potential spaces for resistance in the magazines and agency in the texts.

As discourse analysis is culturally and temporally specific, the discourses found in the UK bridal magazines can only provide meaning for society in the UK in 2008. Another difficulty is the wide range of texts available for analysis, given that any material can be analysed and made relevant and meaningful. When anything in social life can be made significant the question arises of how discourses should be chosen for analysis and why one discourse is selected over another. In addition, two researchers looking at the same data may interpret it differently and identify disparate or even opposing dominant discourses. This flexibility in determining what is text and what is meaning can be too varied and undermines the solidity of any interpretation. While there is a danger of misinterpreting selected texts, there is also a danger of using texts to support one's own agenda and inadvertently imposing patterns on the data, rather than approaching the text objectively.

In order to minimise these problems and ensure the accuracy of my interpretation, I attempted to approach the texts without presupposing what they contained and without prior assumptions as to what discourses they may reveal. I endeavoured

to find dominant discourses by identifying those that were frequently prevalent across a number of texts. Additionally, I attempted not to over analyse texts or look for hidden meanings within the document, in order to reduce the risk of finding meanings and discourses that were marginal or not there at all. I considered the material at face value and only analysed what was obvious and observable.

3.4.4   Choosing the Magazines

The types of magazines on the market varied in price and content. The price of the magazine may well determine the audience, since the cheaper magazines attract those on a tighter budget and the more expensive ones appeal to those who need not consider their budget. The prices ranged from £2.50 to £4.99 and, in order to cover the full spectrum of potential readers, magazines of all prices were bought and read. It was kept in mind that the readership of bridal magazines is very limited since their main appeal is to women marrying or those close to someone getting married. In addition, not all women who are planning to marry look at bridal magazines, particularly those who wish to have an unconventional wedding. Therefore, the likely audience and market using the magazines would consist of soon-to-be-brides, women involved in weddings, including mothers of the bride, those who mostly follow conventional wedding patterns, and those who can afford to buy such a magazine. Any results from this analysis can only apply to these texts in these magazines and to this small readership.

3.4.5   Initial content analysis

The magazines were bought during one week from the same shop in York city centre. I collected all the magazines from the same section in the shop and ensured that I had one of every bridal or wedding magazine present. There are 12 magazines in total, eight originate in the UK and four are imported from the US. There are eight standard wedding magazines, as well as one alternative, one celebrity, one local and one Asian oriented magazine. While the standard magazines are all very similar and contain much of the same content, including real-life weddings, advertisements, photos of dresses and a honeymoon section at the back, the other four magazines are slightly different. *Black Meringue* calls

itself 'The UK's only alternative wedding magazine' and includes features on body painting as an alternative to traditional wedding outfits and 'Pink weddings' (gay weddings: something not featured in any other magazine in my sample). *Now Celebrity Weddings* is an offshoot from the gossip magazine *Now* and mostly features celebrity weddings, interviews with 'stars' and fashion as well as the standard honeymoon section at the back. *Inspired Weddings* is a locally published magazine ('The North's leading bridal magazine') and most of the content contains promotions for local services, venues or events. Finally, *Asiana Wedding* is a magazine designed for the Asian bride 'who wants more'. This magazine is dominated by advertisements and full page photos of women and men in traditional South Asian attire. There are some elements however, that appear in all the magazines. These include: advertisements, full page photos, articles, real-life weddings and directories of shops or suppliers.

3.4.6   *Methods for analysis*

In order to analyse the images I used Goffman's (1979) gendered analysis of advertisements as a guide and looked for regular patterns within images to identify how women and brides were represented. I also drew on Patterson's (2005) article on 'fat brides' in bridal magazines. Patterson believes there is an 'even though' logic of compromise promoted by the magazines, represented by the idea that '"even though you are a plus-size woman, you can still be a beautiful bride"' (2005: 245).

For Hermes, 'texts acquire meaning only in the interaction between readers and texts and [...] analysis of the text on its own is never enough to reconstruct these meanings' (Hermes, 1995: 10). The potential discourses that exist in the texts are only relevant when viewed in conjunction with the reader's view on or interpretation of that text and within the context of their ordinary lifestyle: on its own the text is meaningless. Any interpretation of the text without regard to the context of the reader's everyday life is simply the researcher's reading of the magazine, whose account will be far more processed than any other everyday reading of the text. Hermes also points out that media use, and magazine reading in particular, is very often a secondary activity and therefore not always

meaningful if conducted while the reader is engaged in other activities. Bridal magazines, however, have a more specific focus than the general women's magazines with which Hermes was concerned. People usually buy a bridal magazine for a certain reason and are thus more likely to read it with purpose and attention. Nevertheless, it is likely that people do not read the whole magazine with the same attention and often, unless a certain image or word catches the reader's eye, advertisements and promotions may be passed over. In addition, readers have often bought the magazine to read just one article or one section and the remainder of the magazine is discarded. The significance of discourses found in advertisements, images and other texts, therefore, must not be overestimated.

Gough-Yates (2003) discusses the potential for women to resist the dominant discourses found in women's magazines. On the one hand, Winship (1987 in Gough-Yates, 2003) finds that women's magazines offer women little escape from the 'limited social spaces they inhabited' (2003: 11), and therefore any resistance to the magazines felt by the readers was '(at best) partial and temporary' (Gough-Yates, 2003: 11). On the other hand, some researchers recognise the potential space for resistant readings of the magazines, although they similarly regard these as 'lacking the substance needed to effect meaningful change in either wider society or the magazine genre itself' (Gough-Yates, 2003: 11). In addition, McRobbie (1997) believes that, by constructing the subjectivities of millions of female readers through producing great bundles of meaning on a regular basis, magazines ensure that these meanings must enter our unconscious and produce desires and pleasures whether or not we want them to. These meanings become so familiar that it is out of our control to resist them, and we lose agency. On the other hand, there are those who argue that the texts *do* offer small spaces for resistance and alternative readings of women's lives (Gough-Yates, 2003).

Despite the location of a subject within socially constructed discursive practices, Weedon (1997) suggests that she can also exist 'as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices' (1997: 121). She is also able to reflect on the discursive relations that constitute her and her society and is

able to choose from the options available to her (Weedon, 1997).

To view a person as either fully taken in by a discourse or resistant to it ignores the interesting and diverse ways in which people can react to situations and discourses (McNay, 2000). Discourses are a part of our social world and we draw on them to make sense of our lives and social settings. Further, we are aware of when we draw on these discourses and when we choose to adopt a set of beliefs. Therefore, a person can choose to conform, to take a conventional path in life. Being agentic and conforming to dominant discourses are not necessarily mutually exclusive; being actively aware of discourses, therefore, does not necessarily lead to resistant behaviour. The reading of bridal and other magazines does not have to involve either unconscious conformity to the discourses within or agentic resistance to these discourses.

3.5   PERSONAL REFLECTION

Finally, I propose to reflect on my own position in the research and the theory. I come to this research with preconceptions and my own views and opinions. In order to minimise the effect these have on my research, I acknowledge that they exist and identify when they may have influenced the way I conducted this research, rather than attempting to ignore them. As a feminist I have strong opinions on issues related to relationships and marriage but I feel that these views should not be imposed on people who do not share them or texts that do not agree. Therefore, in the interviews I kept these opinions to myself and during discourse analysis I did not attempt to search for hidden meanings within texts that suited my agenda. In this write-up and the analysis, I understand that my views may influence the outcome and by continually reflecting back on this I hope to limit the impact my opinions have on my writing style and argument, although it is impossible to eliminate this entirely. Moreover, this *is* a feminist analysis and will inevitably be shaped by questioning what others might take for granted. Throughout the analysis which follows, I attempt to situate participants within their context while minimising the imposition of meaning on their discussions, which were not assigned by the talker. This analysis begins with the central theme

of marriage: its meaning and interpretation.

4. WHY MARRY? NEGOTIATING RELATIONSHIPS AND THE DECISION TO MARRY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Most women I interviewed either wanted to marry, were engaged to be married or were already married. This chapter considers why women aspire to marry, what influences this decision, and possible social pressures upon them. First, I consider the role of cultural ambivalence and how notions of 'natural', 'proper' and progression are used to justify the decision to marry. This is followed by discussing the impact of biological explanations in the justification of heterosexual partnership given by women, and the combination of these ideas with more social explanations for marrying. The influence of fairy tales and fantasies of weddings and marriage is explored next, focusing on the image of the big white wedding, Prince Charming and living happily ever after, and the extent to which these can contribute towards the desire to marry. Finally, the influence of children has been considered in terms of deciding or aspiring to marry and the perceived benefits marriage affords to parents. This includes a discussion on the age women anticipate having children, how this relates to marriage desires, and what it might reveal about marriage trends.

4.2 CULTURAL AMBIVALENCE

An overwhelming impression from my interviews is how traditional, conventional and conservative many young women are today in terms of marriage and relationships. Out of my 23 interviewees, 20 advocated marriage, including three who were already married and five who were engaged (and are now married). Of the three dissenting participants, one had grown up expecting to marry only to undergo a drastic change of heart during her late teens and early twenties, with which she was still coming to terms at the time of interviewing. The other two respondents were children of divorced or separated parents and while neither had terrible experiences of divorce, they were sceptical of marriage as a stable, permanent, and inevitable state.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that children with divorced parents often long for the stability and certainty their childhoods lacked, 'a goal which they sadly often fail to achieve' (1995: 175, citing Wallerstein and Blakesless, 1989). A total of six participants from my sample had parents who were divorced or separated: Rebecca and Helen said they were unlikely to marry, Elizabeth was unconcerned but had decided to marry to please her partner, Shirley was unconcerned but thought that she probably would marry at some point, Michelle was hoping to marry her current partner, and Mandy had married because this was a life-long desire. From this small sample of women it seems that this longing for 'a happy family' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 175) was present only for Mandy, who was determined to have a wedding, only to regret being married. For the other participants with divorced parents, their discussions of marriage often seemed more realistic than those with parents who had been married for the previous 20 or 30 years.

For a majority of participants, marriage was reported as a natural step for them to take. This expectation, and almost inevitability, of marriage was expressed in various ways by respondents; most often in terms of tradition and a correct order to life. Yet there is some ambiguity in the talk. Participants discuss the decrease in or lack of tradition in relationships and current society, while simultaneously expressing their own traditional views and longing for conventional lives and roles. It is possible that, as relationships are seemingly becoming more uncertain and family formations are less traditional, this can lead to people desiring something more certain and stable from their own relationships. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim comment, 'the family and loving relationships continue to be idealized on every level of society' (1995: 172) despite a steady high level of divorce. There remains a hankering for marriage and family life despite (or perhaps because of) the increasing fluidity and flexibility of relationships today. Gross (2005) agrees commenting that despite the perceived transformation of intimacy in modern society, the image of traditional family life, 'continues to function as a hegemonic ideal' (2005: 288). Moreover, for Gross, Giddens' concept of fully reflexive individuals replacing more tradition-centred individuals

has not fully taken place. Rather, behaviour is still, to some extent, informed by '"meaning-constitutive traditions," which involve patterns of sense making passed down from one generation to the next' (2005: 288). Therefore, individuals in our society still think and act in terms of traditional cultural constraints.

This was represented in one participant's account in particular. Zoe comments, 'I think I'd rather see like more old fashioned like families and they all sit down and have their tea at the same time [...] I'd rather it be more acceptable to be a normal family'. The 'normal' family is seen as old fashioned, something that no longer exists in our individualised society, and yet, as Zoe comments, for herself this is not quite the case: 'I suppose like it is the normal thing for me of people just grow up and get married'. On the one hand, families are seen as changing and fluid, and on the other hand, growing up and marrying are still seen as the standard thing to do.

However, statistics show that marriage rates are continuing to decline, potentially reflecting a decrease in the importance now placed on being married. This view of family life is echoed by participants who saw marriage as declining in importance and prevalence in society. For Amy, marriage is less traditional now because society is less traditional: 'it's just not as important in society that you're married it's not frowned upon any more'. A loosening of societal morals seems to have had the affect of creating, for some, the impression of a declining significance of marriage and family values. Due to the decrease in its association with tradition, the meaning of marriage is changing, as Fiona says, 'I don't think it's as traditional as before where you get married and you stay I mean there's a lot more divorce a lot of infidelity and things like that'. Marriage is no longer viewed as a stable, permanent bond, instead becoming synonymous with divorce, instability, and impermanence. Nevertheless, Amy still aspires to marry and Fiona is already a wife. Despite these associations with divorce and separation, participants find the idea of marriage very appealing and in particular the idea of it as traditional, conventional, and as a natural progression in life. For Amy and Fiona, there is one view of marriage for society, and another view of marriage for themselves.

Beck-Gernsheim (2002) explains this discrepancy using the individualisation process: individualisation of a society generates, '*both* a claim to a life of one's own *and* a longing for ties, closeness and community' (2002: 8 emphasis in original). Unlike Giddens, who believes the process of individualisation will lead increasingly to self-interested, reflexive, pure relationship type coupling, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim suggest the family 'will be glorified largely because it represents a sort of refuge in the chilly environment of our affluent, impersonal, uncertain society' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 2). The very nature of our fluid relationships guides our longing for stability. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim draw out this theory to examine the meaning love has today; love is seen to be emerging as a new latter-day religion. Family life and love hold out the promise of salvation and perfect happiness. Couples, families and family life are placed on a pedestal and these are the formations of future life we are all to aim for. Although alternatives are now available and acceptable, they are still, to some extent, deviant because they are breaking with tradition.

This discrepancy in being allowed a life of one's own as well as longing for stable ties, comes out in participants' accounts as a difference between what participants want for themselves and what they believe others desire. A greater tolerance of casual sexual relationships and marriage break-down exists alongside continued reification of monogamy, which remains the ideal (Jackson and Scott, 2004a). These existing tensions in wider culture are picked up on by the participants who at once idealise marriage, whilst recognising its fragility and impermanence. It was common for participants to bemoan the decline in the appeal for marriage and number of people wanting to marry, and to position themselves as different, as aspiring to and endorsing marriage. The participants realise that fewer people are marrying and that divorce is common but the appeal of marriage and long term relationships often represented in the media, books and magazines, helps to sustain this discrepancy between views and desires. Amy comments above that marriage is not as important any more and is less traditional and yet, she goes on to say, 'I'd like to get married but I think that's just because like I've got the traditional view of like I'd like to be married and a family'. For other people in

society, marriage is losing its traditional meaning but for Amy this is still very much present and significant in her decision to marry. This contradictory view of the decline in tradition and the longing for tradition also demonstrates the embeddedness of individuals within wider culture and their acceptance of stories told by various societal institutions regarding the nature and current status of marriage, what people are aspiring to now, and what we should all desire.

The ways in which the women interviewed talked about their own otherness, as well as their obvious entrenchment in wider culture, highlights an interesting potential consequence of the individualisation process. This distinction between us and them, what I want and what they want, while somewhat determined by discourses prevalent throughout society, may also be a result of an increasing reflexivity fostered by individualisation. Giddens (1991) believes that reflexivity becomes more important in the formation of self identity for individuals in late modernity, and a level of reflexive self-awareness allows individuals to create their self identity, free from the binds of tradition and culture that previously would have restricted their scope for self understanding. Therefore, according to Giddens' interpretation of the new reflexive project, individuals are no longer fixed to culturally imposed identity positions; they are able to create their own fluid changeable identity, free from tradition and cultural mores. Adams (2003), however, points out that this notion of unbounded reflexivity, 'overlooks many crucial factors in identity formation, and misjudges somewhat the nature of the current age' (2003: 224). Using reflexivity alone, without limits, to create self-identity ignores the culturally situated resources individuals use to inform and understand themselves, such as traditions passed down through the family and beliefs influenced by friends, media and schooling.

The notion that tradition loses significance in identity formation, and the self becomes disembedded from its context, is undermined when it is considered that the concept of individuality itself is another way of embedding individuals in particular frameworks (Adams, 2003: 226). Gross (2005) also criticises Giddens' detraditionalisation thesis. He asserts that reflexivity alone cannot fill the void left by tradition, and certain customs relating to intimate practices continue to pass

down through generations. This contradiction between Giddens' overthrowing of tradition in favour of fully reflexive self aware individuals, and Gross' and Adams' concept of identity still being very much influenced by customs, is reflected in the tension found in my participants' accounts. Their confusion in viewing wider society (other people) as ultra-modern and abandoning customs, while simultaneously desiring very traditional lives, is a reflection of how this discourse of individualisation is seeping into everyday lives. People believe that in wider society there is an individualistic view of relationships and commitment but this view has not succeeded in permeating these women's own beliefs, which are still very much influenced by traditions and history. This then, would indicate that Giddens has been too cavalier in his assessment of the current status of tradition in society, and Adams (2003) and Gross (2005) are closer to the mark in suggesting that, while people are becoming more individualised and more reflexive, tradition and cultural situatedness still play a large role in identity and value formation.

The impact of discourses of individualisation may also have contributed to women's statements of difference from 'others' and their claims to individuality. While on the one hand, individuality and distinction from others is seen to be valued in modern society, they concurrently are advocating and absorbing tradition. Participants appeal to the traditional and in doing so assert that they are alone in this dialectic, others are viewed as conforming to more modern ideals. Interviewees therefore, are asserting their individuality through appealing to traditional concepts and ideas. This idea of reverting to the traditional while asserting individuality is also demonstrated in the women's descriptions of their ideal weddings. These, on the whole, reflect the current trend in weddings, (expensive, white, romantic) yet they also refer to some sense of individuality, and most comment on having something different from the norm and something that would make their ceremony stand out and be remembered. Thus, there is some evidence to suggest the individualisation process is taking place in our society; women are appealing to the discourse of difference (which is, in this case, tradition) in terms of their views and opinions on marriage and relationships, as well as in terms of their desired wedding ceremonies. With regard to their desired

futures, the pattern they expect their lives to take, participants appeal most strongly to tradition, cultural norms and scientific claims.

Therefore, despite some participants asserting that marriage is now less traditional, in addition to its contemporary associations with divorce and separation, some respondents still used the appeal of the traditional to justify their desires. As Grace asserts, 'I think it is still quite a traditional thing it's what you do is you get married', marriage is the thing to do. Therefore, the relationship between marriage and tradition seems to be a complex one, due to the impact of the individualisation process. On the one hand, marriage is viewed as less traditional, it is no longer a certainty, and yet most young women I spoke to aspired to be married. In addition, while many still invoke the tradition and convention of marriage as a means for justifying their aspirations, it is also viewed as changing in nature and becoming less traditional. Marriage is a traditional, long-standing institution and yet, at the same time, a fluid and uncertain concept.

The concept of tradition was also bound up with ideas of rightness/properness, naturalness, having an order to life and responsibility, all of which were used as justifications for marriage. When participants talked about the right, proper or correct thing to do, I interpret this to mean the socially sanctioned or prescribed route, the path in life that is seen to be right and good by other members of society. The 'natural' thing to do is also bound up with ideas of biological determinism, what is preordained by nature, our biology, and what evolution and our biological imperatives require from us. It is often said that monogamy is 'natural', meaning it is something programmed into our biology that we have evolved to practice. Having an order to life can be informed by social and biological influences, which are considered right and natural, since marriage before children may be socially prescribed, but monogamy before children may be considered to be biologically programmed. Responsibility and doing the right thing for children is, again, largely informed by social regulations, and is a matter that is often open for public debate and criticism.

Having an order to life or living life in the right order cropped up repeatedly in

conversations, and participants were concerned that they should live life according to this preordained progression. In talking about religious relationships, Mandy comments, 'there still seems to be quite a traditional pattern of we'll meet, we'll settle down, we'll have an engagement, have a wedding, have a year or so and then have children'. There is a common assumption running through the narratives that this is, or at least is perceived to be, the correct order in which to conduct your life. This seems to provide life with a steady progression through the essential stages and if all stages are completed you are considered to have lived a fulfilled life.

Marriage is seen as a step furthering progression through life, something that has to be accomplished before the next stepping stone (usually considered to be children); in order to progress successfully though life you need to marry at some stage. Eva reflects on this idea commenting,

> ..meet someone, after a few years, you know, live together, then a couple of years after that get married, then a couple of years after that have kids, that feels like a nice sort of steady progression, can't really go wrong...you know I mean there's rational reasons for those sort of gaps.

In this life order cohabitation now plays a larger role. While 50 years ago women would have progressed from courting to marriage, almost all participants expect to live with their future husband before marrying. This progression is assumed to be traditional and the correct way to live life, yet cohabitation prior to marriage is a break from recent tradition. In less than half a century, this relationship process, now taken-for-granted, has altered considerably.

Life is seen as a steady progression through certain stages and these stages are positioned as such for certain culturally prescribed reasons. If life is lived according to these stages and at a steady progression, it is assumed that nothing can go wrong. This idea of a progression is also applied to the progression of a relationship. A couple who have been seeing each other or who currently live

together, are seen as advancing their relationship to the next stage if they marry: 'there must be lots of people who live who decide to move in together if they love each other... then get married as an actual progression' (Lucy). In this way, marriage is seen as something beyond cohabitation, it is a next step[12]. A relationship, as well as a life, is viewed as progressing in set stages and each stage has associated meanings for the relationship, such as increased commitment and permanence, and increased likelihood of advancing to the next phase. The progression from courting to cohabitation to marriage, in life and in a relationship, indicates growing commitment to the bond and increasing stability for the couple.

The idea of marriage as a stepping stone in life is discussed by Sutton et al. (2003) who found that many older participants in their study felt societal and parental pressure to marry, giving them little option but to conform. Although most overt forms of pressure to marry are now invisible, this view of marriage as 'the accepted "stepping-stone" to adulthood' (2003: 11) remains widely endorsed. Nevertheless, the thinking around such pressures has transformed and instead of framing the cultural expectation to marry as a pressure, it is now seen as a freely chosen act to conform. As Lewis comments, 'Once marriage became a choice rather than a necessity, a much more conscious decision had to be made to enter it' (Lewis, 2001: 144). Thus, while the imperative to marry remains, young people talk about choices rather than pressure to tie the knot, despite responding to similar cultural discourses. This notion is also apparent in Gross' work who explains that intimate life is still organised,

> on the basis of ideas and practices that are handed down from the past and that may assume a naturalized and taken-for-granted form, free though agents may be from external constraints that would force them to adopt those ideas and practices. (2005: 306)

Individuals are now free from regulative, external constraints and may make choices regarding their intimate lives but the same ideals and practices persist from past generations, and have come to be accepted as taken-for-granted and

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[12] See discussion of cohabitation in Chapter 6.

natural behaviours. These inherited meaning-making practices are absorbed into culture and create moral restrictions on actions and conduct.

Lewis (2001) has also found evidence of discourses of natural progression and older respondents in her research provided reasons for marrying including pragmatic explanations, the idea that marriage was a natural progression, and that there was no other choice than to marry in order to achieve adult status. In addition, of Lewis' younger respondents, two also referred to a natural progression but used this term to describe the drift into cohabitation rather than marriage. Interestingly, a majority of Lewis' younger participants also rated parental pressure as a significant influence in the decision to marry as well as the time being right and wanting to have children. For Sutton et al. and Lewis, the idea of a progression through life was mainly advocated by older participants; my participants were all 30or younger but nevertheless, commonly expressed the same viewpoint.

Sutton et al. also found that values filtering down through the generations, highlighting the 'rightness' of marriage, were particularly influential if participants were from intact family backgrounds. 'Rightness' (reflecting the cultural and societal prescriptions concerning the right way to behave) involves the opinions of wider society and how individuals believe others would judge their behaviour. My participants talked about marriage being the right thing to do and for one it was a life ambition. Marriage is considered by a majority of my sample to be the correct course of action if the couple want to have children, as Eleanor comments, 'you just kind of assume that that's your life plan and you have to get married and then have children'. This idea of a 'right order' (Adele) in which to do things, and this being the 'way that it's supposed to be' (Susan) is a recurring theme and highlights the impact of parental tradition (see Gross, 2005), the imitation of peers and media influences that permeate our culture.

Marriage was seen as the most appropriate environment in which to raise a family. Yet marriage is also 'right', it means life is lived in the 'right order' (Adele, Shirley and Fiona). For these participants, life would be wrong if marriage were

not involved or occurred in an incorrect order. Even more concerned with being married is Ruth who sees marriage and having a family as her 'life's ambition'. Ruth has grown up seeing how her parents have been together and desiring that type of relationship for herself:

> I want to have a husband and I want to have kids and I want to be the
> Mum and you know do the shopping and all the rest of it and that's...
> that's always been a dream that's always been a bit of a fantasy.

The appeal of family life is very strong for Ruth who is very far from representing someone searching for a pure relationship. Ruth idealises traditional family roles and a division of labour; her ambition to be a housewife supports Holmes' assertion that 'for some women, gender roles might be becoming retraditionalized' in some areas (Holmes, 2004a: 252; see also Adkins, 2000). Indeed, Adkins (2000) goes further to suggest that tradition is not just being revived, rather 're-traditionalised norms, rules and expectations [...] concern new positions and new traditionalised socialities' (Adkins, 2000: 268). Thus, the tradition discussed by participants may constitute a new development of 'tradition' with new norms and expectations. Ruth seems to subscribe to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's idea of love as a secular religion. She is a strict Christian and directs her faith towards family as well as God. Family life is her ultimate fantasy and means of 'escaping from the daily grind' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 175). Therefore, rather than love representing the idol of this new religion, for Ruth it would be family or traditional family roles. Love is not worshipped or revered as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim would suggest, rather this reverence is directed at traditional family formations. Despite idealising traditional family roles, Ruth makes sure to assert, 'that's my choice'; she is not sacrificing her career but is choosing to prioritise her family.

The young women mentioned above view tradition as a reason to marry, a positive influence and explanation of why marriage is still a valid option. Yet the prevailing tradition of relationship, cohabitation, marriage, then children, may not be considered in such a rosy light. Shirley (whose parents are divorced) tells me

that her ideal wedding would not take place in a church. This non-religious location would, however, cause a family rift, not because of the abandoning of the religious aspects but rather because it would represent a break from tradition. In this situation, tradition is not considered as a reason to marry, and Shirley actually advocates breaking from a family tradition. For Shirley then, marriage is not about custom, and traditional values would not influence her decisions. Similarly, Rebecca (whose parents are also divorced), is not enamoured with the traditions of marriage: 'I've always felt like that I've never um... been interested particularly in getting married or having children or any of them like traditional family life so to speak'. Tradition is not for everyone and although the majority of young women in my sample succumb to the appeal of archetypal family life, there are exceptions. One final illustration of this is Lauren who, as mentioned earlier, experienced a drastic change of heart in her late teens and early twenties. Having grown up expecting to marry, Lauren later came to the decision that this route was not for her: 'both my parents are really traditional...gender based roles in our household and I don't want to end up inadvertently subscribing to that by like just sort of sleep walking into it by being a wife myself'. For Lauren marriage *is* tradition and traditional gender roles. By refusing to marry she is refusing to subscribe to these traditional roles, 'refusing to be a wife' (VanEvery, 1995). Moreover, by fearing 'sleep walking' into marriage, Lauren highlights the assumed and taken-for-granted nature of coupling.

4.3   POPULAR BELIEFS

In discussing traditional and 'right' behaviour, participants often appealed to biological or scientific claims to justify these views. The normality and tradition of marriage, are features of our society that strongly influence an individual in their decision to marry yet these are regularly discussed in combination with naturalistic explanations for behaviour. I consider next the combination of these highly influential social ideas with more naturalistic and biological explanations of behaviour advanced by the participants. This will include discussions of instinct, the 'natural' programming of behaviour, and hormones and other biological explanations for our actions.

Connell and Dowsett (1992) note that 'At the bedrock of our culture's thinking about sexuality is the assumption that a given pattern of sexuality is native to the human constitution' (1992: 50): this is referred to as 'nativism'. There are different types of nativism upon which frameworks of Western thought are based. According to Connell and Dowsett, the nativist assumption is that sexuality, whether laid down by God, evolution or hormones, is pre-social, it exists before society and whatever society does to interfere, nothing can 'alter the fundamentals of sexuality' (1992: 50). Religious nativism informed our thinking until scientific nativism took over in recent years. Sexuality in religious nativist terms was defined as lust, and a Protestant marriage offered a legitimate channel for this lust as divinely ordained by God: 'sexuality was not condemned as such but divided between the territory of God and the terrain of the Devil' (1992: 51). This, then, points to the origins of the sexual 'other' who is now commonly reviled in modern Western culture (think homosexuals, paedophiles 'perverts' etc.).

Scientific nativism replaced the religious focus, and Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) marked this shift: 'Sexual attraction was firmly located in the order of nature and indeed given a steering role in organic evolution' (Connell and Dowsett 1992: 52). Sexual attraction, as well as sexual behaviour, was seen as firmly rooted in our biology, as determined by evolution. At its simplest, however, this explanation cannot take into account any effects that society may have on sexuality. For Connell and Dowsett, scientific nativism cannot account for variations in sexual practices across cultures, it does not even account for variation within one culture. In addition, biological explanations for human behaviour such as this cannot offer a plausible account of behaviour, while it advances such fixity of human nature and an impoverished view of culture (Jackson and Rees, 2007). Nativism cannot account for desire and pleasure and how these are so greatly influenced by culture, time period, and sexuality. Nevertheless, despite the redundancy of this theory as a working concept, scientific nativism in particular, remains a powerful social ideology that supports common sense assumptions regarding sexuality. For example, the assumption that: 'boys need to sow their wild oats, […] girls naturally want to look beautiful

and to have babies' (Connell and Dowsett, 1992: 56) is reinforced by scientific nativist ideas.

My participants often had recourse to popular evolutionary/biological explanations for marriage and partnership. Grace says, 'it's just I think the way that we are programmed you naturally want to find the one person who will spend the rest of our lives with'. Being in a couple is seen as something hardwired into our biology. Not only is our nature 'programmed' to find a mate, our roles in relationships are also governed by biology. For Zoe, it is 'naturally [...] the woman that does the cleaning and cooking' because men 'in their nature [...] tend to be quite like practical like DIY type thing'.

Women are also seen as the ones responsible for childcare, as Lucy comments, 'we're the ones who've got babies and naturally have a tendency to wanna nest for 20 years whereas men don't have that have more of a wandering.. just... the way we're built gene way'. Women are naturally the carers and home makers whereas men are more practical and 'wandering'. This idea of gender roles as part of our biology is referred to by Michelle who, on noticing that her friend bakes cakes more now she is married, comments, 'maybe it was a wifely thing to do and I don't know maybe you get these instincts of kind of that you would that you would maybe do more things like that'. According to Michelle, becoming a wife creates these instincts in us to act more wifely and bake more cakes. Eleanor also questions whether there is some 'basic human instinct that says I need to have a mate that's going to provide for me', positioning our ancient ancestors in terms of Victorian ideals of meek femininity and vulnerability. Human instinct is seen as the reason for desiring a partner and stable relationship.

The use of the term 'natural' is a good example of the combination of taken-for-granted social attitudes with biological reasons for behaviour. Nature can at once represent human nature, the way we are programmed to behave, as well as a 'natural' way to behave represented by taken-for-granted, obvious actions that are just common sense: doing what comes naturally. These 'natural' and common sense discourses constitute different types of nativism impacting the ways in

which people think about behaviour, but residing somewhere between Connell and Dowsett's religious and scientific nativist divide. The idea that it is common sense to be married before having children may refer back to the long-lasting influence of religious nativism and moral concerns, while the recourse to natural, biological, instinctual, and hormonal forces at work in coupling behaviour, is more likely to be drawn from a scientific based framework. Therefore, while Connell and Dowsett recognise the significance of religious and scientific discourses on a society's use of behavioural framework, it seems, from my interviews, that the distinction between the two is not so clear, and that other nativisms are being created to incorporate both concepts. These new nativisms include common sense notions of behaviour (using ideas drawn from religion and science) based on what is considered 'natural'.

These common sense assumptions are widespread, and natural and biological explanations for behaviour are so influential today that two participants view social changes as being caused by alterations in our biology. In discussing the retreat from marriage, one explanation Catriona considers is that women's 'biological clocks don't tick till a little bit later on so they don't really think about marriage 'til a little bit later on'. According to Catriona women's biology has changed over the last 100 years so that we are now able to have children at a later age. This idea is echoed by Eleanor who comments, 'maybe it's partly because you can have children much later than you could before'. It is certainly true that women are now having children later in life with the aid of IVF and other fertility treatments and it is more acceptable to do so, but women have always been able to have children up until they reach menopause (and often did). This highlights the possibility that it is not biological facts the participants are appealing to but rather a particular understanding and interpretation of biology. Biology is usually viewed as being unchanging and static but these participants see it as changeable, fluid, and not necessarily fixed for all time. Participants make reference to biology changing according to variations in environment and the ability of biological instincts to be modified with an alteration in life circumstances. This relates to a popular understanding of biological difference and embodiment rather than any real biological facts.

There are more examples of interviewees using hormones, emotions, and naturalness as explanations for couple and relationship behaviour. However, these explanations are never used alone to account for action and not everyone uses biological explanations for behaviour. There is ambivalence in participants' accounts: some appeal to nativism more than others and some do not mention it at all. Therefore, while scientific nativism is prevalent as an explanation for action, it is not exclusive. Throughout the interviews, scientific nativist ideas are intertwined with more social, cultural or learned explanations for behaviour. Continuing the above quote from Lucy she goes on to say, 'but society has formed this like marriage concept of being with one person for the rest of your life'. Biology can only explain so much for these participants. It could be argued that all the behaviours mentioned above by participants are socially prescribed, gender roles, women as carers, yet the appeal of nativism is strong. To believe that our lives are to some extent governed by nature, by what is right and in our biology makes life seem simpler and more ordered. Actions that we have always longed for (such as marriage or long-term relationships) do not need to be questioned because not only are they traditional, they are natural.

4.4   FAIRY TALES AND ROMANTICISING MARRIAGE

The image of the fairy tale ending permeates our culture and exists in novels, films, television shows, magazines and many more mediums. Disney are now synonymous with fairy tales; they have taken the original stories passed down the generations by word of mouth and written down by the likes of Hans Christian Anderson and The Brothers Grimm, and have sugar coated these, often sinister, tales almost beyond all recognition to produce the modern day picture of the happily ever after fairy story. The format of the standard fairy tale promoted primarily by Disney, is that of a female searching for her one and only true love, falling in love, overcoming all obstacles and getting married (see Cokely, 2005). It is unsurprising therefore, that participants in my research would mention the notion of the fairy tale when talking about relationships, marriage and weddings. The 'fairy tale wedding', finding 'Prince Charming' and 'living happily ever after'

have become figures of speech. These are common ideas used for reference in everyday life, which demonstrate the almost invisible influence of such discourses on individuals' views.

The taken-for-granted nature of fairy tale discourses regarding finding your one true love emphasise the notion that it is 'so "natural" for women to want to be married' (Cokely, 2005: 170). 'Natural' in this sense is not necessarily understood as the biological aspect but, rather, the common sense and assumed notion of marriage discussed above. Marriage here is considered 'natural' because it is unnatural not to be married or to want to find your one and only true love. The assumed nature of marriage relies on its cultural normalcy: 'I suppose like it is the normal thing for me of people just grow up and get married and live happily ever after' (Zoe). For some participants this assumption was not questioned and the naturalness of marriage is reinforced by the view of its normality. While 'normal' is interpreted as entirely socially based, deemed acceptable by society, 'natural' is created by society as well as forces beyond society: nature and human nature.

Despite the overwhelming portrayal of fairy tale endings in our culture, however, most participants were very pragmatic about marriage and did not subscribe to these unrealistic expectations. In reality, it is a small number of women from my sample who said that fairy tales were still a significant influence on their marriage or relationships aspirations. A larger group of women explained that although the stories were very important to them when they were young and fed their childish fantasies, when they grew up and saw the 'problems that people have in relationships and stuff you kind of think, well hold on a minute maybe they were lying' (Amy). Fairy tales hold the promise of a day where you are the princess marrying your prince and going on to live happily ever after, and yet, in the real world, there are countless examples of this not coming true. It would be short sighted to think that the fairy tale image alone could create unrealistically high expectations, when we are informed continually of the escalating divorce rates, single parenthood and retreat from marriage. Most of my participants came to the realisation on entering adulthood that the fairy tale, if it has influence at all, is only a 'very small part' of marriage (Penny).

This abandoning of fairy tale expectations for a more pragmatic attitude towards marriage may come about for a number of reasons. Cohabitation is currently on the rise and is a popular arrangement before marriage, with a quarter of unmarried individuals aged between 16 and 59 cohabiting in 2006 (Social Trends 39). This then, could have the effect of bursting the romantic fairy tale bubble of married life by first experiencing the mundane reality of cohabiting life. Cohabitation must induce far more pragmatic notions and realistic expectations of life after marriage, since there is little difference between a relationship involving cohabitation and a relationship involving marriage. Two participants mentioned above, stating their common sense approaches to marriage, have, or are currently, cohabiting.

Another factor I believe contributes towards considerably more realistic expectations is religion. Ruth, who is in a long term, committed partnership but not cohabiting, is a practising Christian. Christianity promotes family values, the importance of marriage for a family (and children), and dedication. Therefore, it could be argued that this religion emphasises more down to earth expectations for marriage, highlighting the need to work at it to make it last. Romance is not at the heart of marriage for Christianity, instead it values commitment, hard work and perseverance. This religious nativist discourse reinforces pragmatism towards marriage rather than more romantic, fairy tale notions.

Two participants reject the notion of the fairy tale ending completely in terms of marriage. Susan was due to marry two months after the interview and when talking about her wedding dress she is scornful of the 'princess-y', 'fairy tale big puffy dress' and instead favours a simple classic design. While this is specifically concerned with the wedding rather than marriage, it is a clear example of a reaction against fairy tale notions. Ruth rejects the notion of 'happily ever after' outright in favour of a more rational, decision based form of romanticism: 'people [...] don't realise that when you make a commitment to somebody you choose to do that you're deciding to love that person and deciding that you will be with that person whatever happens'. Rather than the vague notion of happily ever after,

Ruth opts for a more certain future in which the couple will stay together no matter what. Marriage, for her, is about a certain commitment that is not based on unrealistically high expectations.

Nevertheless, the fairy tale image was, for a few, a significant influence on their own views of marriage. When Grace was asked what has influenced her opinions she responds, 'even all the fairy tales and meeting Prince Charming and living happily ever after', and other respondents use the image of the fairy tale to explain their wedding fantasies[13]. Disney was also mentioned specifically as an institution designed for the regulation of fantasies. In talking about what she believes affects people's views, Amy comments, 'people are still brought up with like Disney films and looking in the media and stuff and there is still marriage and it's the most brilliant day of your life'. In Disney films women are portrayed as concerned simply with matters of the heart and relationships, the possibility of women having other aspirations is overlooked (Cokely, 2005). According to Cokely, this, and the prevailing institutionalisation of heterosexuality, mean women, in particular, continue to hold up marriage 'as a goal and dream of the romantic fairy tale wedding' (2005: 171). Otnes and Pleck (2003) confirm that while these stories are primarily designed for children, they have 'an equally powerful hold on the adult imagination' (2003: 27).

A further example of this can be observed in Rebecca's narrative. From the start Rebecca positions herself as unlikely to marry, she has never 'been interested particularly in getting married' and she declares she could happily live life without being married. And yet, later in the interview Rebecca says,

> I think most of my friends and maybe deep down mine [her own
> fantasy] have got this like little fantasy in their head they'll just meet
> Mr. Right [he'll] sweep them off their feet you'll get married and live
> happily ever after.

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[13] Discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

The idea of living happily ever after with your one true love is certainly a strong one, and supports the idea of marriage as conventional, traditional and natural. Even Rebecca, who is not a great advocate of marriage, is influenced by the romanticism and appeal of the fairy tale ending.

A wedding, however, is not an ending to life as it is so regularly portrayed in fairy tales, as well as television shows, sitcoms, films and books. These stories fail to deal with the consequences of the wedding, the marriage, and what happens to the couple after the event. This adds to the romanticism of the story, since the daily grind of normal life need not be shown, or even imagined. Therefore, this short-sighted picture of marriage (just the romance and wedding) is unrealistic and, it has been argued, may be contributing to the increase in unrealistic expectations of relationships and marriage for young people (Shumway, 2003; Wouters, 2004), and consequently an increase in the numbers of relationships and relationship breakdowns some experience.

The image of the fairy tale happy ending is widespread in our culture. It permeates written, visual and audio media as well as our language. Yet, a majority of women view this image as just that, a fairy tale, not real, not something that happens in real life. Despite assertions that expectations of relationships are on the rise, the majority of women in my sample seem surprisingly down to earth and realistic, and few have naïve expectations of living happily ever after without challenges, even if they do desire the fairy tale wedding.

4.5   SECURITY, STABILITY AND CHILDREN

The perceived security and stability marriage offers to couples is one reason presented, by some participants, for wanting to marry. This stability is most often discussed in terms of bringing up children within a stable family unit. Yet, security was also an issue for the participants concerning their own well-being. As previously mentioned, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) notice that young people are increasingly longing for long-term, permanent relationships in a

climate of change and uncertainty. This is reflected in the interviews in the ways marriage is equated with stability, security and certainty. Being married is 'a more secure way of being with Jack' (Hermione); the nature of the relationship remains the same but ties binding the relationship become tighter (stronger?).

Security concerns also seem to be related to the more legal and financial elements of the relationship. For Michelle, marriage would mean a change from relying on her parents for income support to relying on her partner, despite currently living with her partner in a cohabiting relationship: 'I mean you would have that security that if you lost your job that that person would support you while you looked for another job'. Security also extends to perceived legal requirements that a marriage certificate demands. Being married is interpreted as providing a legal bond that ties the couple together and makes it harder for them to separate. Eva relates these legal ties to financial security and the safeguard marriage affords in case of death or divorce:

> I'd like the security of it, I'd like to know legally as well knowing that
> er our money is sort of all together in one place if he dies or
> something um… I'd have that I'd like the, er sorry, that you know I'd
> be sort of in the eyes of the law part of his life sort of financially.

Marriage offers security to the partners but it also offers a public statement of this commitment to a secure relationship. As Amy comments, 'if you've got married you've actually publicly made a commitment to each other so in a way you've got some actual proof of security'. Marriage secures the relationship legally and financially, as well as making these obligations public, which provides further security because the couple are willing to make these promises in front of loved ones.

When talking about the security of a relationship or marriage, participants most often refer to financial or legal security in the partnership. When stability of the relationship is talked about, this is more likely to refer to the relationship itself and its future: 'I like to think that if you get married it's more stable and you're

never going to break up' (Zoe). Marriage, then, also offers the couple the stability cohabitation perhaps lacks because of the security given by legal and financial ties.

The stability of a relationship is important for the couple but it was most often talked about in relation to having and bringing up children, and the necessity of being married in order to provide a stable basis from which to do this. As Ingraham (1999) notes, marriage 'becomes the way to certify legitimacy, normalcy, and morality' (1999: 110), the heterosexual imagery convinces us that it is important to participate in the 'legitimizing illusions of the institution' (1999: 110), such as the legitimacy of having children within a married relationship. Sutton et al. (2003) found that the most common reason for women in their study to marry was the intention to have children, and many women expressed concern at having children outside marriage. Jane Lewis (2001) also found that wanting to have children was a common reason given for marrying. Of the 23 women I interviewed, 15 said that they would rather be married before having children. Even Rebecca, who had previously commented that she was not bothered about marrying, believed that if children were involved then she would rather be married. Moreover, Rebecca says, 'I think people should be married before they have children'; it is not just personal conviction but should also be applied to wider society. This contradiction is understandable when Rebecca goes on to explain that she can never see herself having children and thus, the necessity of marriage was unlikely to arise for her.

Marriage was seen by participants as the best form of partnership for parents in which to raise children and, therefore, children are a significant influence on the decision to marry. As Eleanor says, 'I think we kind of thought if we were going to have children we should get married before we had children because it provides a bit more stability and security'. There is a perceived need to marry before it is socially acceptable to have children, 'it's still a taboo subject I feel in the eyes of kind of general society it's more slightly more unacceptable I feel in like the opinions I get from other people to have a child before you get married' (Susan). This assertion accords with the findings of a survey in 2000, which found that 54

per cent of the population thought that people who wanted children ought to marry (Barlow et al., 2005). Despite high divorce rates evidencing the unstable nature of marriage, it is still seen as a better and more stable environment in which children should grow up (Jamieson et al., 2002).

Social perceptions of a couple are important in terms of the way these perceptions influence how the couple behave. Being married before having children, however, was also seen as important for the children of the couple and the knowledge that their parents are married and have a steady partnership. For Claire, 'it is still quite important for...the kid to know that their parents are together' and for Abigail, 'I just think it's important for the child to come in like one home with the mother and father who's always there to bring them up together'. Two parents living together are seen as the ideal family type and situation for children to live in. This position is seen as better for the children, while they are growing up, to know that their parents are tied together through marriage. This was particularly true for those whose parents were still together.

Whether married or not, there was also a feeling among participants that when children are involved there should be a strong family unit exemplifying the stability and security mentioned above. This idea of a unit also links in with desires to share a common family name (taking the husband's name) and the appeal of marriage, legally and financially, tying the couple together. For Catriona, marriage makes one feel 'more... part of the family unit you've all got the same name'. Catriona goes on to say that parents 'probably stick together more... try more if they're married', there is more holding the couple together and therefore, the view is, that people will work harder at keeping a marriage together because it is harder to leave than a non-married relationship.

For some, the laws and regulations regarding marriage and divorce influence the appeal of marrying before having children. Rebecca mentions the importance of ensuring maintenance if anything goes wrong and having some kind of ties 'to make it harder for the other person to like walk out on the responsibilities'. Lucy also emphasises this point saying that she would want to 'have legal rights if

anything went wrong'. Lucy is not too concerned about marrying but she feels that if she has children, 'you're a lot more safe to get married because legally that entitles you to... [unidentified advantages or rights]'. To some extent then, marriage is seen as normal and compulsory because of the heterosexual imaginary: 'Rather than seeing the various interests at stake in decisions of this kind and making fully informed decisions, we instead consent to the illusion that you can't have commitment, love, and family without marriage' (Ingraham, 1999: 111).

The appeal of a family unit contributes to feelings of stability and certainty and is an ideal to which we are all told to aspire. Cultural interpretations of the family as mother, father and children, are internalised as the ideal and considered the highest goal in life. Financial considerations are also vital when having children and marriage is seen as more financially secure as well as a more affluent way to live:

> It's very important [...] that you can afford to having a child 'cause a
> lot of people can't and they live off benefits and they still manage to
> get everything and there's a lot of us has to work down to the bone to
> provide things and I definitely think you should be married (Abigail).

Abigail uses a common cultural stereotype of unmarried parents with large families living off 'benefits', somehow cheating honest hard-working (married) people out of their hard-earned cash. Such cultural vignettes are prevalent in discussions regarding social behaviour and are central to discerning the link between wider discourses and personal views. Overall, marriage is viewed as a more secure, stable, wealthy, united, certain and satisfying environment for raising children and, as a majority of my sample would like to have children, this was an important motivation in the decision to marry.

Nevertheless, there was a continuum of acceptable relationships in which to have children, as not all participants said that marriage was the one and only correct way of doing this. Those with more traditional views believed that if children

were involved the couple should marry and this would apply to their own relationship, as well as those in wider society. Participants subscribing to this view included Rebecca, Michelle: 'marriage before children is important' and Catriona: 'I think if you're going to have children with someone [...] you might as well be married'. Another significant group of women conveyed the idea that marriage was the ideal for them but was not necessarily the right path for everyone, and that alternative arrangements in which to have children were acceptable if marriage was impossible. As Shirley says, when talking about being married before having children, 'I don't think it matters too much but it does to me' and Grace elaborates, 'I don't have a problem with it personally I think it's nic- be nice for the children if they knew their parents were married but then I suppose it's what you're used to'.

A further number of respondents felt that marriage was perhaps a good idea but did not necessarily fit in with their other plans or was not entirely needed. Alice was 25 and single at the time of interviewing and felt that being young when having children was more important than being married before having children: 'it'd be nice to get married first but then also I would feel like I'd want to have a ch- you know I don't want to be too old when I have children either'. When I asked Eva if she would want to be married before having children she replied, 'no that's not the most important thing for me.. no not necessarily but that might be nice'.

One or two participants saw no problem with others having children outside marriage. Although Amy herself would like to marry before having children, the most important thing for her is 'to be in like a long relationship and be committed to each other' and Mandy, who also advises marriage before children, concedes that at the least 'it's not a good idea to have kids unless you feel some you know quite strong commitment to the person'. As with the above participants, marriage is not seen to be essential in the upbringing of children, and other factors become more important such as commitment and the certainty of the relationship. Helen, however, goes even further saying that having children makes no difference in the decision to marry since 'if you split up you split up whether you're married or

not'. Nevertheless, there are still some conditions necessary on the couple relationship before they should procreate: 'you should only have children if you really do love each other [...] I'd want to be in a steady relationship that were going somewhere and I could see a future' (Helen).

Only one participant gave any indication that it was desirable or acceptable to have children in a relationship that was not necessarily married or even committed. Fiona, who was herself married, says that being married before having children or not is a

> ..personal choice and if they don't want to get married then that's fine that's it's you know it's, it's up to them. I don't think that um well if-marriage doesn't suit everybody so um I think people should be able to make their own decisions.

Not one participant, however, said or implied that having children as a single parent was desirable; on the contrary, this was often used as an example of how the participants did not want to have children. Single parenthood was not discussed as an ideal or possible future for any of the participants, and a loving, committed, mother and father dyad, whether married or not, was held up as the ideal for which one should aim. This demonstrates the heteronormativity inherent in participants' accounts. While one participant discussed homosexual parenting because her sister and her female partner were considering having children, no others considered a gay or lesbian relationship. This option certainly did not figure in ideal perceptions of family formation.

It is very likely that the upbringing, backgrounds and relationship statuses of the participants have had a significant impact on their views and opinions. I would like to explore these characteristics further to try to understand how some participants have arrived at such views. Religion is certainly an important factor and yet, it influences some people more, and in different ways, from others. Ruth is a devout Christian and sees marriage as essential to a successful life and a prelude to having children. For Ruth, commitment and marriage are decisions to

be made and stuck to, there is no going back. Amy and Hermione also identify as Christians and hold traditional views, yet two further Christian participants hold rather more unconventional views. Helen identifies as a Catholic, albeit not a very strict one, and yet does not aspire to marry and does not consider it essential to be married before having children. Moreover, it is Fiona, who recently married in a Christian church, who says that it is personal choice whether people should marry before having children.

Looking into these last two cases in particular in more depth, aspects of their personal lives may explain the discrepancies in their backgrounds and responses. Despite being brought up as a Catholic, Helen experienced her parents' divorce at a young age and has been living with her mother and step-father for many years at the time of interviewing. In addition, Helen was one of my younger participants being only 21 years old and she had not attended university where ideals of the (middle class) traditional family may be more widely available. Helen had not had a long term relationship since leaving school, and thoughts of marriage may not, therefore, have played a significant part in her life. All these factors and undoubtedly more may have contributed to her open minded attitudes towards marriage and relationships.

Fiona's account is an interesting mixture of idealised family life and more individualistic notions. Fiona was raised a Christian and she still attends church regularly. Her father died when she was younger and her mother remarried and is still with the same partner. Being brought up with traditional family values has contributed to the development of her own traditional views and, despite being only 23 at the time of interviewing, Fiona had recently married. Nevertheless, she places much emphasis on individual choice and she does not expect other people to follow such a traditional path as herself. Fiona talks at length about a particular friend of hers who has had several children and recently married and quickly divorced. It is this experience that seems to have influenced her more liberal ideas about relationships and marriage, although other factors will certainly be involved.

The young women interviewed are largely concerned with stability, certainty, commitment, and having a secure base from which to bring up children. This seems to contradict the notion that family life is disappearing and being replaced by pure relationships, where commitment and love are devalued. On the contrary, the assertion by the majority of participants that they would ideally marry before having children highlights the value placed on commitment and love and the importance of these in their life plans. Increasing divorce rates, while making divorce more visible, do not seem to have devalued marriage or dissuaded most respondents from aspiring to be married. The responses are not in line with the notion that family ties are now a freely chosen act (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). A number of participants mentioned the purpose of marriage being to place extra ties and binds on the couple so they find marriage harder to leave or are held accountable for their responsibilities. Having children is seen as an enormous commitment by participants and binds a couple together, rather than being a freely chosen act that can be accepted or abandoned. In addition, Weeks (2007) notes that family bonds are being replaced by friendship ties and yet, in expressing the importance of a stable family formation, of having the mother and father at least present if not, ideally, together and married, demonstrates how for these participants, the parental roles are far from being satisfactorily replaced by friends.

There are a small number of participants who would perhaps be seen as more individualistic, and yet even these women desire a long term committed relationship, even if this is not formalised by a marriage. The range of responses perhaps fits more closely with Beck-Gernsheim's assertion that people desire a 'life of one's own' and simultaneously long for 'ties, closeness and community' (2002: 8). While acknowledging the uncertainties and fluidity of relationships today, participants really do seem to glorify the family and value the security it offers in an uncertain and impersonal society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Perhaps this also accounts for the recourse back to tradition and the importance many participants place on this in their explanations for desiring marriage.

4.6 Sexuality

For many of the young women interviewed, it seemed that marriage could offer an escape from the dangers of sexuality. In discussing sexual freedom, the most common line of thought was: sex is fine as long as you do it for the right reasons, there are no dangers, and you make the personal choice to do it. Sexuality is hedged in at all sides with conditions, restrictions and dangers that sit 'side by side with an acceptance of greater sexual freedom and diversity' (Jackson and Scott, 2004a: 235). Thus, the most important topic for young women was the dangers of sexuality, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs), mental health and pregnancy. Indeed, rather than an unplanned consequence of sex, pregnancy was viewed as a health risk or a result of 'unsafe' sex. These dangers are muted once a woman marries.

Nine participants said that there is too much sexual freedom now, exemplified by the spread of STIs, a pressure on young people to consent to unwanted sex and detrimental emotional consequences. Although widely accepted now, sex and sexual freedom is not something freed from constraints of worry and emotional and physical consequences, despite Giddens' assertions. STIs were a frequent concern for young women; Alice says, 'well I don't think it's good [...] I think everything's on the increase like sexually transmitted diseases'. Likewise, Fiona comments, 'I think there is too much freedom with sex nowadays they're sort of promoting it on telly sort of you know use condoms all these sexually transmitted diseases'. Thus, the view that sexual freedom is linked with an increase in sexually transmitted diseases arises from an exposure to these ideas through media. That we are exposed more to these ideas and are now aware of the spread of STIs does not necessarily indicate, however, that the incidence of these diseases is increasing; rather our knowledge and their representation grows.

Fine and McClelland (2006) notice that over the last few years sex has become splashed across contemporary culture and yet, despite desire now being loudly displayed, it is simultaneously silent. Sex has become so pervasive in our culture that it has become unreal; it is no longer the real thing but a mere reflection. Thus

sex itself has become silenced while adults try to protect children's innocence and sex education is tightly regulated (Stevi Jackson, 2007). A few participants recognised the increased emphasis on sexual imagery and Fiona comments, 'it's just everywhere it's just advertised all the time as well'. The media highlight certain aspects of sexuality such as promiscuity and STIs while silencing features such as desire.

Penny views sexual freedom as 'promiscuity' and causing unhappiness, 'a lot more people just don't seem happy in one night stands' and this view is repeated by Rebecca and Lauren. One night stands are viewed as lacking in physical intimacy and are, therefore, a less satisfying sexual experience and will make the participants involved unhappy. For Eva, the emotional effects of sexual freedom are even greater, 'I find it intimidating and sordid and difficult and I think it fucks everything up it really does it messes people's emotions and hormones'. Despite a previously active sexual life, Eva has renounced her old ways and goes on to describe how she has been hurt by her experiences. Sexual freedom is perceived to be at odds with emotional well-being. The consequences of fleeting sexual experiences are too detrimental to one's mental health to outweigh the potential pleasures.

Tolman (2002) talks at length about dangers of desire, explaining that women's sexuality holds a fundamental contradiction: 'It involves both pleasure and danger' (2002: 80). As Tolman comments, the representation and teaching of adolescent sexuality most often focuses on the dangers and risks involved rather than the pleasures. It is therefore unsurprising that this reflects the main topic in interviewees' discussions of sexuality. Holland et al. (1998b) state that the privileging of masculinity and male desire results in women often having little control over their sexuality and sexual encounters. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that the more a young woman adheres to feminine ideologies, the less likely she is to demonstrate sexual autonomy, the more disempowered she will feel, and the less safe she will be in sexual relationships (Levine, 2002; Holland et al., 1998b).

Another perceived negative consequence of sexual freedom was the pressure to live up to the promises of such freedom. As Elizabeth articulates, this is the mentality of 'oh crap is that what I've got to do' after seeing media representations of sexuality. For Hermione, this pressure means the age of first sexual activity is becoming increasingly younger, with 'a lot more going on' among young teenagers of 14, 15 and 16. Again this pressure is related to an increased exposure to sex, that has made the topic acceptable in daily conversations for school pupils. It is perceived that sexual freedom has created a large amount of emotional distress as it is contradictory to notions of 'happy' relationships.

As well as focusing on the dangers already discussed, this group of women were also concerned about the 'risk' of pregnancy, their state of mind, that they were 'safe' (Mandy) and 'careful' (Michelle and Rebecca). Freedom was, on the whole, seen as a good thing as long as these conditions were met and potential dangers were averted, such as emotional hurt. Claire, Eleanor, Hermione and Michelle, share this view: 'I'm all for the idea of people being free to do as they please as long as no one else gets hurt in the process' (Claire). By expressing this view repeatedly, these participants make the common assumption that it is all too easy to be hurt or hurt someone else in sexual liaisons. Therefore, any notion that the main focus of sex is now on pleasure is far from accurate when the most prevalent view among my participants was a focus on freedom from hurt.

The various dangers discussed throughout conversations with participants in relation to a greater freedom of sexuality, highlights the limited impact of the notion of 'plastic sexuality' (Giddens, 1992) among these young women. Sex was exclusively talked about in a heterosexual frame with no consideration given to homosexual practises. Thus, sex has not been freed from reproduction as the constant depictions of teenage pregnancy rates and calls for 'safe' (heterosexual) sex remind us. On the contrary, increased sexual freedom has rather heightened the link between sex and reproduction and young women's concerns about becoming pregnant. The importance of this 'safety' discourse becomes paramount as women can no longer rely on access to more traditional routes out of unwanted

sex (see Houts, 2005). Sexual freedom must be welcomed but because femininity is traditionally at odds with desire and active sexuality (Tolman 2002; Levine, 2002; Holland et al., 1998b), women are hesitant in fully embracing it, highlighting its dangers, focusing on emotional well-being, and creating a variety of conditions dependent on safety that restrict their need to be entirely sexually free. This view is supported by Sue Jackson (2005a) who suggests that young people are not as rampantly sexually active as might be portrayed by the media. Rather young people are demonstrating a more considered, hesitant approach to sex as they try to negotiate their desire, the dangers involved, and ensure the necessary conditions are in place for 'safe', 'consensual' sex. Since my sample demonstrates a high level of safety in sexual relationships, this may suggest that feminine ideologies are changing and developing to include safe sex practises and personal choice. This is perhaps not surprising given the prolonged and concentrated focus of public policy and media on decreasing the numbers of teenage pregnancies and containing the spread of STIs.

A freeing of sexuality has also freed women from unsatisfactory sexual partnerships, it has increased awareness of sex, knowledge of what to expect, and given young women a voice within sexual relations. Seven of the 23 participants mentioned personal choice in engaging in sexual activity (Houts, 2005; Tolman, 2002; Allen, 2003). One participant, Eleanor, talks about sexual freedom and choice in terms of human rights, 'I think there has to be that freedom because you have to have an individual choice otherwise it's an infringement of human rights really'. Individual choice for sexuality has become rhetoric of human rights discourses. Adele also mentions agency in discussing short term sexual relationships, she comments, 'I think it's fine if [...] the person feels OK with it, it's I mean it's personal choice isn't it really I mean it's not something I would really do or want'. Adele can see that it is a personal choice to engage in unrestricted sexual relations but she chooses to refrain from doing so, highlighting the issue of accepting sexual freedom as a concept while not accepting it as a way of life

A minority of participants had been through periods in their lives where they had

conducted numerous sexual relationships (Eva, Lauren and Mandy), but all now reject that lifestyle and talk about it as an unhappy period. Other participants who advocate sexual freedom do so in theory but do not live the stereotypical lives of sexual flings, one night stands and purely sexual relationships. This is perhaps because as Christian-Smith (1993a, 1993b) notes, through magazines and romance novels (as well as other media) women are encouraged to combine love with lust and so feel they should only have sex in loving relationships. Thus, as the connection between love and sex is eroded and young women explore their sexual freedom, the connection is at the same time maintained as women are told to explore this sexuality within a loving, committed and emotionally 'safe' partnership.

Sex is viewed as a special activity, significant for those involved and bound up with emotions and feelings. Thus, sex has a social and moral significance, which all participants appear to endorse, and leads to a policing of each other's sexual activities. Sex is set up as a special activity (for women in particular) and this special status inhibits the enjoyment of total sexual freedom. Alice says, 'it's just something to be special isn't it and people don't really treat it like that any more'. Similarly, Lauren comments, 'I think a lot of people having sex who don't appreciate what it is or what they're doing and they're maybe just doing it for the sake of it and that does seem to be a shame'. The increased exposure of sex gives the impression that people are having sex for the sake of it and it is not treated as a special act any more.

The perceived 'specialness' of sex implies that these women do not endorse sexual promiscuity. This view is reinforced when participants have recourse to biological notions of gender differences and sex roles. The idea that sex is more of a risk for a woman because it is she who ends up impregnated, was highlighted by a number of participants. It is assumed therefore, that sexual behaviour is biologically determined because of this link between sex and reproduction (Sharpe, 2004). Although this link is no longer appropriate, it is still commonly considered that sex is a 'natural' biological imperative for the continuation of the species and sexual behaviours are seen to be determined by biology. In addition,

the 'risk' of pregnancy is clearly still on many women's minds, which highlights how far we are from plastic sexuality where women can have sex free from reproduction concerns.

This biological link also extends to gendered emotion management. Eleanor comments,

> I suspect that women seem to get feel more of an emotional attachment than men do men just seem to, seem to be able to walk away much more easily and women seem to be the ones that get more messed up by it.

Alice talks in a similar vein: 'women I think get more I think we are more emotional with our hormones and everything anyway it's a whole different thing but I think we get more attached'. In sexual relationships, women are viewed as being more emotional than men and as becoming more attached to the relationship through having sex. Again, this view may be formed through biological discourses. Men are viewed as needing to 'sow their wild oats', while women and their 'hormones' become attached to men because of a 'basic human instinct that says I need to have a mate' (Eleanor). Lees (1997) explains that female sexual desire is linked with negative emotions and consequences; attachment and pregnancy; whereas male desire is seen at natural. This view is also very likely influenced by traditional discourses of women and relationships. According to Allen (2003), these discourses assert that women want love, are passive and vulnerable while men just want sex. In addition, Chung (2005) found that young people view heterosexual relationships as involving rational men and emotional women. Women are supposed to be the ones forming the emotional attachment.

A prevailing tension remains between the expectation for women to openly desire, and the still common use of sexual judgements, stereotypes and name-calling. Women are still objectified; their sexuality judged by the clothes they wear and how many sexual partners they have had. It is not surprising, therefore, that few women embraced more sexually free lifestyles, considering the messy negotiation

of sexuality, femininity and respectability involved. This lifestyle was deemed as acceptable for some people but 'I'm not really interested about going out having one night stands that kind of thing' (Penny); Abigail, Adele and Catriona agree. Throughout accounts, participants distance their own actions from how others are perceived to behave. This theme re-emerges here as participants deem sexual freedom as acceptable for 'others' but not for themselves. This self/other divide could be used in this context to allow an individual to hold contradictory beliefs; sexual freedom should be accepted and celebrated but traditional femininity does not account for agentic sexual activity. This distinction allows participants to express the accepted view that sexual freedom is good, while rejecting this freedom for themselves and maintaining traditionally feminine ideas of sexual moderation. Thus, by simultaneously over-saturating images of sex and silencing sex discussions, and by retaining discourses of danger, society steers women into more acceptable forms of sexual behaviour and loving relationships that will eventually lead to marriage: the most controlled sexual environment of all.

4.7 YOUNG MOTHERS, YOUNG WIVES

Most respondents wanted to have children and most of these wanted to be married prior to giving birth. Concurrent with this wish to have children was the additional desire to not be an older mother. The desire to have children at a younger rather than older age is positioned within a common discourse claiming women are now choosing to have children later in life. For at least seven participants, there was a reaction against this older motherhood and these participants would aim to have children when young (under the age of 35). This reaction has a consequence on the rates and ages of women marrying since marriage is considered essential before having children, and if they are desiring children when young, then they are hoping to marry even younger. Wanting to be a young mother was, for a few, prioritised even above being married. This position is characterised by Alice (age 25) who wants to be married before having children but recognises that as she is now single and does not want to be 'too old' when she has children, then children might in fact come before marriage.

Reasons for the desire to be younger mothers vary from associating active parenting with being younger to the increase in birth defects in children of older parents. Eleanor and Grace believe that being a younger mother would mean being able to 'run around with my children and and play with them' (Eleanor) and 'play with all their toys' (Grace). The view is that the older one grows, the less active one becomes and less involved, or less able to be involved, in the physical lives of children. Other participants were unable to give reasons why they wanted to be younger mothers, perhaps supporting the idea that this is simply a backlash against the rising age at childbirth, and the increasingly prevalent media stories of women needing IVF treatments or leaving conception too late in life because they have prioritised their careers. This is enacted against numerous accounts in the media of teenage pregnancies and ways of tackling the epidemic of single teenage mothers. Therefore, the women I interviewed wanted children when young but not too young, a common consensus being before or not long after turning 30: 'I do want children before I'm maybe 30' (Catriona), 'I don't want to wait until I'm much past 30 to be having kids' (Michelle), 'I'd like to be having kids by the time I'm in my early 30s' (Eva).

This desire to have children younger and consequently marry younger, should have had the effect of lowering the average age of women at first marriage. My sample, however, does not reflect what is currently known about recent social trends. The survey Social Trends 39 (2009), reports that in 2006, 26 per cent of all conceptions were to women between ages 25-29, very closely followed by the age group 30-34 (24 per cent). The average age at childbirth for all *first* births was 27 in 2007; close to the desired age at first birth outlined by my participants. Nevertheless, the age at first marriage appears to remain high, the latest statistics (Social Trends 39) reporting 29.7 for women and 31.8 years for men (56 per cent of conceptions occurred outside of marriage in 2006; a circumstance not attractive to a large proportion of participants). A majority of participants want to marry and to do so in their twenties, albeit late rather than early twenties, and want to have children soon after. These statistics do not entirely reflect the trends in my research, which demonstrate at least a desire to marry younger. Claire (age 24), Abigail (age 21), Penny (age 27), Elizabeth (age 25), and Susan (age 20) were all

engaged at the time of the interview and Grace (age 24), Eleanor (age 26), Ruth (age 27) and Lucy (age 30) married shortly afterwards. In addition, Fiona (age 23, married for two months), Hermione (age 29, married for seven years) and Mandy (age 30, married for two years) had all married at a fairly young age. Therefore, while it is possible that these women are simply unusual and do not represent the majority of women at this age, these findings may also be indicative of an emerging trend to marry, or desire to be married, at a younger age.

4.8   CONCLUSION

Thus, women desire marriage in order to have children and to do so at a fairly young age. This is a common response but often for different, varied reasons. Most importantly, marriage is seen as a stable and secure environment in which to raise children, the children can see their parents are married and supposedly feel more secure and stable. Yet, marriage is pragmatic as well as a purportedly superior relationship in which to raise children. There are ethical and moral issues with regard to marriage being the right thing to do for children but it is also more convenient for the parents who are able to rely on each other for support, take each other's availability for granted, and take shared rather than sole responsibility for the child care.

Marriage is also an assumption made by young women who do not question the fact that one day they will marry. It is seen as a natural stage and stepping stone in life that should not be missed. Women are hoping for the security and safety of marriage in an increasingly individualistic and uncertain culture. It is clear from accounts that there remains a longing for close and intimate ties with another although independence in this relationship is also valued. Moreover, women take this formation of bonds for granted since they are perceived by many to be ordained by nature, a natural and biological imperative for the continuation of the species. These views are, however, tempered by more common sense assumptions regarding behaviour and biological reasons are never used alone to justify attitudes. This leads to the emergence of a new type of nativism apparent in women's discourse: a combining of scientific, religious and common sense

notions that inform beliefs.

This combination of different perspectives is also apparent in women's conceptualisation of fairy tale romance alongside more pragmatic notions of marriage and weddings. While fairy tale ideas were talked about by some participants, more mentioned practical reasons for marrying such as security (financial as well as emotional), stability, and marriage providing the best family base in which to raise children. Moreover, marriage offers a safe space in which women can express their sexuality and desire without fear of the associated dangers of STIs, damaging mental health, sexual stereotyping and unwanted pregnancy. Thus, marriage is desired because it is assumed, traditional, natural, and 'normal'; not to marry is undesirable and abnormal, socially unacceptable. It offers close ties as well as the opportunity to develop individuality. It is biologically natural and makes sense as the best relationship form. Marriage is romantic and sensible, practical and natural, traditional and modern; a step that many young women expect, without question, to take in their lives.

5.   THE CURIOUS ABSENCE OF LOVE

5.1   INTRODUCTION

While marriage was often viewed as 'natural' and 'normal', love was also used to justify the institution. Every participant I spoke to had something to say about love and marriage; commitment and relationships could not be discussed without some mention of love, loving or being in love. This perhaps is not surprising, since love is a pervasive theme in modern media, literature and advertising. As Stevi Jackson notes, love is a central concept to 'familial ideology, to the maintenance of heterosexual monogamy and patriarchal marriage' (1993: 202), so it is bound to be discussed by women talking about relationships and marriage. Yet when asked to tell me about their relationships, there was an absence of *falling* in love stories and almost no one recounted the romantic vision of falling 'head over heels' in love with their partner. In this chapter I will explore the ways in which young women talk about love, how they try to define it, what different types of love exist for them, and how these women have experienced the nature of love. This analysis will be framed by wider discussions on love such as Giddens' (1992) theory of confluent and romantic love, the transcendental nature of love expressed by Giddens (1992), Langford (1999), and Beauvoir (1997), and the modern Western paradox of love highlighted by Hochschild (2003).

Discussion begins with a focus on the disparity between romantic love and confluent love, with a mixture of both emerging in participants' talk. This is followed by an examination of the absence of stories of romantic love spontaneously introduced by participants, with reasons for this omission explored including 'it just happened' stories and the drift into love relationships. This drift into and out of love leads onto debates concerning love in retrospect, and how and why love is denied in past relationships. Considering the variety of love stories told, the next section deals with different types of love, the contrast between loving someone and being in love, unhealthy love and love between friends and family. The focus then shifts to the meaning of love as defined by participants, whether it is viewed in a more or less romantic light, its relationship with

commitment, and how love changes over time. This chapter finishes by linking love and marriage and debating how closely these are bound in participants' notions of relationships. Whether love alone is enough for a marriage, if love is a precondition for marriage or vice versa and the extent to which love is a legitimating ideology for marriage, are concepts discussed here.

5.2   ROMANTIC LOVE OR CONFLUENT LOVE?

Although love and marriage are almost exclusively portrayed as going hand in hand, in talking about marriage and relationships, very few participants discussed love at length before being prompted to do so. Whether this was because they were embarrassed to talk to a stranger about love or because it was unimportant for their relationship accounts is unclear. When I did ask what they thought love was, I was met with many confused or blank faces. A large number had difficulty describing what they thought love was, what it entailed, and what it meant for a relationship. Alice seemed very confused about her previous relationships and was uncertain whether she was in love or not, 'I don't really I think the last one I was with I did really like him maybe I loved him I don't know but I don't know if you ever really know what love is'. Another unsure participant was Eva who comments, 'the amount of times I've thought I was in love with a man um a huge amount of times [...] but real love I don't know whether I've experienced it I don't know'. There is a great deal of uncertainty when it comes to love, probably because it is so widely discussed and considered to be such an important part of life for women today. Love is held up to be salvation for both sexes, although perhaps more so for women. This unknowing of love, its perceived indefinable, unquantifiable nature is, according to Stevi Jackson, the romantic convention that 'tells us that love is in essence indefinable, mysterious, outside rational discourse' (1993: 206-7). Love, we are told, cannot be communicated in precise terms, it is beyond expression. This mystical nature of love accords it 'a special legitimacy by placing it on some higher plane inaccessible to reason or explanation' (1993: 208) and serves to reinforce the transcendental nature of love; equating it to a form of religion.

While none of my participants spoke about love with great religious fervour, for some it did seem to represent a form of personal salvation. For Abigail, love involves 'respect and kind of worship the grounds about your loved one'. Worshipping a loved one has some resonance with Beauvoir's suggestion that women gain subjectivity through their transcendence, a woman, 'chooses to desire her enslavement so ardently that it will seem to her the expression of her liberty; [...] she will humble herself to nothingness before him. Love becomes for her a religion' (1997: 653). Abigail's idea of worshipping the grounds around her loved one fits in with Beauvoir's concept of humbling herself and experiencing love as a religion. Yet the love Beauvoir talks about seems disconnected from the love experienced by most of the participants interviewed. Classic feminist scholars see love as experienced differently for men and women (Beauvoir, 1997; Firestone, 1971; Cancian, 1987) and for Beauvoir, while men remain sovereign subjects throughout loving relationships, for women 'to love is to relinquish everything for the benefit of a master' (1997: 653). For Firestone (1971), there is a difference in loving between the sexes: 'women are monogamous, better at loving, possessive, "clinging," more interested in (highly involved) "relationships" than in sex per se, and they confuse affection with sexual desire' (1971: 152). On the other hand, 'men are interested in nothing but a screw (Wham, bam, thank you M'am!), or else romanticize the woman ridiculously; that once sure of her, they become notorious philanderers, never satisfied' (1971: 152). I would argue, however, that this view of love is not sanctioned by interviewees. There is far more talk now of equality in loving and in relationships and few (if any) participants would view themselves as relinquishing themselves for their partners. In addition, the differences in loving highlighted by Firestone do not seem to be wholly relevant for young women today, and few participants reported this situation in current or previous partnerships.

Yet, some of this ground-breaking classical theorising is still highly useful and important today. Comer's (1974) analysis of marriage, in particular, remains significant in relation to the prioritising of this family relation above any other. Comer's discussion of love is enlightening and her idea of using love as a legitimating ideology for marriage still holds strong: 'So that sex is legitimized, so

that attraction and warmth and affection can be called "love", which can then be parcelled into marriage and one woman and one man come to symbolise an *institution*' (1974: 220 emphasis in original). Comer also talks about the unrealistically high expectations that are brought to marriage and among these, the existence of a hope of finding personal salvation, for 'If we didn't expect to find personal salvation through married love we wouldn't be disappointed in not finding it' (1974: 224).

This idealistic notion of love as a form of salvation or transcendence is also apparent in some of the women's discourse. Elizabeth talks about love as 'wanting to be the best for the other person [...] help I suppose bring out the potential'. Love helps individuals to become better people (as religion intends), falling in love 'constitutes a personal and social revolution' (Langford, 1999: 24) and can provide personal salvation (Weber in Stevi Jackson, 1993). This notion of love as transcendental, implies a romantic interpretation of love, that of all-consuming love, overcoming all obstacles love (Stevi Jackson, 1993), yet Elizabeth and Abigail also talk about pragmatic aspects of love. Abigail says that love is 'about caring for someone and having someone care for you and love you no matter what'. Caring for someone is beyond traditional romantic notions of falling in love (which fit in with transcendental love); it implies a practical and mutual arrangement. This mutuality is also expressed by Elizabeth who comments,

> He helps me to be happy...and I make him happy [...] Mark will be the one who's telling me you can do that you know you can do that or I'll be the one trying to point out to him how well he's doing when he's having a low point.

This mutuality of the nature of the love relationship jars with the traditional romantic notion of love that views love as an unequal power relation between men and women produced through society and culture. Rather, this notion of a practical and mutual love is more in line with Giddens' (1992) concept of confluent love.

Confluent love involves 'opening oneself out to the other' (Giddens, 1992: 61), and is an active and contingent love that is always in flux. This love, therefore, clashes with a romantic view of love that, according to Giddens, presumes a one-and-only and forever quality to the relationship. Confluent love also assumes a level of equality in emotional care and the more equal a relationship is, the closer it is to a pure relationship. This mutuality of emotional give and take is apparent in Elizabeth's comment above and comes out in other participants' narratives when they talk about caring for each other and having someone to love them. In addition, the notion of opening oneself out to the other is also a common theme running throughout the love stories. Susan in particular emphasises this point, commenting that love is:

> ..being able to accept someone fully [...] you understand them you know what is going to upset them and you know what makes them laugh [...] understanding I think is important and knowing someone I think goes a big way to loving them and knowing like silly little things like what their favourite meal is or how they like their coffee.

This level of intimacy described above must reflect Giddens' concept of 'opening oneself out to the other', knowing each other fully, and this then implies that the love Susan is talking about is confluent love.

However, Susan was engaged to be married at the time of interviewing and so, despite her account matching ideas of confluent love, she asserts that this love is forever and one and only; a more romantic vision. Romantic love is defined by Giddens (1992) as opposite to confluent love, it is fixed and will last forever. Ideally, romantic love is egalitarian but in reality it has great inequalities of power in the relationship. Stevi Jackson (1995) has a slightly different take on romantic love and sees this as hinging on the idea of falling in love; falling in love is associated with obstacles to overcome and insecurities this creates. Therefore, this form of romantic love is felt more in the beginning of relationships or in short term relationships. This also creates the distinction between being 'in love' which

relates to romantic love felt in the early stages of relationships, and loving someone which is a less romantic and more long lasting type of love. This distinction is also expressed by Hendrick and Hendrick (1992), who divide love into passionate and companionate love. Passionate love is that felt at the beginning of a relationship, 'the flame that consumes two people' (1992: 48), whereas companionate love, 'is the glowing embers that endure when the dramatic flame has subsided' (1992: 48). Although categories vary, it is clear that most theorists agree that there is a divide between love felt in the early stages of a relationship and that experienced in a long term partnership.

Romantic love, as defined by Stevi Jackson (1993; 1995), was talked about by seven participants. Rebecca thinks she has never been in love but when she does fall in love she imagines it will be like 'when you're just not interested in meeting... you know another relationship you know you settle like the in back of your head you're planning like wanting a future'. Love will be all consuming; she will not be interested in anyone else and desires a long term future. It is probable that Rebecca conceives of this type of love as the ideal because of the pervasiveness of romantically being in love or falling in love stories. Love stories generally narrate the falling in love part rather than the more mundane loving relationship that develops over a number of years. Mandy talks about romantic love when she first fell in love 'where it actually hurt and you're confused by it' but this was only felt in the first throes of love; in her long term relationship now, 'love is not confusing no it's very um embedded and very comfortable'. This would support Stevi Jackson's and others' assertion that romantic love, or passionate love, occurs more at the beginning of relationships and fades to a different type of love as the relationship progresses.

This initial feeling is also expressed by Ruth who explains that when she first met her partner, 'I didn't want to be at work 'cause I couldn't concentrate and it was very kind of overwhelming and overbearing I couldn't stop thinking about him', a very clear description of falling in love. Yet, she goes on to say 'you just wouldn't be able to live life like that um but in a way that's not love I don't think, that's kind of lust' so while others might differentiate this as falling in love rather than

loving, Ruth does not define this as a type of love at all but rather as lust. In addition, this overwhelming lust is only felt in the beginning of a relationship: 'I think it's only when you get to know someone that you really know you have an attachment that there's actually love there'. Michelle also talks about romantic, all-consuming love and this is in the context of relationships conducted at a younger age. Michelle says,

> You never fall in love like you do when you're a teenager 'cause everything is so important when you're that age you don't have perspective like you have now [...] it's all consuming when you're that age, there's never been anything in life that's ever been more important.

Yet, when you become an adult, you gain perspective, and love becomes more rational and considered.

From the examples given above, it seems that the young women's love lives are characterised by a mixture of confluent and romantic love, the two are not mutually exclusive as Giddens (1992) suggests. This hybrid love residing between romantic and confluent love may be a result of the way in which Giddens sets up romantic love. Giddens' definition of romantic love is a very narrow one, as fixed and lasting forever. If these constraints do not apply then the love involved must be confluent love. It is likely however, that love is a much more fluid construct and does not adhere to these strict prescriptions, either fixed or contingent. Rather than confluent love becoming more common because romantic, fixed love is less popular, this is instead a result of the narrow definition Giddens imposes on love. Since love is more complex than these simplified categories, respondents' discussions inevitably involved a mixture of confluent and romantic ideas. In addition, confluent love in the sense of companionate love, characterising the bond between friends, has been around for longer than Giddens suggests. Rather than this type of love emerging as a result of modern relationships and a transformation of intimacy, it has existed in some form or another in friendships and partnerships for many generations (see Seidman, 1991).

Nevertheless, the traditional idea of romantic, one and only, forever love is very much still present today and still of great importance for the young women interviewed. Bauman (2003) believes that love as 'till death do us part' is out of fashion and love now is represented by short flings and one night stands. Nevertheless, those marrying were relying upon a forever love attachment. For example, Susan, who demonstrates a desire for equality in emotional give and take in her relationship, also expressed a wish for forever love in her decision to marry her partner and a desire to stay together for life. Therefore, rather than confluent love replacing romantic love in modern partnerships as Giddens would have it, some aspects of confluent love, such as equality and opening out oneself to another (intimacy) are becoming incorporated into a more traditional view of love as long-lasting.

Giddens believes that in modern times, romantic love has fragmented under 'the pressure of female sexual emancipation and autonomy' (Giddens, 1992: 61). However, while certain elements of romantic love such as inequalities of power in the relationships and love being the responsibility of the wife to maintain have diminished, for my participants, the essential elements remain paramount. The effect of female emancipation, gathered from my participants, has been to transform the nature of love so that rather than confluent love emerging as the alternative to Giddens' romantic love, they are more convergent and aspects of both intertwine to create a new distinct style of love.

Hendrick and Hendrick (1992) cite Sprecher and Metts (1989) who view the romantic ideal of love as involving five beliefs:

1. Love at first sight
2. There is only one "true love" for each person
3. Love conquers all
4. True love is absolutely perfect
5. We should choose a partner for "love" rather than for other (more practical) reasons. (Hendrick and Hendrick, 1992: 61)

Some aspects of these beliefs are present for the young women interviewed. The

idea of love at first sight is expressed by Fiona who comments she knew she wanted to spend her life with her partner from the first few occasions of meeting him. Love conquering all and overcoming obstacles is another idea expressed by Grace and Claire. In addition, participants are keen to express their decision to marry in terms of love rather than more practical and 'cynical' reasons for marrying. Yet participants were also pragmatic about love and all participants who were in long term relationships expressed a mixture of romantic ideals such as those identified above and more down to earth ideas of what the love relationship involved.

Despite the distinction between confluent and romantic love appearing blurred, it is apparent that participants upheld the distinction between falling in love and being in love, passionate and companionate love. The romantic notion of falling in love is certainly viewed by some as separate from the idea of loving someone in a long term relationship. The only participants to whom this distinction was perhaps not so clear were those who had yet to experience love. Having said this, however, Eva, who explains that she has never really been in love, imagines different sorts of love:

> ..falling in love with someone and it's passionate and we're lovers [...]
> and then there's the more kind of like almost like a love business kind
> of thing [...] it's a practical love as well it would be nice if those two
> could conjoin.

The conjoining of passionate love and practical love, as Eva describes it, is exactly the type of love participants talk about in their own relationships and visualise as the ideal. This quote represents the desire for passionate love and the need for a more practical love. While each could exist without the other, the ideal is the joining of the two in one relationship. This joining of passionate love and practical love often comes about when a couple are friends prior to dating, and can drift into a more romantic relationship.

Cancian (1987) views this distinction between passionate love and practical love

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as the difference between feminine and masculine aspects of love. According to Cancian, the female concept of love is that most regularly identified as love, and this is associated with 'emotional expression and talking about feelings' (1987: 69), while men prefer the more practical side of love, 'such as providing help, sharing activities, and sex' (1987: 69). From participants' responses, however, this distinction is less clear and many women talk about the practical side of love as well as the emotions involved. A difference may still exist, on the other hand, in the form that the practical assistance takes. The women talked frequently about caring and supporting their partner emotionally, which could fall under a more feminised definition of masculine love, whereas men may focus more on actual physical help and support.

5.3   ABSENCE OF LOVE STORIES: THE DRIFT INTO RELATIONSHIPS

This practical aspect was also reflected in participants' accounts of love, and when asked about relationships, they more often talked about a drift into their partnership rather than telling grand stories of falling in love. Participants were more likely to recount, date by date, a history of their romantic encounters, when asked, rather than narrating their relationships in terms of romantic or passionate love. Participants talked about their relationships in a very matter of fact and pragmatic way as though they had complete control over their love lives. However, there are also discourses of relationships being beyond control and certain events just happening. This may reflect the confusing nature of relationships and women's agency within them. The question remains whether it is acceptable for women to take control in relationships or if this should still be left to the male partner.

Six women talked about being in a loving relationship that had ended before the interview took place. Of course it is easy to be wise in hindsight and many of the women did this, justifying why they had become a couple in the first instance, or why it had gone wrong. Nevertheless, the story of becoming a couple never reflected a romantic, love at first sight discourse. Amy describes the process as follows:

I think the first reason we got together was because like one of my best friends and one of his best friends were in a couple and *it just kind of happened* um and then yeah it just kind of went on from there' (emphasis added).

Amy talks about this as though she did not make the conscious decision to date, but it happened anyway. This idea of 'it just happened' is also discussed by Tolman (2005) in her conversations with girls about their sexuality.

Tolman found that a common explanation for how they have come to have sex is that it 'just happened'. This can be viewed as 'one of the few acceptable ways available to adolescent girls for making sense of and describing their sexual experiences' (Tolman, 2005: 2). Thus, when framed in this way, 'it is one of the few decent stories that a girl can tell' about sexual experience (2005: 2). This way of explaining certain behaviour is seen as a cover story, hiding desire, active choice, agency and responsibility for the behaviour. In terms of sexuality, this is an unhealthy discourse, maintaining the notion that sexual stories need to be covered and ignoring 'the ways in which girls are under systematic pressure not to feel, know, or act on their sexual desire' (2005: 3). Applying this framework to discourses of falling in love may, however, create a slightly different interpretation.

Using 'it just happened' to describe how she started dating her past boyfriend could also be employing the cover story, not wishing to expose her desire to date or desire to have a boyfriend. It may also be Amy's method of making sense of what happened, the gradual drift into a relationship. She goes on to say that she was in love in this relationship so she talks about strong feelings towards her partner but rather than directly expressing these emotions to me initially, she uses the cover of it just happening. It is perhaps an easy way of describing the events, not having to remember too clearly what happened and may have been used to prevent dragging up memories from the past. The use of 'it went on from there' also seems to be another implementation of a cover story. She talks about being

in love and committed in the relationship but this only became apparent when I asked direct questions about love and commitment. The brushing off of emotion, desire, and love is interesting and could be interpreted as an elaborate cover story to prevent herself from revealing her innermost desires or could have been utilised because she was too shy to explain her emotions to a researcher or stranger.

Most participants talking about previous relationships do not go into detail about the beginning of the relationship, how they got together, whether they fell in love and so on. Shirley, however, goes into a little more detail than others. In contrast to Amy, Shirley talks about entering relationships through conscious choice. When talking about one relationship, she comments, 'again I entered into that not expecting it to be anything too much saying I wanted it to be casual and it just kind of developed from there'. This relationship developed to the point of talking about marriage and yet Shirley never mentions love when discussing this partnership. Saying 'it just kind of developed from there' is perhaps another example of covering up the emotions and desires felt in this relationship. Both examples from Shirley and Amy's discourses demonstrate an unwillingness to discuss the process of falling in love and the feelings involved. This may be either on a conscious level of wishing not to discuss it or it may be on a more sub-conscious level. The reluctance to discuss love may be informed by the socially unacceptable nature of discussions on desire or a result of confusing changes in the nature of loving from more romantic notions of falling in love to pragmatic and practical ideas of being in love. On the other hand, it could simply be that the relationships were too casual to be important to them and their accounts of love.

While the women discussed above were talking about previous relationships, women in current relationships, on the whole, talk about falling in love in a similarly ambivalent fashion. Susan talks about a very gradual drift into her current relationship, starting off as friends and 'then we sort of got round to sort of like so you kind of like me then do you um yeah sort of yeah and um and then the rest is history really'. Other than this very common phrase for referring to the development of relationships, the talk is very uncertain, probably reflecting the awkwardness of the moment but also perhaps this framing covers up any desire on

her part that might be deemed unacceptable. Susan goes on to talk about moving in together and becoming engaged soon afterwards but, again, love was not mentioned until I asked about it.

One other example of this is in Lucy's talk: 'we started going out and then it completely massively took off from there'. Again, this notion of 'then everything happened' means that stories of falling in love are missing from the women's discussions. Rather than talking about love and romance and falling in love, the women wait to be asked about these concepts. It is perhaps the nature of my research that they wait to be asked rather than pre-empting the question but it does seem odd that very few people spontaneously discussed love stories without prompting; none told falling in love tales and even when discussing love, some remained reticent.

This absence of love stories may be due to a deficiency in the English language to express love feelings. Hendrick and Hendrick (1992) explain that because our language is so lacking in useful and meaningful ways to express and discuss love, we depend on 'metaphors of love to express love's complexity in daily life' (1992: 3). Kovecses (1991, in Hendrick and Hendrick, 1992), for example, found people expressed love as a unity, such as '"we are one"', or love as insanity, such as '"I'm crazy about you"' (1992: 3). These participants, however, did not use such standard, accepted clichés. Clichés about love and romance have become so commonplace it may be that they are now seen as tacky and in some way diminishing the emotion. Instead, people are employing their own metaphors to describe their emotions. In addition, the traditional clichés described above are highly romanticised, expressing strong statements about love. As these participants seem more down to earth and reticent about displaying overwhelming feelings, it could be that this generation of young women are developing their own, more toned down, metaphors and clichés and thus their own language in which to converse about love. The earlier notion of relationships and falling in love as 'just happening' may be an example of the use of a paraphrase or metaphor being utilised to express the complexity of the emotions experienced by this new generation of young women. However, it may simply be the case that

such metaphors and clichés were used because the respondents found it embarrassing talking to a stranger about such personal and complex feelings as love.

Another metaphor used commonly in the participants discourses was the idea of 'waking up' to love. Eleanor comments, 'about a month ago I suddenly woke up and I just thought I'm in love with you and I thought I was before that point but I just woke up and I just knew'. Whether Eleanor physically woke up from sleeping and knew she was in love or not is unimportant. The use of the 'waking up' metaphor here may be to explain the inexplicable change in her love emotions from one day to the next. This is used in a similar way by Catriona who says,

> I think it develops all the time one day you wake up and you think oh yeah like I really care 'cause say you're worried about someone say you're like someone's on a long trip and you worry and that shows that you love someone.

Again, Catriona is not necessarily referring to awaking from sleep but waking up to the emotions she expresses she is feeling. This metaphor of 'waking up' to emotions enables participants to explain the sudden realisation of love for a partner without having to give a detailed account of why or how this change in their feelings came about.

Together with the use of love metaphors and cover stories, there is a distinct absence of falling in love narratives in the interviewees' accounts. This is highlighted by the common use of 'and the rest is history' catch phrase as well as 'it just happened' explanation for entering a relationship. They also encapsulate the emerging impression that there is a propensity to drift into relationships rather than taking the active decision to become a couple. This notion is expressed most eloquently by Mandy who explains:

> We're really like just best mates um but got together 'cause we got together in a club and did a lot of growing up together and so it's

never really sort of been it's never been a conscious decision really

[...] it wasn't really like a whirlwind romance.

It was never a conscious decision of Mandy's to enter a relationship or maintain a relationship, she drifted into one and love, romance, and desire grew from there. The idea of a whirlwind romance, while the most commonly depicted in every form of media, is not the type of romantic relationship experienced by the majority of my participants. Rather, they have experienced falling in love through drifting into relationships, becoming friends and then redefining the relationship or setting out with low expectations only to find love unexpectedly.

It is possible that the drift into relationships is talked about more in terms of past relationships where the initial stages of meeting have ceased to be important. However, as seen above, some participants did also use this explanation for their current relationships and more did so than used a typical romantic 'love at first sight' narrative. This idea of drifting into a relationship is perhaps more apparent now than in the past because of increasingly less formalised courtship processes. Wouters (2004) has documented changing courting regimes over the previous century. In as late as 1992, the advice in etiquette handbooks indicates that dating was still very much formalised, with strict gender roles outlined, including the male responsibilities for contraception and paying the bill on a date (Wouters, 2004). Even this, however was relaxed in comparison with the extremely strict rules of the late Nineteenth Century necessitating the use of chaperones and formal introductions. Yet rules did become increasing fluid, as young people came to the forefront of social relations after the Second World War and social conventions were revitalised. Gradually it became acceptable for women to initiate contact with men and sex became more central to ideas on dating and relationships before marriage. For many young people now, even the word 'dating' seems old fashioned. Rather than going out on 'dates', couples come together within groups of friends or meet regularly on nights out with friends. Thus, a pair gradually grows closer as the intensity develops and although no formal courtship process has occurred, they find themselves in an established relationship. Moreover, this talk of drifting into relationships may be used as a

cover for strong emotions felt but not expressed (to me or to each other initially). A gradual development of a relationship does not imply that the feelings involved are any less powerful, the partners may still be besotted, and it is simply the method of becoming a couple that is more relaxed.

However, there are three participants who differ slightly from this drifting trend. Initially, Fiona describes the beginning stages of her relationship with her husband: 'I didn't see a lot of him um but we just gradually kept meeting up and six months later he sort of proposed'. A very superficial, minimal description of falling in love. However, when questioned further on the nature of her love for her partner she elaborated: 'I just instantly I kind of knew that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him', not directly talking about love but certainly expressing a more romantic idea about their first meeting. It is possible then, that further questioning on my part would have produced more traditionally romantic responses to questions of love and relationships. I do think this is unlikely, however, as participants were all asked very similar questions and follow up queries. It is more likely that Fiona has a greater romantic vision of her relationship. Whereas other participants drifted into love relationships, resulting in a less romantic, more pragmatic version of events, Fiona very quickly chose to be committed and loving by accepting the marriage proposal, and might therefore, view this as more in line with a whirlwind romance beginning.

In a similar vein, Abigail describes her relationship, 'he's just such a nice caring person really and we just get on really well and...so I'm really looking forward to spending my life with him'. Again there is no direct mention of love, but she does talk about lifelong commitment, which is associated with romantic love. Abigail has been with her fiancé for nine months and he proposed after they had been together for eight months. Abigail is 21 years old and has seen her partner, who works abroad in the army, for around five weeks out of the five months prior to interviewing. Therefore, this situation might be viewed as a more traditional whirlwind romance; this is certainly how Abigail views it:

We're doing it slightly old fashioned like we're getting married and

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then we're going to find a place to live just life's too short really you don't know when your time's up [...] you might as well go for it if you know it's right.

Abigail is still in the initial stages of her relationship and is experiencing romantic love, passionate and all-consuming. She is experiencing the whirlwind romance lacked by others and describes the associated experiences of choosing to marry her fiancé and expressing her desire to be with her partner forever. This is not to say that other participants did not also express this desire in terms of their husbands and partners. The difference is however, Abigail mentions this spontaneously while talking about her relationship whereas others needed more prompting to express such strong desires.

Earlier, Ruth talked about meeting her current partner, explaining that she 'couldn't concentrate' at work and found the whole experience 'overwhelming and overbearing'. This is a clear picture of a typical falling in romantic love story, the all-consuming emotion. However, Ruth does go on to say that for her this is not really love but rather a kind of lust. Love develops later when a couple get to know each other better. While this is a good example of a narrative of emotions at the beginning of a relationship, it cannot be termed a falling in love story because the individual involved did not consider this to be love.

While there are a few examples then, of falling in love narratives, these occur only in specific circumstances or are redefined as falling in lust. This absence may be due to a use of cover stories to hide narratives of desire and passion, because language lacks the appropriate terms to express love emotions, or it may be because there is a greater tendency for couples to drift into relationships and this may be due to a more liberal and free culture generally. It is certainly true that women now have more freedom to begin and end relationships and increasingly more autonomy and opportunity to convert friendships to relationships than just 20 years ago. The career of a relationship has changed now, altering how people negotiate and think about partnerships. Through greater freedom and autonomy, formal courtship procedures have lifted and notions such as a chaperonage and

restrictions on 'petting' now seem ludicrous. Wouters (2004) records this change from very rigid, formalised courtship practises in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries to the more relaxed regulations of today. These more relaxed notions will also have had an impact on the way love is viewed, producing an increasingly sexualised definition of love. In the past, when physical aspects of relationships were more strictly defined, long periods of unfulfilled lust developed, creating a romantic notion of love. Now that experiences of love have changed and sex has become a large part of a loving relationship, the way love is defined has altered. In addition, as even more recent dating procedures have relaxed, there is less expectation that a couple will form following a standard set of behaviours. There are no rules concerning who should ask out whom, dating is not always expected but rather just 'hanging out together' is common, and sex can happen at any stage of the relationship or not at all. Therefore, it is clear to see how drifting into relationships has become increasingly acceptable, easy and common.

Nevertheless, it is also still the case that young women feel they cannot openly and freely discuss sexual relationships, and terms such as slag and slut, used to refer to openly sexual young women, still circulate. Despite this possible constraint in talking about existing intimate relationships, the young women questioned were not hesitant in talking about and reconstructing previous romantic partnerships.

5.4   LOVE IN RETROSPECT: 'I THOUGHT I WAS IN LOVE...'

A feature of discussion that arose in many women's talk was the redefining of love in previous relationships. When looking back at the emotions involved in past partnerships, it was common for the women to denounce their love in the form of 'I thought it was love but…'. Michelle says this about a past relationship: 'I thought I was in love with him and in hindsight it was quite an inappropriate.. very different backgrounds'. Michelle now 'realises' that it was not love at all. Another participant who used retrospective love is Claire who comments, 'maybe I did think he was the one but I don't think I loved him no heh I'm very glad to

say that now'. It is a relief for Claire to be able to say now that she did not love her previous boyfriend, love is happily denounced. These comments imply that love has a powerful impact on the way we see our history and our lives. While these participants may have thought they were in love at the time, it is important for them now to be able to say that it was not love. This may be because the relationships failed and because they were from inappropriate, dissimilar backgrounds or because, in Claire's case, the boyfriend turned out to be cheating. True love for these women cannot be represented by such unsuccessful relationships. They reconstruct their pasts in order to dismiss love as not love at all. This happens because 'real' love is viewed as lasting forever, that romantic, one and only vision of Giddens' and so many others. Since the relationship has subsequently broken down, the feelings felt in the relationship must not have been love. In order to justify this reconstruction of events, participants use strategies such as hindsight or a 'realisation' that it was not love all along. Rather than an actual change in the reality of their emotions, these participants are retrospectively reinterpreting the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of their pasts. In looking back on their history, they reinterpret the situation to fit with their current beliefs about love: that it should be forever and long lasting.

Two participants had other explanations for why they thought they were in love in the past and now 'realise' they were not. Eleanor says, 'I think deep down I always knew we could never live together um but.. but I still thought I was in love with him and would have said yes if he asked me'. This idea of knowing deep down is perhaps another 'realisation' that dawns with hindsight, another retrospective reinterpretation; at the time of the relationship, the participant thinks she is in love and the relationship has a future but talking about it now, she 'realises' that she knew all along that it would not work. It is easy to become caught up in a relationship and the romance of a proposal. Shirley expresses this in her own account, 'I look back now and I think no I really wasn't [in love], that was just me getting swept away by things and just wanting to say it'. Love is said in the heat of the moment and when these women are swept away by the romance of their relationships. Looking back now, despite having said they were in love at the time of the relationship, Eleanor and Shirley now assert that it was not love

and maybe deep down they knew that at the time. As Shirley comments, she wanted to say she was in love at the time because she was swept away by the intensity of the relationship. Similarly, Eleanor talks about intense feelings towards her partner that she now recognises as her own desire to be in a stable relationship rather than feelings for her partner: 'I needed some sense of stability and some sense of support and I think he provided that'. While at the time they may well have been in love, looking back and reinterpreting the situation enables these participants to redefine the situation and justify why they thought they were in love at the time and why they now 'realise' it was not love all along.

Other participants talk about their uncertainty about being in love as a consequence of their young age at the time of the relationship. Helen comments on this, 'when I was 15 I thought it was [love] but then I met the next one and I thought that were [love] and it's just really weird'. Helen is unsure whether she has ever been in love and despite thinking she was in love in her first relationship this was redefined after her second relationship, each time thinking that the previous experience was not love and the current experience was love. This may be due to her young age at the time of these relationships. Lauren comments about her own relationship, 'it was sort of unhealthy…um weird love that you think is love because you're young and you haven't had anything like that before'. Again, this type of love that individuals are not sure whether is 'real' love or not because they are young and do not have any other experiences with which to compare. Young love is often seen as intense but it is also viewed as confusing by these participants who are unsure whether to class this as real love or not. When Rebecca was asked whether she was in love in her first serious relationship she replied,

> I used to really think so yeah but I think it was like a first sort of kind of thing I don't think it was…like what proper love, you know, long term relationships are about, I think it, 'cause we were so young.

For Rebecca then, her first love was not real, proper love, because they were so young. The love experienced by younger people, teenagers, is not considered to

be the same as the type of love experienced by adults in long term relationships. There is a sense that first love cannot be real because of the young age when it is experienced, and because it is the first time these young women have had such feelings.

Hermione and Fiona also talk about love in retrospect, deciding that in previous relationships they cannot have been in love. However, this is expressed slightly differently. For these participants, it is only on meeting their current partners that they 'realise' they were not in love before. When Hermione was asked whether she was in love with her previous partner she responds, 'I thought I was yeah um but meeting Jack…I just thought well no I wasn't as in love as I thought I was um but at the time yeah'. The love she now says she feels for her husband is so different it causes Hermione to redefine her previous ideas on love and what love is. Similarly, Fiona comments about a past relationship,

> At the time I thought that I loved him but since meeting Joseph I just
> think it was just because he was my first really ever proper boyfriend
> […] I realised that it couldn't have been love it just must have been,
> don't know what you would call it, lust or something.

Since meeting her husband, Fiona 'realises' she was not in love before. Again, the love with a first boyfriend is devalued because it is a first time experience and here it is demoted to lust.

Love is a special emotion that is given a very high status, not only by the women in this study but also by wider society. Love is supposed to be a precondition of marriage and marriage is supposed to last forever, therefore, love is supposed to last forever. In addition, the notion of 'one true love' and 'soul mates' perpetuates the idea that we are only supposed to love one person in our lives (preferably our husbands/wives). These notions are often taken-for-granted and their validity is not questioned. Holmes (2004a) notes that the search for a unique love remains important and that if someone believes 'they have found *the one* they might "downgrade" their past loves and declare that (true) love only happens once'

(2004a: 255 emphasis in original). Therefore, it is unsurprising that women in these interviews deny or downgrade the love felt in previous relationships. Love is supposed to last forever and be directed at your 'true love', so for the relationship to then end, this indicates for some people that it was not love all along. Participants try to make 'their lives fit the narratives of romantic love' (Holmes, 2004a: 255), which say that true love happens just once in a lifetime. In addition, the love experienced for a life-long partner or husband must be felt as different for the participants, from the love felt in previous relationships. If this were not the case, there would be nothing setting the current relationship apart as any more special or unique than the individual's previous liaisons. When a couple find 'real' love, all the love experienced before must be an inferior type of love or not love at all. This highlights the possibility that different types of love are perceived to exist, first time love, love in retrospect, real love and so on.

5.5 DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOVE

Some theorists believe there is a difference between loving someone and being in (romantic) love (Stevi Jackson, 1993, 1995; Hendrick and Hendrick, 1992). This idea appeals to Eleanor who comments, 'I think there is a difference between loving somebody and being in love with somebody'. However, while for Stevi Jackson being 'in love' is considered to take place at the beginning of relationships and loving someone to develop in longer term relationships, Eleanor describes her love process in opposite terms. This is how Eleanor explains it:

> You don't know what it is to fall in love, so you're kind of guessing, so you don't really know what any other feelings that you're feeling are, so I think you've kind of.. you keep thinking well, oh well I've got a boyfriend and I really like him and I care for him a lot and I wouldn't want to cheat on him and and we could get a house and we could do this but.. and then you think that you're in love.. um and that's not to say that you don't love them but I think there's a difference between loving somebody and being in love with somebody..and.. I mean I've lived with James for.. about two years

now we've been going out for just over three I think um [...] but I think..about a month ago, I suddenly just woke up and I just thought I'm in love with you, and I thought I was before that point but I just woke up and I just knew.

Before the moment of realisation, Eleanor thought she loved her partner but when she had her epiphany, this was a recognition that she was *in* love with her partner, a state that is ordinarily perceived to occur before the stage of loving a partner. This is perhaps a reflection of the different ways love is viewed now. For some, love has become an easy word to say. This is echoed in Shirley's account. Shirley says,

I used to think that you should only say it to one person in the same way that you know you should only marry one person, if you marry multiple people then somehow it degrades the whole thing um but now when I say it I just mean that I really care about the person and that I feel really strongly for them.

It used to be the case, for Shirley, that to overuse the word love devalued it in some way. Now, however, it has come to mean something different; rather than meaning 'I want to settle down and have babies with them' (Shirley), it means caring and feeling strongly for someone. Perhaps, then, love now is a much more fluid concept and love for friends and love for partners is becoming closer in meaning. The special type of love reserved for one and only partners is being *in* love. In the past being in love was associated with the romantic stage of falling in love at the beginning of a relationship. It is possible that now that 'loving someone' is used more often in many different circumstances, being 'in love' has become the special term used for forever, romantic, long-term bonds. This idea is reflected in Bauman's commentary on love. Bauman (2003) believes that love is more common now but, 'Rather than more people rising to the high standards of love on more occasions, the standards have been lowered; as a result the set of experiences referred to by the love word has expanded enormously' (2003: 5). Therefore, since love and loving is used more frequently in different types of

relationships, the notion of being *in love* is kept apart and separate for true love pairings.

This concept is also brought up in Catriona's account. Catriona has been with her partner for just over a year and talks about love in this way: 'I'm quite maternal with my friends as well boyfriend and that so I feel like I care for my boyfriend in that way and then sort of like I'm in love with him as well'. What sets her love for the partner aside is that she is *in* love with him.

Not only are there different types of love within a romantic relationship, there are also considered to be different types of love for different types of relationships. The most obvious difference is that of love for one's family and friends. Rebecca makes this distinction clear:

> I think there's different types of love [...] there's a love like you love
> your family like you love your friends that kind of love and I don't
> think that's the kind of love you should have in a relationship.

The love felt for family and friends should be different from that felt for your loved one. Lucy goes further than this and says, 'I've only been in love twice and this one feels far superior type of love obviously the love for your family and friends and things like that'. For Lucy then, the love in her current relationship is superior to the love felt for family and friends (as well as the love felt in previous relationships).

Looking back on past relationships and denying the love felt at the time might be a consequence of the significance placed on love in relationships and the condition that love is supposed to be forever and long-lasting. Rather than denying love previously felt, Lucy explains about her previous partnership, 'yeah I was in love I was in love with Philip but it was just a very different type of love and um.. like I still love Philip I would say in a non-love way'. Instead of claiming that she was never really in love, Lucy asserts that the love she felt before was a different type of love and goes on to say that she loves Philip only as

a friend. The difference between saying she was *in* love with Philip and she still *loves* him now, reinforces the notion that being *in* love with someone is different from loving someone and is somehow a superior type of love.

In some participants' accounts there was also mention of an unhealthy type of love. This was talked about by Lauren, Eleanor and Eva. For all three participants, unhealthy love developed in their first long term relationships and for Eleanor and Lauren this was also when they were relatively young. Eleanor does not talk directly about unhealthy love and in looking back at her relationship she explains that now it probably was not love at all. Nevertheless, she does admit she was very committed to the relationship because her partner provided her with stability and support that she was very much in need of at that time in her life. At the beginning of the relationship she was very dependent on her partner and because he was five years older than Eleanor, she felt he liked her dependence on him. However, as she became more confident in herself, and a stronger person, the relationship started to become unbalanced and as Eleanor says, 'he couldn't give me the freedom that I needed' and that is when it all fell apart. When Eleanor left for university, she explains, 'he couldn't let me be me um so I guess that was probably not a very healthy basis for a relationship in the longer term'. A healthy relationship, therefore, must involve a certain amount of freedom for each partner, and a balance of power between them.

This is reflected to some extent in Lauren's account. Lauren was with her partner for four years between the ages of 16 and 20. She describes it as 'one of those um extremely close clingy intense relationships you have you phone each other a number of times a day and you say things like I love you forever and we'll be together forever'. This level of intensity at such a young age causes Lauren to define the love as 'a sort of unhealthy weird love' and she felt uncomfortable in the relationship because of the demands made on her freedom. As she puts it,

> He constantly talked about the future; what will we do where will we
> live and it always I found a bit unsettling and didn't really like it
> 'cause I did feel I was very young and I didn't want to settle down or

make plans and promises that I wasn't going to keep.

As with Eleanor, the relationships and love became unhealthy, because of the impositions on the women's freedom to be who they are, or do what they planned outside of their partner.

Eva talks about an unhealthy type of love that comes about because of too much loving. She met her former partner while travelling abroad and they continued to travel together for another year. Despite having a wonderful time abroad together, on their return to the UK, Eva slept with somebody else and as she describes, 'it was just from then on it was just...steadily chipping away at each other's trust [...] it was the most poisonous disruptive relationship I could possibly imagine'. Nevertheless, the relationship continued because, as Eva says,

> We loved each other so much and yet we were...despised each other
> for loving each other so much...creating this interdependence it was
> the most unhealthy thing I could imagine and I never want to go back
> there again.. although I do love him dearly.

Again, unhealthy love is where there is an excessive amount of interdependence and not enough freedom for the partners. Eva still defines this as love, however, and unlike Eleanor does not demote the feelings involved (although she talks about love rather than being *in* love).

In addition, throughout accounts there is an implicit emphasis on fidelity and exclusivity as a pivotal aspect of love. This is not made explicitly clear or discussed directly by anyone; rather it is almost an assumed condition of love. In Eva's account above, she describes her relationship as deteriorating from the moment she sleeps with someone else, as soon as the fidelity assumption is broken, love and relationships inevitably break down. Similarly, Claire talks above about her first relationship that she said involved love until she found out her partner was dating another person. When this was discovered, the relationship immediately broke down and love was denied. There is a common assumption

that love and marriage are based on fidelity and exclusivity and that as soon as something happens to endanger these tenets, the relationship must come to an end. This is such an assumed prescription that participants found it unnecessary to expressly outline its importance in accounts of current and ideal relationships.

Perversely, it is this notion of exclusivity that is so important in differentiating love for a partner from love for a friend or family member. Jackson and Scott (2004b) note that 'Today non-monogamy is, in the main, spoken and written about only in the context of "affairs" or "adultery"' (2004b: 154), which highlights the taken-for-granted nature of exclusivity in sexual relationships. Such monogamous demands are what separate friends from lovers:

> The privilege given to the couple legitimates demands on partners that are never made on friends, particularly the demands for exclusivity: the insistence that not only is the relationship special and exclusive, but the thing that makes it special – sex – is something to be engaged in only with that person. (Jackson and Scott, 2004b: 155)

If the glue that holds the relationship together (sex) fails to keep the relationship exclusive, 'the whole relationship falls apart' (2004b: 155). Monogamy is clearly important for participants but it is so taken-for-granted that it is neither discussed nor its relevance questioned. This could be why participants find love such a difficult concept to define: so many aspects of love are taken-for-granted, such as fidelity which is barely spoken, and heterosexuality, which is also not discussed in interviews. As Comer (1974) highlights, '"Real" love is only that which is exclusively focused on one person of the opposite sex – all else is labelled "liking"' (Comer, 1974, 219). Although this was written some 35 years ago it is still a common assumption among these young women. Cancian (1987), on the other hand, distinguishes friendship from love in married couples by how much communication and self-disclosure is involved. On the whole, more intimate disclosure and communication may take place within a sexual relationship but this may not exclusively be the case, for indeed close friendships can sometimes involve more sharing of intimacies than a marriage (see O'Connor, 1992).

I have so far discussed the difference between romantic and confluent love, the

drift into relationships and absence of love stories, the difference between love and being in love and various types of love including what differentiates the love in a friendship from love found in a sexual, intimate relationship. What has been overlooked throughout this discussion, however, is what actually is love and how the interviewees define what love means to them. This has been covered *ipso facto* to some extent, since love constitutes all aspects of discussions to date. Nevertheless, in the next section I consider what participants thought romantic love itself consisted of and what it meant for them.

5.6   WHAT IS LOVE?

When posed to participants, this question appeared to be one of the most challenging to answer. Responses to this question are laced with 'it's so difficult to sort of to explain' (Fiona) or 'I don't know if you ever really know what love is' (Alice), but most are able to give some explanation. The first category of responses involves actions or behaviours that are supposed to define love. One aspect mentioned most often was that of caring for your partner and caring about their family and what happens to them. Catriona expresses this as follows: 'it's not just like lust it's actual like you care about what happens to that person you care about their family'. Abigail also talks about caring and adds that it should be mutual, 'I think it's about caring for someone and having someone care for you'. This idea of caring for someone and what it involves is expanded upon by Claire: 'we care for each other ...don't want bad things to happen to the other one don't want the other one to be hurt'. Caring for someone, practically as well as emotionally, obviously plays a large part in loving them. This foregrounding of care as an essential element of love for women contradicts Cancian's (1987) notion that the narrow definition of love dominating public opinion is the feminised concept focusing on feminine qualities such as talking about feelings. On the contrary, participants were wary of talking about feelings alone concerning love and accounts often combined practical or physical concerns with emotional.

This idea of love as caring for someone does not, however, differentiate love for a partner from the love felt for friends and family who, similarly, one would also

want to protect. There must be more then, to romantic love. Other aspects mentioned that constitute love include respect, bringing out the best in the other and worrying for someone. Michelle also mentions the idea of a link between love and commitment. Michelle aspires 'to be with somebody that loves you that much that they want to commit to spending the rest of their life with you'. In this interpretation, commitment only happens when love is strong enough and commitment and love are interdependent. Amy also expresses this view when she comments, 'I think to be committed to someone you've obviously got to love'. Love is a precondition for commitment and must be present in order for commitment to be meaningful. This type of committed love, for Hermione, also has an unconditional element: 'there's always going to be somebody there for me that loves me completely unconditionally and [...] I'm going to be with them for the rest of my life'. Unconditional love is usually associated more with family love rather than partner love that will very often break down because of affairs or behaviour deemed to betray commitment.

Definitions of love also included discussions on intimacy, being comfortable together, sharing interests, telling each other private thoughts and feelings. For some this was the most important aspect of love. Adele describes love as 'feeling just real comfortable in their presence partly because of the trust and partly because there're things in common and you know shared interests and shared fun'. Sharing interests in a partnership is one of the main constituents of developing intimacy. For Susan, love is about getting to know someone and loving all their characteristics:

> You understand them, you know what is going to upset them and you
> know what makes them laugh, that sort of thing. Understanding I
> think is important and knowing someone I think is, goes a big way to
> loving them.

Understanding and knowing your partner is vital to love developing. This idea is supported by Ruth who comments, 'I think it's only when you get to know someone that you really know you have an attachment that there's actually love

there', anything felt prior to knowing someone is categorised by Ruth as 'lust'. However, this aspect of love as knowing someone and forming an attachment is not that separate from love felt for a close friend. Few participants are able to go further to distinguish and set apart love for an intimate sexual partner. Only two participants, Susan and Ruth, talked about sex and having a healthy sexual relationship forming part of a loving partnership.

Defining or knowing when one is in love is not so easy for other participants to pinpoint. Elizabeth has been with her partner for over eight years and they met when she was 16. She does not describe the process of falling in love, but rather she says,

> I realised that we must have something like love because when we fell out and argued I didn't get all melodramatic and think oh no it's the end we should split up I thought no we'll just talk tomorrow and it'll be fine.

For Elizabeth, love was a change in mind set from entertaining thoughts of breaking up when they argued, to not considering this as an available option. Rather than special feelings towards her partner, she found love to mean a solidifying of their relationship and the bond they shared. Ties once breakable became strong and sturdy with the development of love.

The assertion by participants that there are different types of love, and that love is felt differently at different times in life, suggests that love is not fixed but is a changeable construct. What it means to declare love for someone has changed considerably for Shirley over the last few years. She describes this process of change,

> When I told Philip that I loved him I um I was sort of, essentially I was fully committing to him there I was saying you know I want to be with you forever that's what it meant to me then, [...] but now when I say it I just mean that I really care about the person and that I feel

really strongly for them and it doesn't mean necessarily that I want to settle down.

When Shirley first fell in love, love meant longevity and commitment. However, as she fell in and out of love and met various different people, what it meant for her to say love, changed from a statement marking out their relationship to an expression of her feelings. Nonetheless, although she is more relaxed about saying she is in love now, 'there's still an intensity there but there's not an expectation'. For Shirley, the meaning of love has changed from determining expectations of a certain and committed future, to merely an expression of intense feelings that do not involve any expectations for the future of the relationship. This then, may be one example of a participant experiencing confluent love. For Shirley, love is no longer linked with foreverness and has become a more contingent and transitory emotion. This is also reflected in her description of entering into relationships, which she explains are often considered temporary at the start and little is expected from them. Shirley gives the clearest example of all participants of entering into pure relationships that she anticipates to continue only as long as she is gaining satisfaction from them. In addition, the love she feels in relationships now most closely resembles Giddens' notion of confluent love.

In Shirley's case, the meaning of love has changed from an emotion connected with commitment and longevity to a contingent feeling based on satisfaction and caring. Ruth also notices the changing nature of love in identifying different types of love. She comments that as one goes through a relationship, love 'develops, it can get stronger'. Therefore, the strength of love within a relationship can change, according to Ruth, and this is evidenced in some participants' assertions that they still love their previous partners, in a 'non-love way'. Love can change within a relationship, become stronger and lead to a greater bond, or become weaker, resulting in the eventual break-down of the bond.

This notion of love as a changeable and fluid emotion supports the assertion that love is a social construct rather than a 'pre-given constant feature of human life'

(Stevi Jackson, 1993: 203). However, as Stevi Jackson goes on to say, many arguments regarding the cultural variability of love are 'underpinned by essentialist, or even downright biologistic, assumptions' (1993: 203). This idea is not greatly evidenced in my interviews but biology in relation to love is mentioned by a few participants. Lucy talks about the love she feels now and how this, 'absolutely like makes my stomach go all like...' and she cannot find the words to go on. Nevertheless, this idea of the viscerality of love, the emotion having actual physical consequences is a common one and Mandy talks about the type of love that 'actually hurts'. It is likely that strong emotions are capable of manifesting in physical symptoms, evidenced by the impact of adrenaline on the body. Yet, it is how we experience these physical affects and how we classify them that are important here. In these examples, participants characterise the bodily affects as physical evidence of love, yet the physical feelings could equally have been a result of anticipation or sadness or hurt. By describing these feelings as symptoms of love, the participants make a link between the abstract emotions and tangible bodily signals. Love becomes embodied. Claire talks about her partner who studied science at university and tells her that love 'is just this this like psychological thing and not really anything meaningful'. Despite this very scientific outlook on love, Claire philosophises, 'it probably is...got some science behind it like he says but it's still a nice feeling'. The idea that love is about science and biology is moderated by Claire, in saying that it is 'still a nice feeling'. Overall, the social or biological nature of love is not discussed in depth by participants. In talking about the variability of love and different types, it is apparent that they view love, to some extent, as social, although participants would also see it as something pre-social existing physically, outside of social discourses on love. As Grace comments in answer to whether love has become commercialised,

> In some ways you could say it has like that whole valentines thing which is totally just a commercial thing but I think people...still sort of...even if you took all that away I think you'd still have all the love and the romance.

Two participants are also somewhat aware of what Hochschild (2003) calls the 'modern Western paradox of love'. This paradox represents the discrepancy between the depiction of fulfilling, intimate, playful love, we are encouraged to aspire to, and the reality of the social context that warns against trusting such love too much for fear of betrayal or divorce. Shirley's concept of love has changed over the course of her relationships and despite still aspiring to fulfilling love, she now trusts it less and is cautious not to become too deeply involved in relationships. Ruth also acknowledges a discrepancy between expectations and reality. Ruth comments,

> I think there's a lot about how relationships should be with the one and um they should be, you should feel great um this person should fee- you know the love of your life. I mean what does all that mean um they're all sort of ideas that you see on a film um you know lots of romantic comedies that you see will have people talking about oh he's the one and they fall in love and it's not it's not really like that in real life.

Ruth understands this discrepancy and tries not to be deluded by the romantic ideal. The modern Western paradox of love is undoubtedly still in existence for these women in the UK, romantic love is idealised and all women aspire to intimate loving relationships. At the same time, participants talked about increasing divorce rates and a decline in levels of commitment and a very small minority recognised this paradox. This paradox also emphasises the social and cultural nature of love, the definition of which depends on the current fashion in media depictions of love. The ability of the meaning of love to change and alter is echoed in its variable importance within marriage. As Hendrick and Hendrick (1992) comment, just one generation ago 'women, especially, were willing to marry in the absence of romantic love' (1992: 4). In recent times, however, love and marriage are increasingly viewed as 'important covariants' (1992: 4).

5.7 LOVE AND MARRIAGE: DO THEY GO TOGETHER LIKE A HORSE AND CARRIAGE?

While stories of *falling* in love were absent, when asked why they wanted to marry, participants did then recourse of discourses of abstract love and being *in* love. The most common assertion was that participants wanted to marry or had married because they were in love. The fact of love alone seemed reason enough to commit to their partner for a life-long sentence. For Catriona, a 'couple get married because they love each other' and this sentiment is echoed by Zoe and Michelle. Susan goes further to say that for her marriage will 'prove that we love each other' to themselves and to their friends and family. For Eva, love and marriage are even more closely linked as she says marriage 'means love', when a couple marry this presupposes that they are already in love.

Eva and Hermione, moreover, both say that people marry because of love and as a way to publicly display this love: a common reason given to marry also mentioned by Eleanor and Lucy. In talking about displaying love, this is often referring to the marriage as a symbolic display of love and the wedding as a physical show. The wedding itself is important in enabling an individual's family and friends to see for themselves how much the couple love each other. This is evident in Ruth's response, she says, 'in getting married the actual wedding is a way of showing you know these two people love each other and that's a great thing to be celebrated'. The wedding is the celebration of love for the couple. This is also true for Lucy who, in talking about her ideal wedding, comments, 'I would want it to be...almost like not about me but about love and about...marriage'. The purpose of the wedding is to focus on celebrating love and marriage. Other than these romantic reasons for marrying, few participants mentioned practical reasons to marry and, if these were mentioned, the participant would describe the unromantic reasons as cynical and consider them less important. There are, of course, other reasons to marry but love is the most significant and the most important to the women interviewed. Marriage can happen with love alone in the absence of other reasons but marriage cannot happen in the absence of love.

Therefore, the meanings of the wedding and marriage have changed considerably over the last century. The wedding now is used to display and showcase the love between the couple marrying rather than signifying a woman's shift from her father's home to her husband's. Marriage is no longer necessary for a man and woman to live together or spend their lives together and so its meaning has changed from representing a rite of passage for men and women into adulthood and independence, to a public demonstration to others that the couple are in love. This change in the meaning of marriage is inevitable as the constraints initially imposed on married couples are lifted and society has become accepting of more varied lifestyles. Marriage is no longer necessary to achieve independence from the family home or to have one's own family or children. Today marriage is increasingly regarded as simply a means of exhibiting a loving relationship and commitment between a couple.

There were two participants, however, who did not see love and marriage as intrinsically linked. Helen comments, 'you don't have to have a ring on your finger to say oh yeah he really does love me'. For Helen, marriage is not necessarily a proof of love between a couple, love should exist whether they are married or not. Lauren is similarly sceptical of marriage and the wedding process in particular, explaining that for her, the wedding is saying, 'look at us and our love', which, she explains, in complete contradiction to Ruth above, 'is silly because the majority of people find love and so it's not necessarily anything out of the ordinary'. On the one hand, Ruth believes that love is special and should be celebrated with a wedding, whereas Lauren believes that weddings are redundant since most people find love anyway and weddings are simply 'self indulgent'.

5.8   CONCLUSION

Whether marriage and weddings mean love, are public displays of love or prove love, it is clear that for a majority of my participants love is the primary legitimising ideology for marriage. Participants only consider marriage within a loving relationship and expect love to be a precondition of marriage. Nevertheless, it is true that there are other substantial reasons given to marry, as

considered in other places in this thesis. Love is different because it is expected to exist before a marriage and was mentioned by every single participant as an ideal to be aspired to within a relationship or marriage. While almost all participants aspired to love within marriage, two participants were unconcerned at the existence of long-term love outside marriage. For the majority of interviewees, love and marriage are unquestionably linked and although love can exist outside of marriage for most, marriage was not considered acceptable without love.

The lack of spontaneously discussed falling in love stories highlights the nature of relationship formation now; a drift most commonly characterised these young women's accounts of beginning a partnership. No longer do women talk about love at first sight or falling head over heels, relationships often develop out of friendships or acquaintances and love gradually develops over time. This lack of decision making and agency in starting a romantic liaison is characterised by participants description of these encounters 'just happening' (Tolman, 2005) or using metaphors and clichés to describe the process. Interviewees deny their agentic actions in forming relationships and falling in love.

6. 'IT FEELS LIKE A TATTOO': MARRIAGE, NON-MARRIAGE AND COMMITMENT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Although love is characterised now by drift and a lack of agentic choice, it seems young women are still making definite choices regarding commitment, and discussions of marriage and cohabitation invariably produced talk of commitment. As attitudes towards marriage and relationship styles are changing, it is necessary to consider how intimate relationships themselves are altering, including the connections and ties felt by couples to keep them together. These issues are not straightforward and this chapter attempts to explore these issues further, delving into the complex assumptions surrounding cohabitation, marriage and commitment. Although commitment is a concept used in many areas of life including dedication to one's job, to morals, religion, or family, in this chapter it refers specifically to the bond felt towards intimate partners. In this respect, heterosexual relationships have been the activating force in bringing the notion of commitment to the centre of relationship and intimacy discussions. This chapter seeks to determine how such ties work in couple relationships.

The term 'commitment' is used to conceptualise many different aspects of couple relationships including devotion to one another, investment in the relationship, ties to each another, a feeling of bonding and closeness, longevity of the partnership, attachment, loyalty, fidelity, stability and permanence. I have tried, therefore, to use these terms throughout this chapter to indicate which element of the broad concept of 'commitment' is being referred to in each circumstance. I have also tried to use 'commitment' only when referring to all such elements or when trying to determine, in more detail, its meaning.

People's reluctance to talk about commitment in everyday conversation led Smart (2007) to conclude that the notion of relationship ties could not be separated from feelings of love and attachment. However, my participants seem to be able to conceptualise commitment as an important and vital component of relationships in

itself, although often linked to love. Some participants raised this topic spontaneously while others did so in response to direct questions. Participants were ready to talk about commitment and, once raised, it was stressed repeatedly in accounts. This openness in talking about it is perhaps because the concept has become a prominent feature of popular culture, with phrases such as 'commitment issues' or 'commitment-phobia' now widespread. As a result, young women are now able and willing to talk about intimacy and have a wealth of new phrases with which to conceptualise it. Participants are also able to distinguish between different types of relationships and some refer to the changing nature of intimate bonds and their transformation in meaning, from previous generations. Yet there is some debate over this transformation and whether permanency has become less or more important with the increase in women's freedom and decrease in marriage rates. Despite this continuing discussion, commitment clearly still matters to my participants.

I begin by reviewing the current literature on commitment and evaluating its contribution to the field. I then bring in participants' own accounts of their relationship bonds, what these mean to them and how important they remain. The review of the literature and the examination of participants' accounts lead to my attempt to re-conceptualise what commitment means using existing theories intertwined with participants' own experiences. This involves viewing commitment as a process that takes place in couple relationships rather than as a static entity. The process of forming close bonds is seen to be changing and I consider how this is happening, the extent to which the importance of intimate ties have changed, or been perceived to change, and I establish evidence of temporary and permanent relationships to explore this. I also explore how marriage and cohabitation fit in with the bonding process and whether they take place at different or similar stages during this process. This is followed by a more in depth study of cohabitation and investigating what role this plays in the lives of the young women interviewed, using degrees of cohabitation plotted on a continuum. The relationship between cohabitation and marriage is considered as well as its legitimacy as an alternative or equally valid relationship formation.

6.2 CONCEPTUALISING COMMITMENT: EXISTING THEORIES

It is assumed that intimate couple attachment has a meaningful definition within relationships. Yet, when it comes to actually articulating this meaning, trying to define the aspects of this tie, and come up with a coherent concept, this is more difficult. Of course the concept will have different meanings for different people and even for their different relationships but there must also be some defining features that enable people to recognise it when it happens. It is these features of commitment that are of concern here: how/can it be defined? What do young women's accounts tell us about it? How might this fit in with wider theories?

In discussing this notion, Jane Lewis (2001) explains that for most writers on the subject, 'commitment involves behaving in ways that support the maintenance and continuation of a relationship' (2001: 124). In trying to break down this concept to determine its various parts, Johnson (1991) suggests that there are three dimensions: '(1) personal commitment, the feelings that one wants to continue the relationship; (2) moral commitment, the feeling that one ought to continue it; and (3) structural commitment, the feeling that one has to continue it' (Johnson, 1991: 119).

Adams and Jones (1997) conducted a thorough review of the literature on commitment and refined the dimensions, going on to successfully compare them empirically using six studies involving 1,787 participants. Jane Lewis (2001) summarises these redefined dimensions as:

- an attraction component, based on devotion, satisfaction and love (= commitment to spouse);
- a moral-normative component, based on a sense of personal responsibility for maintaining the marriage and a belief in marriage as an important institution (= commitment to the marriage);
- a constraining component, based on the fear of the social, financial and emotional costs of ending the relationship (= feelings of entrapment). (Lewis, 2001: 124-5)

According to Mansfield (1999 in Lewis, 2001), the moral element should be

expanded to include cohabiting relationships, since all aspects of dedication may be equally involved in such partnerships. Mansfield also identified two forms of bond: a commitment to the relationship that is now-oriented, focussed on the present; and a commitment to the partnership that focuses on the future of the couple. Sutton et al. (2003) found that their participants view commitment as a bond or glue that cements a relationship together and involves a willingness from both partners to work at the partnership, especially when it was under stress.

In 1992, Stanley and Markman (in Stanley et al., 2004) suggested that there were two main aspects to commitment: constraint and dedication. Constraint 'denotes the forces or costs that serve to keep couples together even if they would rather break up'(Stanley et al., 2004: 498), while dedication 'refers to the individual's desire for the relationship to be long term, to have an identity as a couple, and to make the relationship a high priority' (Stanley et al., 2004: 498). Moreover, the dedication aspect represents devotion to the other person in the relationship. Stanley et al. also recognise adherence to the institution of marriage as a further aspect of unity. This model is, therefore, another interpretation that incorporates a tie to the person (attraction, dedication and so on) and constraining elements based on the costs of ending a relationship.

From investigating the break-down of cohabiting relationships, Smart and Stevens (2000) propose that relationships should be viewed as being on a fluid commitment continuum. At one end of the continuum lie relationships based on a mutual bond, and at the other end rest relationships based on contingent ties. Those relationships based on mutuality are presumed to be lasting by the individuals involved. The couple reflect on the reasons for entering, and on the nature of, the relationship. Contingency plans are put in place, such as wills, and the couple have mutually agreed expectations for the relationship. Relationships based on contingent ties are hoped, rather than presumed, to last; no legal or financial arrangements are put in place and there is an unwillingness to connect fully for a number of reasons, such as the unacceptable behaviour of the other person.

Relationships based on contingency are unlikely to involve a moral-normative component since this is future oriented and based on a personal responsibility for maintaining the relationship; this will not be present if there is a hope that the relationship will continue rather than a presumption. Lewis suggests that the moral or 'ought to' dimension is fading as traditional notions of family organisation are eroded. Although the 'ought to' factor does not disappear completely, 'it is no longer imposed and has to be negotiated' (Lewis, 2001: 126). Since forming a bond should be viewed as a fluid process, it is possible for this element to develop and grow over time or recede and disappear.

Smart and Stevens (2000) also acknowledge that age and life cycle are important in understanding the attachment in a relationship. For example, those who cohabit at a younger age, or who are pressured to cohabit because of life circumstances, are more likely to have relationships that are largely contingent, and are more likely to end their relationships. Weeks (2007) agrees, suggesting that dedication is related to life course stage and that a couple are less likely to implement ties at transitory periods. When an individual is settled in an area, job or country, they are more likely to form an attachment than an individual who is experiencing transition in their life situation.

Moreover, Wouters notes that young people (who are often at transitory stages in life) are encouraged by relationship manuals to 'spend much time and energy on discovering the opposite gender' (2004: 119). Readers of these guides are encouraged to 'date around' when they are young, in rejection of those (older) couples who have settled down and are living together. Thus, young people, in particular, are encouraged to experiment with, and have, frequent relationships in order to 'get those raging hormones out of their system and be young and wild' (2004: 119). Taking these manuals as a representation of trends in society, they suggest that teenagers and those in their early twenties are actively encouraged to have free and easy sexual relationships, and this is made easy by their transient lifestyles, while those of an older age are expected to settle down.

Yet Wouters recognises the contradictions in this advice and the social scripts

open to young people. In order to achieve a satisfying 'lust-balance' (between sex and love) one undergoes an emotional tug-of-war

> because the increased demands on emotion management will have intensified both the fantasies and the longing for (romantic) relationships characterized by greater intimacy, as well as the longing for easier (sexual) relationships in which the pressure of these demands is absent or negligible, as in one-night stands. (Wouters, 2004: 160)

This extract reflects ambivalence between a desire for easy and free sexual relationships and the pressure for stable and long term romantic partnerships involving intimacy. In addition, Wouters also recognises the increase in reflexivity that characterises modern relationships and is reflected in the ease of participants in recounting and reflecting on their own past relationships. In gaining the space to be more experimental with their relationships, young women are able to be more reflexive in looking back on their lives, in order to inform their future decisions. This heightened reflexivity and ambivalence between romantic and sexual relationships is a result, Wouters suggests, of increasing intermingling between men and women and among different classes.

In her more recent work, Smart (2007) re-evaluates her conception of commitment. She explains that it should be seen as a feeling that develops over time, in the face of difficulties, and is therefore hard to identify in the initial stages of a relationship. In this more recent work, Smart tries to define the concept by asking same-sex couples, who were marrying, their reasons for wanting a commitment ceremony. In their replies, she finds that the bond is intertwined with, and inseparable from, concepts of love. Smart found three different experiences of the ceremony:

- The first can be seen in terms of transformatory love, where commitment is a promise for the future. In this form commitment becomes a deeply symbolic act, an endorsement that looks ahead to a new life in partnership. (2007: 68)
- The second takes the form of affirming an unfolding and shared past in which both love and commitment are embedded in ordinary everyday activities, which may not appear "special" to the outside observer but are integral to the lives of the couple.

(2007: 68)
- The third is where the relationship is seen as potentially fragile and in need of some kind of external support or recognition and where a public ceremony is seen as a potential protection against disintegration. (2007: 68).

The third type can overlap with the first two and the first type may merge into the second given time; these are not rigidly bound categories (Smart, 2007). Where the ceremony is seen as a promise for the future, an endorsement that looks ahead, this may be comparable with contingent attachment that involves a hope that the relationship will continue without the longevity of the partnership to reinforce this hope. When the experience of longevity is made up of a shared past and an embedding of love and attachment, this may be mapped onto a mutual bond that arises out of a long-term partnership, is future-oriented and is expected to last for the rest of their lives (Smart, 2007). Finally, if the experience of developing ties is expressed as a need for external support to keep the relationship strong and together, this may be compared directly with the notion of a constraining factor, that is based on building security around the relationship, and providing stability through external constraints.

Duncan and Phillips (2008) note that the traditional view of 'sexual faithfulness continues to be valued as a key part of commitment within marriage' (2008: 4) and Barlow et al. (2005) found that 80 per cent of cohabitants think that sex outside of a cohabiting relationship is wrong. Thus, fidelity appears to be a key element in forming attachments. Moreover, according to Wouters (2004), the percentage of young women who considered an act of sexual infidelity to be the end of the relationship was 41 per cent in 1979 but 63 per cent in 1983/1993 (2004: 138). The norms guiding infidelity in marriage are, therefore, becoming increasingly strict. Yet, as Wouters goes on to suggest, this must be considered in the context of other changing social circumstances, such as a greater emphasis now placed on intimacy, openness and telling the truth in relationships.

Duncan and Phillips (2008) also notice the role that children play in structuring relationships: 'Children seem to hold a particular, "morally absolute" position in people's attitudes to family' (2008: 25; see also Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003).

This notion that children structure a family and represent a uniquely moral responsibility leads Duncan and Phillips to conclude that family relationships remain fairly traditional. Thus, 'Marriage, as a social institution, may have simply been widened more than "decentred"' (Duncan and Phillips, 2008: 25): the tradition of marriage (especially before having children) remains central but can now encompass a wider range of relationships (homosexual couples, for example) and is not the only way in which to conduct a lasting partnership.

It may also be argued that dedication to a relationship has different meanings for different generations. While Sutton et al. (2003) found that for older people it involved dedication to marital roles and a promise to fulfil these roles, for younger participants the bond was a personal act expressed to remain together. The difference between the interpretations of the older and younger participants highlights the changing perceptions of the nature of and importance of the connection. In addition, in line with Sutton et al.'s findings, the process appears to represent a more private and personal act now than in the past, that can be expressed within and without marriage. As Jamieson et al. (2002) note, marriage is no longer necessarily the point at which a couple commit.

Attempts to define commitment in a static way (Johnson, 1991; Adams and Jones, 1997) were important steps in recognising its multiple constituents. Subsequent conceptualisations included time and life stage as additional dimensions (see Mansfield's (1999) 'now' and 'future' orientated relationships in Lewis, 2001); these temporal considerations make the earlier components less static in their formulations. The concept was then widened further to resemble a continuum between two points (Smart and Stevens, 2000), which enabled commitment to be imagined as fluid and moveable, where people might move between lesser and greater ties.

Yet, with the growing importance of fidelity in a relationship, almost all relationships contain an element of contingency, even the most mutually connected. Stanley et al.'s (2004) 'dedication' and 'constraint' model offered an alternative and yet their view of the role of constraints on a relationship appears

limited. Finally, Smart (2007) offers the alternative perspective that commitment is indivisible from love. This works to bring love back into the debate to help describe what the process might be like as people experience it. This model also introduces the notion that 'structuring' ties are chosen willingly and not just by accident or developed from a fear of the costs of relationship breakdown. This account also differs from previous attempts to understand commitment as something quantifiable (for example the attempt to identify cohabiting relationships as less lasting than married ones). Smart (2002; 2007) identifies it as a process that people go through, although later with a backward looking dimension growing out of shared experiences over time as well as a forward looking dimension; a marriage ceremony as a promise for the future (Smart, 2007).

Commitment in a relationship can be represented by actions and behaviours other than marriage; one particularly significant act being moving in together. Cohabitation is used so frequently as a means of progression in a relationship that a false impression has been created that cohabiting couples have legal rights, or even the same rights as married couples (Duncan and Phillips, 2008). This is despite a government funded campaign in 2004 to raise awareness of their lack of entitlements (Social Trends 39). Barlow et al. (2005) suggest that living together represents a point on a continuum between dating and marriage and they devised a cohabitation scale to illustrate this. At one end, cohabitation takes place very soon after a relationship begins, may be pre-dated by pregnancy, lacks legal and financial arrangements, and involves little or no commitment. In this situation, living together often occurs out of convenience rather than as a mark of the bond between the couple and offers a less forced replacement of 'shotgun' marriages. At the other end of the scale, cohabitation is used as a variety of or alternative to marriage, and involves very high levels of attachment between the couple who expect the relationship to last. Cohabitation can occur at any point along this scale and can also move up or down the scale: cohabitation out of convenience may develop into a more marriage like situation. When considered thus, marriage ceases to remain a separate state and instead becomes a form of cohabitation at one end of the scale. As for cohabitation, it cannot be viewed as a single concept

but rather one involving endless types and levels of commitment (Barlow et al., 2005). As Coast (2009) suggests, cohabitation should be viewed simply as an alternative to being single.

Lewis (2001) also notes that cohabitation covers a wide range of relationships from trial marriages to more established partnerships. Lewis found that one reaction to suggestions that cohabitation always involves less stability, was an assertion by her cohabitants that their relationship was as permanent and strong as any marriage. In addition, as Jamieson et al. (2002) note, the increased ease of leaving a relationship does not necessarily indicate a significant change in ideals, rather it is simply easier now to end an unsatisfactory relationship; long term partnering is still the ideal. According to Jamieson et al., a growth in the rates of cohabitation does not necessarily reflect a selfish unwillingness to invest in family relationships. This is particularly relevant when it is considered that the majority of married couples have cohabited prior to marriage. Thus, according to Lewis (2001), some cohabiting couples actually displayed more commitment than married couples and Barlow et al. (2005) similarly suggest that cohabitation can require more dedication because of the lack of formal and legal binds.

6.3   COMMITMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Commitment was readily discussed by my participants although most found it difficult to define. Some interviewees identified commitment in a relationship as a bond or glue that takes work (Sutton et al., 2003). Abigail comments, 'once they're you know committing to that you're becoming like one', a bonded unity. Zoe also talks about this in terms of having a family name, 'I think like also if you've kept your name it be kind of like saying I'm not really that committed to you', thus, the bond involves becoming a unit and sharing a family name to represent this unit. The idea that this involves working on the relationship is also expressed by a number of participants. In particular, Ruth comments,

> When you make a commitment to somebody you choose to do that,
> you're deciding in a way, in a way you're deciding to love that person

and deciding that you will be with that person whatever happens and that you'll try and stay friends with that person whatever happens.

For Ruth, making a connection is about being with a person 'whatever happens'; unity is made through a conscious choice. This notion of a bond emerging as a choice is unusual among participants and, although often not openly expressed, the more common assumption is that it develops over time, indicating that it has a temporal element, often based on a shared past. Certain elements of the bond such as love, attraction, fidelity, are often unspoken and develop without much attention. These aspects will creep up on people without them noticing and can be best defined by looking back over the relationship. Ruth is an exceptional case since she is particularly religious and is conscious that marriage, for her, must be for life. Therefore, creating a bond must be a conscious decision since she has to ensure that the relationship will work no matter what. The external force of religion, in this instance, creates a constraint on the relationship; the external pressures of the religious elements would make it unacceptable for this relationship to end.

This contrast between the making of a conscious choice and the temporal development of commitment is explored by Catriona. She explains,

> I always think of commitment as coming with time so I think it's one of those things that you don't really choose…you do choose to commit to someone but if you've never said you're exclusive to each other I don't think commitment is like a choice, it just kind of develops um…so I think it's not really like something that…is like a factor, it's just is part of your relationship um…yeah so yes you still have to work on your relationship but the commitment's always there…it's a kind of underlying.

The ambiguity between choosing to unite and ties developing over time may be explained in terms of making an initial choice to be exclusive (the 'underlying' dedication), which can then develop into a longer lasting allegiance. A

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partnership that develops over time is represented for participants by more substantial or obvious gestures, such as going on holiday together, meeting each others' family or moving in together. This discussion of a choice to form a lasting bond and the development of ties highlights the gradual progress of forming a union from just the initial elements at the beginning of relationships, often based on love and a decision to be exclusive, to a later development of the bond based on a greater number of factors including a shared history.

According to participants, two key issues influencing the process of becoming attached are age and life stage (see Smart and Stevens, 2000; Weeks, 2007; Wouters, 2004). Although most women interviewed highlighted the importance of commitment, this was often done with reference to their relationships now, as compared with the past. Some women only recognised the importance of such dedication after a period of time in their youth spent on one night stands or other, various, temporary liaisons. For example, Alice comments, 'when I was younger with certain boyfriends I probably wasn't as committed but as I've got older I just think commitment is important'. Similarly, Eva explains how she spent much of her youth involved in casual sexual relationships and those that involved little or no loyalty. However, Eva has since experienced a change of heart, 'I think it's incredibly important I can't believe that I've ever not thought about that.. that I thought you know felt differently earlier in my life'. While Alice and Eva are talking in terms of their own experiences, Grace and Rebecca also recognise that perhaps *other*, younger people are happy to 'play the field'; although in Grace's words, 'eventually everybody would prefer to be settled down'. This notion of other people, younger generations, desiring or experiencing less closeness is also reflected in Rebecca's account, 'I think it is important personally but I don't know that everyone believes that especially like in young relationships like young lads and lasses going on big holidays together and like pulling competitions and all that'.

Despite Abigail bemoaning a decline in loyalty, in her previous relationship when she was younger, she 'wasn't committed just like my ex wasn't committed to me it's just one of those things'. Similarly, Adele experienced temporary

relationships in her past,

> I didn't feel like this was the person that I wanted to particularly stay
> with it, it was more of an interim, it did probably thinking about it feel
> more of an interim thing, I thought oh I'm not really sure about this
> person but we'll see kind of thing.

This is not an unusual experience in shorter term relationships or in the beginning stages of a relationship. For Alice, relationships conducted when she was younger were not at all permanent and Grace also concedes that in terms of a previous relationship it was 'just let's see what happens'.

Moreover, a number of participants discuss the impact of forming ties at transitional stages in life, such as moving home or work, going to university or experiencing bereavement. These events are characterised by a significant transition in life from one situation to another and can involve much upheaval. Lauren's previous intense relationship lasted four years and spanned A-levels and the first few years of university. Lauren comments that 'arguably it would have been quite fine for like six months or a year but four years to encompass such a transitional time that I don't look back on it fondly at all'. Lauren goes on to say that she believes that there are

> ..time specific relationships where it's only appropriate for a certain
> phase of your life and then you move on because you are growing and
> changing all the time. So it might be that someone is appropriate
> between the ages of like 16 and 19 but beyond that they're not.

Lauren believes that this relationship should only have lasted a short period of time. She also links age with life course, since young people are 'growing and changing' and experience many life alterations. As young people go through these transitional phases, it is unsuitable and unrealistic to expect that one relationship will be satisfactory throughout this period (see Weeks, 2007). Individuals change along with their circumstances and Lauren says that certain relationships are 'time

specific' and should only last as long as that period in their life supports the nature of the relationship. This may also explain why relationships conducted at a younger age are often short term, since young people are going through numerous life changes, such as leaving school and starting a job or going to university. It is during these periods that a lasting connection is abandoned until later in life. And yet, Lauren was loyal during this period and Eleanor and Claire also talk about relationship endurance through transitional life stages.

Claire met her partner when she was 16 and still at school; her partner had just finished his A-levels and was about to leave for university. Having spent the summer together, the couple stayed in contact while Claire's partner was away at university and on his return over the Christmas period they became an item again. From this point on the relationship was conducted over long distances for the following seven and a half years; they only started living together six months prior to the interview. Despite all the transitions from school to university to working full time and throughout moves all over the country, Claire and her partner remained faithful to one another.

For Eleanor, the devotion and love she felt for her partner seemed to become strengthened by uncertain periods in their lives. She comments, 'I found it interesting that [...] it's at the point of the most uncertainty I think we've ever had that I fell in love with him'. Thus, these participants' experiences run counter to Weeks' (2007) suggestion that relationships are less likely to be permanent at transitory times. For these participants, their union is strengthened by changing experiences and this is perhaps explained by considering where they are in the process of committing. Those in relationships involving the initial stages of the bond are more likely to end the relationship or experience a weakening of ties during transitory times in their life; other experiences take priority over the relationship. Yet, for those whose relationship is further along in this process, it seems that the relationship may be strengthened by life changes when the individuals realise how much they have invested in one another and how important the relationship and its future is to them.

While forming a lasting partnership is essential to these participants now, it was less important for many when young because this stage in life is often experimental and carefree. 'Playing the field' when young is perhaps an early set of behaviours, employed to learn about relationships and determine their importance. These experiences when younger may be invaluable in recognising and becoming ready for closer, more meaningful bonds later in life. This is evident in Alice and Eva's accounts which demonstrate the development of a desire to settle down in an enduring partnership as their circumstances alter.

This discussion of 'younger' people highlights a self/younger self divide in the way participants talk about their past experiences. Their current self is distanced from their past self and the behaviours and situations they experienced. This is exemplified in two distinct examples; when participants refer to past stages in life, and when they talk about being 'young'. In terms of life course, younger people may often experience an experimental stage when they wish to try out different relationships and behaviours. As individuals move out of this stage they may distance themselves from this period in their life. This may also happen as people age and mature. As individuals grow older and establish their maturity in relationships and actions, they distance themselves from their former, experimental behaviours. In addition, these individuals may wish to reconstruct their pasts, explaining away their behaviours in terms of being young and inexperienced, in order to appear more mature.

There is also evidence of a distancing from 'others'. This is probably due to an appeal to independence and individuality from 'others' as well as (mis)representation of actual beliefs and attitudes in the media and other social commentators. Fiona could not be with somebody if they were not loyal but she goes on to say, 'well I don't know 'cause then other people aren't that bothered by it you know they're sort of quite happy you know living non-committed lives'. Similarly, Lucy explains, 'I think you'd want one that's committed but then maybe that doesn't I'm sure that doesn't suit lots of people'. In these examples, the self/other divide may be more about not wishing to talk for other people rather than claiming individuality. Yet, each assertion puts distance between what the

participant desires and what 'other' people may desire. It is common to hear news reports or to view on TV soaps, stories of fleeting relationships and decreasing adherence to and in relationships. Therefore, it is unsurprising that participants wish to distance themselves from this view and assert individuality in their own behaviours; none of the women interviewed would be happy to live 'non-committed lives'.

The self/other divide may also be utilised to explain the variation in respondents' views on the importance of partnership ties; some participants declare permanency is no longer valued, while others claim it is still of great significance. Although participants themselves still value loyalty highly, they may consider that 'others' view it as less important because of the increase in one night stands and temporary relationships; it is still important for oneself but less important for others. This discrepancy, however, may also be explained by viewing commitment as a process that ebbs and flows within and between relationships. Some young women may be experiencing and interpreting it at one stage of the process, viewing it as life-long and based on a long-term attachment to one another that builds up over time. Others, however, see it from a different stage in the process, meaning the relationship is dependent upon certain factors such as love and happiness.

Those viewing relationships at this stage in the process of commitment may see it as decreasing in value and losing much of its importance. As Abigail says,

> I do feel that people in a relationship, and yeah they're happy, and you know they just go out and have a good time and get drunk and one thing leads to another and they blame alcohol and that's just stupid.

According to Abigail, fidelity has become less important to people because it is now so easy and common for 'others' to go out, get drunk, and meet someone else. Fundamental changes in culture have, according to Abigail, led to a weakening of partnership ties for some. Elizabeth does not explain why she feels loyalty may have changed for others, but she does say that it is 'possibly not as

important for other people as it is for me um I know friends who'd be a lot more forgiving I'm very lenient about most things but I'd always say no cheating'. By saying that faithfulness is not as important for other people and that she is very strict about no cheating she is implying that others are less strict about their partners cheating. In line with Abigail, Elizabeth talks about a lack of loyalty in others that culminates in increased infidelity.

Not only is attachment in general seen as less important but 'people' are also less devoted in their relationships. A lack of permanency is again linked to the increase in divorce and infidelity by Fiona. When asked whether she thought people were less committed now she replied, 'yes I'd say um I don't think it's as traditional as before where you get married and you stay I mean there's a lot of divorce a lot of infidelity and things like that'. It is seen as acceptable now for relationships to end quickly and more frequently. As Grace puts it, 'it's a bit more acceptable to play the field more' and Michelle: 'it's definitely different now you're allowed to date and split up and date and split up and wait until you've found your way in the world'. For both Grace and Michelle, this increased flexibility has also led to young people valuing stability less highly in their relationships. Yet, rather than *less* commitment, this might simply be a different *type* of attachment from that experienced by previous generations. With the loosening of external constraints, relationships are often based solely upon love or satisfaction. Although more long term ideals (such as investments in the partnership, social expectations of longevity and exclusivity) frequently develop given time, these can be rejected completely.

In addition to the increased acceptability of various behaviours, expectations are also thought to have altered. This change is highlighted by Mandy and Michelle. For Mandy, 'there's less and less expectation that people commit to stuff these days' and Michelle,

> ..a reduction in commitment.. yeah 'cause I think previously it was
> expected and you'd have to be thinking about these things much more
> early on, [...] yeah maybe people are less committed 'cause they're not

thinking about marriage early on in a relationship.

There is now less pressure on young people to marry early or at all than in the past, allowing young people the freedom to delay thoughts of marriage and to have increased numbers of relationships. However, this has also led to the perception that there is a parallel decrease in the levels of commitment present in relationships. As Adele so succinctly puts it, people 'commit for the time being but it doesn't work out or if something better comes along then they're you know sort of break off the commitment'. The bond for 'others' is perceived as being just for the time being, for as long as satisfaction within the relationship lasts. This idea of a temporary connection is also picked up on by Shirley who notes, 'I think they're willing to get committed to a certain level but making the final commitment I don't think they are necessarily as much so'. It appears that for 'other people', there is a perceived increase of a non-permanent type of relationship dependent on short-term satisfaction.

Yet a (perceived) increase in temporary ties at one end of the process does not mean that longer-term bonds at the other end of the process are concurrently declining. Rather, the increased freedom to begin and end relationships and for women to have more relationships before settling down, may have resulted in the assumed definition of commitment widening and becoming largely contingent; while certain aspects of it are becoming increasingly widespread (love and sexual exclusivity for example), others are declining (such as social expectations). As Gross (2005) suggests, while certain 'regulative' traditions of lifelong partnering are diminishing (such as moral concerns), the image of coupledom inscribed in this tradition remains and is now informed by meaning-constitutive traditions (such as romantic love and intimacy).

Although some participants express the view that permanent relationships are declining in importance for 'other' people, others view the status of unions as unchanging. As Catriona explains, 'I don't think it's changed I think people are still as committed but I think people are putting off marriage maybe for their careers'. Rather than a lack of ties now, the prioritising of careers may explain

why marriages are delayed. An explanation given for the increase in divorce rates is that people have more opportunity now to leave unhappy relationships. Zoe comments, 'I don't really think people are less committed I think they just can see another exit I suppose rather than just staying in an unhappy marriage'. Thus, relationships and ties are increasingly contingent upon happiness as the focus in relationships shifts to maximising satisfaction. There is also more awareness of adultery and infidelity now than in the past and this is evident in the explanation given by Susan of why there is a perceived change in levels of loyalty: 'there probably was like adultery and things but it wasn't so kind of well known'.

For Hermione, people are not less attached now, rather the types of bonds being experienced are changing; people are as dedicated but express this feeling in different ways, 'like living together or having children together' (Hermione). For these participants, commitment is not seen to be declining, rather it is changing; in terms of marriage it is now prioritised differently with respect to careers, children and money. Lasting relationships are still as important but so is freedom and it is now much easier for individuals to leave unhappy unions, with a decline in moral obligations (see Lewis, 2001). There is also increased knowledge and media portrayals of infidelity, affairs and relationship breakdowns, all leading to heightened awareness of the weaknesses of relationships.

It is not clear, however, whether the experience of commitment itself has changed over time or whether perceptions of it have altered as a result of shifting social attitudes. For Eva, it is a change in the meaning of intimate ties, and this has come about because of a change in values, 'in the sense of you know it's so easy to just get an abortion if you want to [...] so it doesn't matter if things go a bit wrong'. Our morals have been devalued, leading to permanency being less valued in society. For Mandy, it is the process that has changed because of a change in social values:

> A part of me that thinks I could cope on my own, that's quite
> important to me, I don't know if that's about sort of modern take on
> commitment, whether women are because of the whole feminism and

independence and self sufficiency if you so it's sort of self
preservation thing or keeping a bit of yourself that knows you would
be alright on your own rather than like historically the wife becomes
part of her husband.

Mandy has a 'modern' take on unity that involves a certain degree of
independence and self-sufficiency. On the other hand, Lucy explains, 'the word
commitment doesn't mean as much these days as it perhaps did [...] people don't
have the patience any more to commit' meaning, perhaps, that people do not
invest in relationships as they once did. It would be hard for the bond to change
meaning without the accompanying change in social values and attitudes.
Therefore, while it might appear simply that the meaning of commitment has
altered for young people now, this has been brought about by a general shift in
attitudes towards relationships and love, as the differing perspectives of the older
and younger participants in Sutton et al.'s (2003) study demonstrate. There is now
greater freedom to leave unsatisfactory relationships than in the past; shifting
priorities and a greater awareness of infidelity have changed the way attachment is
understood.

Ruth has another explanation for a perceived lack of stability. For Ruth, the
temporary relationships and short term flings young people are having are 'a form
of having fun' it's not 'about relationship building at all so it's about this is how I
get my fun'. By reconstructing these forms of pure relationships as not about
'relationship building', such liaisons are removed from the category of
meaningful relationships. Therefore, for Ruth, the only relationships that matter
are those involving high levels of dedication. Thus, as Ruth says, 'I don't think
it's a lack of commitment', rather it's an increase in temporary, 'fun relationships'.

There are also numerous examples from the participants' accounts of highly
committed relationships. Claire, Eleanor, Fiona and Helen all talk of relationships
where commitment was important and often prioritised above other relationship
aspects such as romance and intimacy. Commitment, then, is changing and
changeable. The level of dedication to a relationship can alter at different times or

stages in life and is perceived to be different for 'other' people. Moreover, some relationship ties should only last for a certain length of time. While commitment may be strengthened over time: 'I definitely wasn't as committed to our relationship and making it work as I am now' (Catriona), at other times it grows weaker: 'I would say I have been committed but as things tail off I've started to feel less so' (Shirley). This, again, is perhaps dependent on where the individuals are in the process of committing: it can become stronger with time as certain elements within the partnership develop (such as investments for the future), although if these elements do not evolve, it is more likely to weaken over time as satisfaction decreases.

6.4   COMMITMENT AND MARRIAGE

Almost half of all participants saw marriage as the ultimate sign or demonstration of commitment. It is viewed as the 'ultimate' sign of relationship stability and is considered to be ideal, despite the perception that fewer people actually experience it. Although marriage appears to be declining, as Sutton et al. (2003) comment, it is still important to couples to marry as a mutual expression of commitment to each other. Helen says, 'it is sort of really two people just doing the ultimate commitment to each other'. For some of the other participants this also reflected a permanency: 'it would just feel like that was the ultimate commitment and it would feel like that was how it was going to be then for life' (Adele), 'it means people making a lifelong commitment to each other' (Elizabeth) and 'it is just about making a commitment and saying I want to be with this person for the rest of my life' (Grace). Marriage is the supreme partnership that is supposed to last a life-time. As Penny reflects, 'once you're married you're husband and wife and then you start thinking about children and things', once married, you can begin to think about your future and plan ahead.

For others, marriage is more about formalising an existing committed relationship. As Ruth says, 'even though they've been committed it's that it's the formalising of commitment'. The common perception is that marriage represents the moment when a couple commit but for many this is not when the bond actually forms

(Jamieson et al., 2002), it is simply a demonstration that it already exists. Mandy agrees: 'I still think society sees marriage as commitment but to me it meant a lot more that we were still together after ten years under no legal obligation'. For Mandy, while society may view marriage as the formalising and legitimising of love, it means more to her that they remained faithful to each other without this official binding (see Lewis, 2001 and Barlow et al. 2005).

Furthermore, Mandy says 'I don't think marriage necessarily means commitment because it is so flexible you can undo it like legally you can undo it and socially it seems a lot more acceptable to undo it now'. Thus, marriage does not necessarily represent any level of commitment. It has become decoupled from marriage because this is no longer seen as the only expression of commitment; other ways of demonstrating it include having children together or living together. Thus, marriage does not automatically *mean* commitment because it is also possible to marry and not be highly committed. As Lucy suggests, 'I think there are people out there who cohabit and are less committed than those who are married equally I think there's probably people who cohabit and are more committed than those who are married'. For all participants who were in long-term relationships but not married, their partnerships already contained a high level of commitment, marriage was not needed to have it, but it was needed to *express* it. Although marriage no longer exclusively means commitment and it is no longer found exclusively within a marriage, wedlock is thought to be the ultimate *display* of commitment, a visible expression to the outside world that other actions, such as cohabitation, lack.

Many participants, therefore, suggested that to be married was more of a commitment than not to be married: 'it feels like a very permanent situ- it feels like a tattoo it's sort of is marriage I think' (Eva). Again, this notion of permanency with marriage remains prominent, despite high divorce rates and endless portrayals of infidelity in the media. The idea of a tattoo is also rather pertinent to marriage since it is a permanent and highly visible display. Moreover, being not married is seen as retaining the option of easily walking away from a relationship. Grace highlights this point, 'I personally prefer to know that we're

both totally committed than kind of think oh why don't you want to marry me do you want to have that easy get out clause'. In addition, the extra work of organising a wedding suggests to onlookers that the couple are serious: 'you've got to be a lot more committed haven't you to spend thousands of pounds walking down the aisle' (Alice). This quote also highlights the idea that having a wedding is an investment itself in the relationship[14], an added external constraint. By having a wedding, and spending thousands of pounds on one, it becomes a financial investment in the partnership; an extra dimension to the experience of connectedness. Having spent this much money displaying their loyalty to one another, a couple are less likely to end the relationship without a great deal of thought.

6.5 DEVELOPING A MODEL OF COMMITMENT

Commitment should be understood as a process that can grow and wane in relationships over time. A couple will go through this process together and it is not comprised of static and organised ingredients. Moreover, according to Lewis (2001), commitment no longer has externally enforced factors such as the stigma attached to divorce, although certain social pressures may still influence individuals' desires. The process now is increasingly negotiable between the couple and is, significantly, exclusively determined by the couple. It is their negotiation and definition of commitment that determines its meaning for them and where in the process they sit. According to my participants, the process of committing involves certain elements that are either essential, or desirable, or unavoidable.

6.5.1 Fidelity and Exclusivity

It became clear from participants' accounts that a level of sexual exclusivity was implicit in commitment. For Eva, this means 'having a sense of fidelity to each other' and for Michelle 'just being with one person at one time [...] physically committed I think that's very important'. Alice says, 'if you know you've got

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[14] See Chapter 7 for more on weddings as investments in relationships.

someone that's not loyal to you I just think what's the point being with them'. Monogamy (being with one person at one time) and fidelity (staying faithful to that one person) are an assumed basic level of commitment. A relationship without this base foundation is considered not worth having and evidence suggests that these conservative opinions regarding fidelity have strengthened over the last few decades (Wouters, 2004; see also Barlow et al., 2005; and Duncan and Phillips, 2008). For Penny, an individual does not even deserve to be in a relationship if they are unfaithful.

Fidelity is a key aspect in the continuation of the partnership and it represents a certain level of contingency in all relationships since a greater significance is now also placed on intimacy. As fidelity is increasingly emphasised, contingency is heightened because stricter rules on exclusivity mean partnerships are now more likely than ever to end if these rules are broken. Therefore, a rise in divorce and separations may not be due to a decrease in dedication but rather an increase in contingency and greater importance placed on one aspect of commitment: sexual fidelity.

6.5.2 *Love and longevity*
Other major aspects of commitment were love and longevity. For Shirley, her declaration of love for her partner was inseparable from her expression of commitment and desire for a long term partnership: 'I was fully committing to him there I was saying you know I want to be with you forever'. Love and personal attraction to a partner are viewed as elements of commitment for a number of theorists: Adams and Jones' (1997) 'attraction component' is based on devotion and love, and Smart (2007) considers all aspects of commitment to be inseparable from love. Thus, love clearly plays a significant part in long term relationships and lasting bonds.

Claire and Shirley both talked about longevity and for Claire commitment means, 'the idea that both of you think that you'll be together for a long time'. Time is a key element because it encompasses past and future aspects of relationships as well as life course stage (individuals are less likely to commit to a relationship

when young or at a transitory period than when older or settled). One aspect identified by Smart (2007) defines commitment as 'affirming an unfolding and shared past' (2007: 68). Thus, a shared past and love are important elements in this model. Moreover, Stanley et al.'s (2004) 'dedication' aspect involves the desire for a long term relationship and Smart and Stevens' (2000) mutual commitment includes a presumption of permanence. Thus, commitment can involve the unfolding of a shared past as well as a desire for and expectation of a shared future. Long term attachment is dependent on life course stage and age, based on shared experiences that have developed over a period of time between a couple, and may also involve an expectation for the future and a desire to remain together. While love in a relationship may signify a desire to stay with the partner, length of time can lead to the implementation of certain factors that evolve to deter the couple from wanting to separate. Thus, a long lasting relationship based on love and fidelity, will lead to the implementation of other factors such as investments in, and expectations of, the relationship. Longevity is needed before having children, for example, because it implies that the relationship will last for(ever?) a long time. Longevity links the initial stages of committing to the later aspects of the bond that develop with time; it provides the bridge between the two.

Mandy explains how the impact of time influences her view of commitment:

> I'm not sure you can prove commitment [...] the only sense of commitment that I have is retrospective, that you can see that you've been together for that long therefore you must be committed, I don't think you can do anything to prove that you will be committed in future 'cause anything will hap- can happen.

Contrary to popular beliefs about marriage proving permanency, Mandy explains that her sense of commitment can only be determined through looking back over the relationship; it can only be proven as a result of the length of time she has been in the relationship. Mandy, therefore, highlights the pivotal nature of retrospective length of a relationship to commitment. Mandy also acknowledges

that this involves a high level of contingency since a history of shared experiences does not provide a guarantee for the future. This is a clear example that even those relationships based on a long shared past will involve a certain degree of contingency. Since the future is an unknown, any type of relationship, no matter how long-lasting, is contingent upon something, for as Mandy says, 'anything can happen'. This contingency can perhaps be contained with an increase in relationship investments such as children. Religion may also have an impact: when an individual or couple are particularly religious, future behaviours may not impact upon the decision to remain committed because the external constraints outweigh in significance potential future behaviours.

6.5.3   Social Expectations and Internalised Constraints

Regardless of the progress of individualisation, moral choices are still being made on a regular basis and these considerations remain a significant concern for a number of people with regard to their families and relationships (see Duncan and Phillips, 2008 and Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003). To have children within a relationship is considered the greatest bind for participants and for most this should take place within a committed marriage. This belief in marriage as an important institution, and participants' desire to use marriage as a basis for having children, demonstrates the remaining significance of a moral element in relationships. It also highlights the intertwining of certain moral and structuring dimensions of commitment (as defined by Johnson, 1991 and Adams and Jones, 1997); moral obligations to a relationship can intertwine with other, external obligations (such as having children).

It would also appear, however, that some of these moral decisions are increasingly negotiable. Although participants themselves would prefer to have children within marriage, it is considered acceptable for 'others' to deviate from this norm. Moreover, the social expectation to stay in a relationship is no longer strictly enforced. As Lewis (2001) states, moral obligations in relationships (a feeling that the relationship 'ought to' continue because of social and religious sanctions on the importance of marriage) can be increasingly negotiated (2001: 125). On the other hand, the majority of my participants expect that they will be married

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and desire a traditional nuclear family (also see Gross, 2005). Although the 'regulative' tradition to be in a lifelong marriage is declining, 'meaning-constitutive' traditions (originating from 'regulative' traditions) continue to remain influential (Gross, 2005). These new 'meaning-constitutive' traditions are being defined and reconstituted by young people now and structure contemporary intimacy. Thus, there is still a great deal of societal pressure on young people to have long term relationships[15], despite the abundance of academic and non-academic literature to the contrary (which, as Gross points out, have largely ignored the remaining 'cultural constraints on intimate practices' (2005: 288)). While the importance of lasting relationships is impressed on young women, it will remain a societal expectation.

Although this element of commitment is less obviously imposed now, and laws and norms guiding marriage and relationships have relaxed, young women still feel the pressure to be in a meaningful relationship. Partnerships that are based solely on present satisfaction and love do not involve such social pressures. Thus, while 'moral' factors, based on the belief in the importance of marriage, may be disappearing, with increasing acceptability of fluid relationship types, there remains an element of pressure that originated in this moral consideration that is still present in young women's expectations.

Gross (2005) commented on the expectations of young women in the USA in recent years. He explains that despite an apparent transformation of intimacy, family life remains geared to traditional expectations:

> marriage was expected of nearly everyone; divorce, though
> increasingly common, was frowned upon; a strict division of labor
> [sic] between the sexes was normatively in force; and, more generally,
> any serious deviation from the norm of the "standard North American
> family" was regarded as suspect. (2005: 287).

Thus, behaviours and expectations were, and are still, very much informed by

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[15]   See Chapter 4 for more detail.

'meaning-constitutive traditions' (Gross, 2005: 288), such as the lingering idea of traditional marriage, that involves patterns of behaviour passed down through the generations. Such traditions and ideals assume a taken-for-granted form, 'free though agents may be from external constraints that would force them to adopt those ideas and practices' (2005: 306). For young couples, the image of traditional family life 'continues to function as a hegemonic ideal' (2005: 288), despite these traditions no longer being imposed or forced.

Although the 'moral' notions of staying together for the sake of the family, church and state have faded, along with the stigma of divorce, there is still a pressure and expectation from society, families and individuals that young people should stay in long term stable relationships (and marriage where they have children). This is evidenced in participants' accounts of serial monogamy, early commitment, a desire to marry, as well as more structural influences such as the new (conservative) Coalition Government's tax breaks for married couples initiative. Marriage is still considered to be a highly important social institution and participants acknowledge the need to work at a marriage in order to keep it strong and together. The societal expectation for a couple to remain together will only be undermined in certain situations (infidelity, for example).

6.5.4   Relationship Investments

Structuring obligations, such as having children, are considered by respondents to be a significant part of commitment. This was talked about in many different ways and, for a majority of participants, it was thought that commitment must be strongest when making the decision to have children together; greater than in cohabitation or marriage. Children 'really do bond you together for life' (Michelle). For Catriona, having children with someone is the 'biggest commitment you could do' and for Helen, 'having children is a big big commitment [...] probably more than a marriage'. For Amy, this is different from 'other forms of commitment as well like if you've got children then that's a commitment to each other'. Having children in itself is creating a commitment between a couple and moreover, one that is above and beyond the dedication needed to marry or cohabit.

The commitment that having children creates is seen as a different type from that made between the couple. When adding external constraints, such as children, this does add an extra dimension to the relationship. In addition, since having children is seen as a major constraint on the relationship, 'you might as well be married' (Catriona) beforehand, as this is viewed as a less significant external constraint. This is clearly reflected in Michelle's account, she comments, 'I think if you're not willing to make a commitment to marry somebody then how in the world would you make a commitment to have a child with them?' Having children produces an investment to the relationship and supports a future oriented outlook, since most people desire to have children within a relationship that will last. In addition, this account of commitment reflects the view that marriage is itself a significant external constraint that represents a certain degree of permanency and an assumption that the couple will stay together.

These structuring forces can be compared with Johnson's (1991) 'structuring commitment', Adams and Jones' (1997) 'constraining component' and Stanley et al.'s 'constraint' element. However, these theorists suggest that this aspect is based on the fear of the costs of ending the relationship or factors that force a couple to remain together. From my participants accounts, it is clear that there are constraining elements to relationships that tie a couple together, which go beyond 'fear of the social, financial and emotional costs' (Lewis, 2001: 125) of relationship termination and 'feelings of entrapment' (2001: 125), and are rather investments made for the future of the couple. Smart (2007) recognises this in her most recent conception of commitment. One element of this model states that external ties are put into place to protect from potential disintegration. This feature is also present in Smart and Stevens (2000) concept of 'mutual' elements in which contingency plans are put into place to protect the relationship and plans are made for the future. This type of bond might then include gestures such as moving in together or buying a house together that are constraining on the relationship, may involve feelings of entrapment, but will also involve a desire to enforce this constraint, and a willingness to impose obvious signs of commitment to the relationship. These constraints may well 'trap' a couple into a relationship

but this would not necessarily be viewed as such by the individuals involved; rather they see the commitments made as adding security to the partnership. While these actions do tie a couple together and restrict their freedom, they are quite different from those suggested by Adams and Jones (1997) who view the constraining components manifesting 'in the absence of couple satisfaction' (1997: 1178). On the contrary, I would argue that external, constraining factors holding a relationship together can be willingly imposed ties made to enhance couple satisfaction (having children together, buying a house, marrying and so on), although this can change given time. This argument is surely reinforced by participants accounts of engagements, moving in and obtaining mortgages together that are seen as steps towards a satisfactorily lasting relationship.

6.5.5   *The Model*

Commitment is a process that people engage in when developing intimate relationships with others. Although forming the bond is a process, and can begin and manifest in different ways in different relationships, certain elements appear to be central. Longevity is a significant constituent in a number of ways: participants refer to commitment as a desire to stay together for a long time, the length of a relationship marks the existence of ties and becoming committed is invariably influenced by life course stage. Yet, longevity plays a larger role in the development and maintenance of a long term relationship. The longer a relationship lasts, the more likely a couple are to invest in a relationship and the greater the costs become of leaving it. External pressures grow with the lengthening of relationships as marriage becomes an increasing expectation. In addition, other elements such as love and exclusivity are likely to develop and grow over time and with the continuance of a relationship. Therefore, not only is longevity a key element in itself, it is also central in influencing other aspects of commitment. Thus, commitment is based on:

- Fidelity: this is an underlying prerequisite that must be present for a long lasting and satisfying partnership. This represents a new emerging moral consensus among young people regarding the basic requirements of intimate relationships. Fidelity is expected and assumed and provides a

basis upon which the relationship and other dimensions of commitment can grow.

- Love: often considered to be inseparable from commitment, it is also thought to be necessary to provide a stable base upon which it can grow.

- Longevity: as a desire for a long term partnership, an acknowledgement of a shared history and position in the life course. This includes the unfolding of a shared past as well as a desire for a shared future. This element will also impact the other aspects of commitment that alter and develop over time.

- Social expectations/internal pressure: these grew out of the previous 'moral' aspect. While children will often provide a moral element upon which responsibility to a relationship is based, commitment to a partnership can also be based on a desire to maintain that relationship because of the societal pressure to be in a long term stable partnership. This externally prescribed expectation will create individually internalised norms that reinforce this desire.

- Investments in the relationship: whether these are willingly imposed external constraints introduced to enhance a relationship satisfaction (such as children or marriage) or occurring through an unexpected change in circumstances (such as unplanned pregnancy), these investments can strengthen the bond felt in a relationship.

Any of these types of commitment may be present to some extent in any relationship although one type may be prioritised above another. For example, a cohabiting couple with children will have ties through external constraints in the form of the children and shared accommodation, but they may prioritise their commitment based on feelings of love and respect or longevity of the partnership. The longer that a relationship continues, the greater the expectations grow that the relationship will endure, and the pressure to remain together increases. Feelings of entrapment may well be present for some couples but this element of relationships was not apparent among my participants.

Commitment is experienced as a unifying bond (such as sharing a family name),

as a decision or an expectation. The process of forming such ties appears to be informed by two main dimensions:

- Pull factors (being pulled into a relationship): characterised by a desire to stay together. This involves fidelity, monogamy and love. The desire to stay together and longevity will often lead to push aspects of commitment.
- Push factors (being pushed into a relationship): characterised by not wanting to end the relationship. This involves longevity of the partnership leading to investments made for the future of the relationship and includes internal pressures and external expectations of others.

Thus, couples define commitment as wanting to stay together because of love, fidelity and longevity *and* not wanting to break up because of (these factors as well as) expectations that the relationship should continue and investments that have been made. The pull factors are often in place first before the push factors, which develop over time, although societal pressure may be ever present. Rather than representing two ends of a continuum like the contingent/mutual scale of Smart and Stevens (2000), where people move between lesser and greater ties, this model represents a process of commitment where certain stages will be reached before the process can move on. As with a continuum, the process can ebb and flow and strengthen and weaken as relationships contain more or less of these elements of commitment.

6.6 AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF COMMITMENT

Lauren gives an unusual account of her views on commitment:

> I don't know that I'm necessarily a fan of the long term commitment,
> just like stating it at the outset that seems a bit presumptuous 'cause
> you never know what will happen…so I would want to
> be…committed in that…you you would know that someone isn't
> going to be flighty and not going to run out on you but similarly I
> think I would be quite unsettled by the idea that someone wanted to

spend the rest of their life with me…unequivocally that that was what they wanted to do. I I'd want them to think daily whether they were happy and whether I was happy and that a- a- you know just I'd want someone to actively enjoy my company not just be with me for the sake of it.

Lauren's account may be considered as a concrete example of a pure relationship (in Giddens' (1992) terms). Lauren is happy only with a certain level of commitment, anything beyond this and she would be 'unsettled'. For Lauren it seems that happiness in a relationship is far more important than committing for commitment's sake. Deciding to be tied to someone, regardless of what may or may not happen in the future, is 'presumptuous' since a couple's circumstances, situation and their individual feelings in the future are unknown and not guaranteed. Thus, Lauren raises her concern for an unknown future where 'you never know what will happen'. Yet, she does advocate permanency to a certain extent in order to know her partner was not going to be 'flighty'.

The relationship is entered into for its own sake, for the pleasure of the individuals involved, and is based on confluent love that is contingent upon opening oneself out to the other and equality in emotional give and take (Giddens, 1992). This type of relationship is only maintained while each person derives some satisfaction from it. As Lauren herself comments, 'I'm very aware that you don't need to necessarily stick with someone just like for the sake of it you can split up and it might be that you're happier apart'. It should follow then, that Lauren would view this as a temporary relationship, contingent on what will happen and each individual's happiness. Yet, when asked whether she is committed in this relationship she replies, 'yeah really committed'. Lauren perhaps experiences the union here as love and wanting to be in the relationship rather than investing in a relationship for the long term and the social expectations of staying together. It is the aspect of longevity that is lacking because Lauren is not desirous of a long term relationship and her fidelity is not necessarily based on a shared past. Lauren is also not concerned about social expectations and she has rejected the societal pressure that encourages long term partnerships. This is an entirely

different view from Ruth who advocates staying together no matter what. Pure relationships then may be characterised as containing a certain amount of loyalty that include the pull aspects of love and fidelity. However, the push factor of a desire for a long term relationship may be missing, which means that certain elements entailed in commitment that stem from longevity (such as investments and expectations), are not involved.

It is also possible that this pure type of relationship experienced by Lauren has been deliberately entered into because of past experience, rather than because of a transformation in intimacy. It may be that this transformation has allowed situations such as these to become more possible but such relationships are not necessarily a direct consequence of individualisation. In Lauren's case, she describes her first serious relationship as 'extremely close clingy intense [...] you phone each other a number of times a day and you say things like I love you forever we'll be together forever'. According to Lauren, this relationship made her feel 'very uncomfortable' and his constant talking about the future at such a young age unsettled her. It is almost deliberate that in her current relationship, 'we don't talk about the future which I find [...] really almost more reassuring 'cause you don't need to constantly verbally reassure each other oh I'll love you forever'. This type of relationship seems to have emerged for Lauren out of a strong dissatisfaction with her previous relationship that was too intense and highly emotional. As a result she has opted for a more relaxed relationship now where, although she is in love, she does not feel the pressure to make concrete plans for the future and can 'happily walk away if it wasn't working and that's fine' instead of 'oh my goodness what will I do without him how will I manage oh my god weeping tears misery dreadful'. Past relationship experiences are clearly significant influences on the ways young women conduct current and future partnerships. Moreover, people are free to have different and varied relationships and it is this freedom that has allowed Lauren to experiment with different relationship styles.

Cohabitation was viewed by at least six participants as a way of being together that involved less commitment than marriage. Susan talks about this in terms of a fear of committing, 'I think if you're a little bit like afraid of commitment in that in the kind of legal sense of commitment, to live together is very similar to being in a marriage together'. Cohabitation is seen as similar to marriage but it is just not as much of a commitment. Rebecca talks about cohabitation patterns among her friends, 'I know quite a few people that are like that.. aren't particularly committed in their relationships but they do live together and they'll go round you know in clubs meeting other people'. Yet, it seems as though the types of cohabitation being talked about here by Susan and Rebecca are entirely different, one representing more of a marriage situation and the other little more than a house share. These different uses of cohabitation are represented by Barlow et al. (2005) as a continuum, with the marriage type relationship and high levels of commitment at one end and the equivalent to house share and low levels of commitment at the other.

Rebecca talks about her own experiences of cohabitation, she

> ..wanted to move in with him [a previous boyfriend] 'cause I didn't
> want to be with my parents any more but, so that pushed it as well but
> I think it was like just, 'cause it's what grownups do you know and
> like loads of my friends, [...] at a young age moved in with boyfriends.

When cohabitation occurs out of convenience, through peer pressure or at a particularly young age, it is likely to involve lower levels of commitment. Lucy also recognises this situation, 'a lot of people maybe live with each other more out of circumstance' although she then goes on to say 'no there must be lots of people who live who decide to move in together if they love each other then get married as an actual progression'. Cohabitation and commitment were topics that many participants expressed ambivalence over and found it difficult to give consistent views. Many would express one view on cohabitation only to give the opposite

view a few minutes later.

Part of this ambivalence may arise out of the constant juxtaposing of marriage against cohabitation. In comparison, cohabitation is sometimes seen as less of an investment and sometimes seen as more. Yet, this sort of analysis is not helpful and framing the debate as marriage versus cohabitation means the nature of cohabitation is often overlooked. Cohabitation and marriage should be seen as different relationship choices and ways of being together involving all the same confusions, doubts, emotions and indecisions as marriage (see Coast 2009). Both cohabitation and marriage can involve the same or different types of commitment. Although people perceive, and will undoubtedly continue to perceive, marriage and cohabitation as separate and different and involving their own, discreet amounts of commitment, this is not how these processes work. The only difference that may be acknowledged is that cohabitation is an invisible sign of commitment between a couple, involving a wide range of commitment (including none), while marriage is more public and is likely to include a slightly more restricted range.

Due to the status of cohabitation as a perceived rival to marriage, a number of participants believed, falsely, that cohabitants had certain legal rights (see also Duncan and Phillips, 2008 and Social Trends 39). Lucy comments,

> I definitely think there's loads more people these days cohabiting
> rather than buying into marriage because marriage seems to be a bit
> out-moded, outdated.....which is reflected in the fact a lot of laws have
> been passed recently to give equal rights to cohabiting couples.

This view is repeated by Catriona who says, 'I think marriage these day I think people aren't as bothered because there's more rights for when you're cohabiting and things like that'. Another confusion surrounding cohabitation was the impact this had on the future of the relationship. According to Penny and Eleanor, if a couple cohabit first, 'there wouldn't be as many divorces 'cause if you cohabit for a long time and then you get married perhaps it would kind of resolve a few

issues' (Penny). However, according to Lucy, 'if people cohabit and then get married the marriages fail 'cause they've been so used to just being together'. The existence of these opposite beliefs is perhaps due to differences in the use of cohabitation. If it is used as a precursor to marriage and the couple live together with the aim of eventually marrying, this may well reduce the likelihood of divorce once the couple know they are compatible. However, cohabitation also includes those couples who do not see themselves as committed as married couples, particularly those involved in cohabitation of convenience where the commitment is yet to be made.

The view of cohabitation as involving low levels of commitment led some participants to suggest that cohabitation devalues the institution of marriage. Hermione outlines this view:

> I just think it maybe is a lower it's decreasing people's values um if they can just live together forever and not be bothered about it I I think I I would rather see people get married because I think I think it's important.

Although she does not directly say that cohabitation devalues marriage the comment that people can 'just live together forever and not be bothered about it' indicates that cohabitation is not a suitable alternative to marriage. Abigail agrees with this and when asked whether cohabitation could be used as an alternative to marriage she replies, 'no I still think you should get married before you live together'. Moreover, Abigail does not understand why, 'if you're happy and you live with someone why don't you just get married?' Cohabitation is seen by some as a lower or lesser form of marriage, as Eleanor explains,

> At the point where I suggested to James that we should move in together and he said yes, I think if if I'd said will you marry me he'd have run a mile so um so obviously it's not quite the same.

Marriage is still seen as more of an investment because of the ambiguity of

cohabitation. For a couple, living together can include exactly and only the amount of commitment they are happy with; this can include none or a great deal. Yet this flexibility serves to devalue cohabitation and the commitment felt in some cohabiting relationships.

The versatility of cohabitation in encompassing a range of relationships from trial marriages to more established partnerships (Lewis, 2001), perpetuates and reinforces the low status it is afforded by law and politics. Since it is viewed as second to marriage and involving less commitment, many people take the opportunity to cohabit as a precursor or trial before marriage to replicate it while not living with the accompanying constraints and restrictions. As Claire explains,

> I think that it would give people a chance to see if the relationship would work, so therefore a lot of relationships would break up um before people decide to get married and I think it's just a good idea of testing the waters really.

Cohabitation is viewed by almost all participants as a necessary precursor to marriage: 'I think it's definitely you should cohabitate [sic] before you get married 'cause you can't truly know someone until you spend sort of days together and nights together' (Catriona), 'oh yeah I couldn't live not live with them beforehand oh no no way definitely cohabit a couple of years beforehand' (Eva), 'it helps to be living with somebody before you get married I think because you get to know their bad habits and you get to know them more because you're with them all the time' (Fiona) and 'I think people probably do see it as wiser living with somebody before you marry them.. as a kind of stepping stone' (Lucy). Cohabitation as a trial before marriage, testing the waters, was popular even if cohabitation as a replacement for marriage was not.

One of the main reasons why cohabitation is seen as inferior to marriage is the perceived ease of ending a cohabiting relationship. Although some participants, such as Eleanor, do recognise the complexity some cohabiting relationships have, such as combined assets and housing contracts, others see it as the easy option or

retaining a get out clause. Rebecca reflects this viewpoint when she comments, 'I suppose in a way it's better than marriage you know it's like you can walk away in a way a bit easier than if you were married um it's a good trial run isn't it'. Cohabitation offers a replication of marriage with no legal ties, in this way it is seen as a 'better' form of marriage than marriage itself for Rebecca. Yet, Rebecca also talks about this as a 'trial run' and thus, perhaps not as an alternative to marriage but a testing of a marriage type relationship to see if marriage could work in future. For others though, this ease of breaking off the relationship is less welcome,

> If you're living together you kind of just you could split up at any- I mean I know you could split up at any time in marriage but there is a whole procedure, you've got to separate and divorce and all that sort of thing and I think with living together you could just, it seems to me a bit like you could call it a day too easily. (Hermione)

For Hermione and others, cohabitation is insecure, the only way to properly secure a relationship is through marriage. On the other hand, Amy raises the possibility that security is ever present in a cohabiting relationship: 'if you've got married you've actually made a commitment to each other so in a way you've got some actual proof of security of something which I suppose if you're cohabiting then you have anyway'. For Amy, cohabitation is as much a proof of security as marriage, she supposes.

Thus, those who see cohabitation as insecure may only be considering cohabitation at the end of the scale where commitment is marginal. A number of participants recognised that cohabitation was not necessarily any less stable than a marriage. When Lucy suggests there are cohabiting couples with less commitment than married couples and equally there may be cohabiting couples with more, she recognises the ambiguity in the cohabiting relationship as well as the potential for cohabitation to offer a space for relationships equally or even more committed than those who are married. Susan makes a similar observation, 'I think there are people who rush into marriage too quickly and don't have the

same level of commitment as some people who are living together'. This reinforces Jamieson et al.'s (2002) assertion that a growth in cohabitation does not reflect an unwillingness to invest in family or a significant change in ideals.

Lewis found that one reaction to suggestions that cohabitation always involves less commitment, was an assertion by cohabitants that their relationship is as committed and strong as any marriage. For Michelle, cohabitation was an equal investment to marriage, 'I think living together is a really important part but it is definitely as committed I think as being married to somebody because we make decisions together'. Moreover, one participant would be happy to cohabit instead of marrying and others could see how 'other' people may use it like this. Helen says, 'I'd be happy doing that because if you get married not a lot's going to change really'. Although some recognised that the type of cohabitation involving high levels of commitment could be used as an alternative to marriage, most still viewed marriage as the ideal. Cohabitation is versatile and flexible and it is precisely this uncertainty that persuades the majority of participants that cohabitation on the whole represents less commitment and marriage is just one step further.

It may be the case that, in line with Lewis (2001) and Barlow et al. (2005), cohabiting couples actually display more commitment than married couples because cohabitation lacks the formal and legal requirements to stay together that marriage entails. To stay together with no external obligations to do so is surely more of an achievement than staying together when there are ties keeping you in a relationship? This is a phenomenon picked up on by a very small number of participants. For Mandy, cohabitation was 'more valid than marriage as a sign of commitment' because there were no legal ties binding her and her partner together; they chose to be together. Rather than seeing cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, Mandy sees it as a totally separate, equally valid way of conducting an intimate relationship, 'I don't see marriage as in the least bit essential'. For Mandy in particular, cohabitation can involve equal, if not more, commitment than a marriage and she rejects the assumption that cohabitation presupposes less.

Mandy is, however, in a minority and more participants said that cohabitation was not a viable alternative to marriage. As Ruth responds when asked whether cohabitation could be an alternative, 'no because friends live together I've lived with friends'. Cohabitation cannot replace marriage because it is barely differentiable from living with a group of friends. Others believed there was no need for any alternative to marriage, cohabitation or otherwise: 'I don't really see the point of having another one I think marriage is marriage and I think it would get too confused' (Claire), this view is echoed by Zoe.

Yet, there were more participants who positively view cohabitation as an alternative to marriage (for 'other' people). As Adele comments, 'yeah I think it can for the right people yeah I mean some people just don't believe in marriage do they or are a bit jaded against it or something like that and yeah it's definitely a viable alternative'. For these participants, cohabitation is acceptable as an alternative for marriage for other people, although not for themselves. Moreover, it is an alternative *and less committed* relationship choice.

Amy is one of the few participants who recognised a need for an alternative to marriage that is viewed as equal to it. She comments,

> I think there should be that alternative open to people if they don't
> want to get married in a church or in a registry office I think they
> should be able to enter into a civil partnership together because
> erm…[...] I think it is important that..people first of all realise that if
> they are just cohabitating they don't have the same rights and that they
> do have some way of not getting married as such but having the same
> like political status.

Amy does not go into why there should be an alternative but it is perhaps because of the restrictions of where a couple can marry, 'in a church or in a registry office'. Civil partnerships are seen as more 'equal' relationships (Eva) that mean the same as a marriage but do not 'land you up as being man and wife' (Mandy).

Civil partnerships reject all the traditions and conventions of marriage and yet encompass almost the same legal entitlements and identical perceived levels of commitment.

6.8   CONCLUSION

From a review of the literature and my own participant responses, I have been able to develop an approximate model of commitment. This involves certain factors that 'pull' an individual into a relationship, such as love and a decision to be faithful, and other factors that 'push' an individual into a relationship, such as investments in the partnership and social expectations. The 'pull' factors represent a desire to be in a relationship while the 'push' aspects represent a desire not to end the relationship. While the 'push' factors are negotiable and are not necessary for commitment to exist, they are still commonly present in relationships and commitment is considered to be ideal when both aspects, 'pull' and 'push', are involved. In addition, the push factors are negotiable. Although investments are often made in relationships to strengthen and reinforce the partnership, these are increasingly easy to dissolve or remove. Moreover, the social expectation to remain in a long term partnership, although still present, is declining and increasingly can be rejected by couples (although not by most in my own sample). Longevity is also a highly important aspect of commitment since it is involved in both 'pull' and 'push' factors. Longevity can encompass the life course stage of an individual, a desire for a long-term relationship, proof of a long-term bond and it provides the bridge between pull and push factors. This model, however, does not, and cannot, attempt to explain all experiences and aspects of relationships. Since commitment is a fluid and changeable process, there is not one single model or group of aspects that can be said to explain its entire nature.

What is certain, however, is that no matter what stage of the process a couple is at, infidelity has the power to seriously damage commitment. It became clear that although contingency is only associated with commitment based on present satisfaction, it is, in fact, a consideration at any stage of a relationship. The

importance of exclusivity highlights this issue and the reality that any relationship is likely to be contingent upon remaining faithful (except perhaps in rare cases of highly religious relationships where religious ideals of permanency outweigh damaging behaviours). Sex and fidelity are vitally important to the continuation of relationships.

The making of ties is affected by time, age of the individuals involved and their life course. All of these will influence how the bond is experienced and the level of dedication that is deemed appropriate. Moreover, people are becoming increasingly reflexive and participants did not struggle to reflect and analyse their past relationships. Society is becoming more reflexive and individuals can increasingly interpret and distinguish meanings of commitment for themselves. Thus, these meanings are increasingly subjective and 'commitment' can mean very different things for different people; its nature is perceived to be changing. However, it is also more likely that the nature of relationships is changing, bringing with it new and different ways of expressing emotions. Rather than individuals being more or less committed now than they were a generation ago, the ways and means of experiencing it have changed considerably and thus altered people's perceptions.

Commitment has become decoupled from marriage; it can now reside in other situations, such as cohabiting relationships or those involving children. It may be involved in marriage but this is not presupposed, and marriage is not the only relationship formation in which it is experienced. Commitment is still very much attached to the decision to have children and this was seen as the most obvious and strong expression of the bond. Commitment is not integral to cohabitation but different levels may exist within different implementations of living together. Cohabitation may be as permanent as marriage to the couple involved, they are simply different ways of living commitment; marriage is a visible display, whereas cohabitation is invisible and involves a more private expression.

The way commitment is talked about differs with relation to whether the participants are talking about the concept for themselves or for 'others'. The

self/other divide is very apparent throughout discussions on this topic and 'other' people are always viewed as different from or at odds with the views of the participant. This discrepancy also arises when participants talk about their past self; previous behaviours and actions often conflict with what the participant now believes. This discussion enables participants to assert that while 'other' people are less or uncommitted, the notion is still very important to themselves. Juxtaposing self and others, or self and past self, is a device used by individuals to distance themselves from behaviours and beliefs they now view to be different from or contradictory to their current views. The prevalence of the use of this 'othering' may indicate a desire by the young women to express their independence and individuality in an increasingly homogenised culture.

The belief in commitment by the majority of participants resembles the nature of blind faith that is commonly displayed in religion. While religious patrons are expected to put their faith in an unknown and unseen higher being, women and men are similarly expected to trust to an unknown force, called commitment, that will bind a couple together through thick and thin regardless of future changes. This bonding is considered to be the ideal and unalterable, without thought to future happiness. Rather than commitment retreating in favour of shorter term liaisons, it seems to remain extremely important to most participants and vital to their continuing partnerships. Only infidelity has the automatic power to destroy the faith held in commitment.

7. 'THERE IS MORE PRESSURE TO HAVE A WEDDING THAN THERE IS TO HAVE A MARRIAGE': THE WEDDING RITUAL

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Weddings were often talked about as an opportunity to display the commitment felt in a relationship; this commitment is otherwise invisible. When talking about weddings, participants also often displayed conflicting views regarding tradition and the potential for innovation. While the traditional, conventional wedding was longed for, interviewees also expressed a wish to do something 'slightly different' (Grace). Other themes that emerged include a discrepancy between how 'other people' view weddings compared to how participants themselves view them; the questionable separation of weddings from marriage and the meaning of marriage; the commercialisation and expense of weddings; the influence of celebrity weddings; the extent to which weddings have become cultural performances; and what exactly weddings stand for now: love, commitment, confirmation of a relationship, or simply a party or celebration.

This chapter focuses on these themes as I attempt to uncover the role weddings play in the lives of young women today. I begin by discussing the decision to have a wedding and the extent to which this is a choice, an anticipated step or an inevitable (but still desired) future. This is followed by a consideration of whether weddings have become separated from marriage and the meaning that is associated with being married. This leads on to a discussion of what, or who, participants claim weddings are for: whether for the couple, for family and friends, for love or commitment or just for a party to celebrate the union. The desire to have a celebration in front of family and friends, and the separation of weddings from the meaning of marriage, may lead to suggestions that weddings have become reduced to simple cultural performances (Boden, 2003). This notion is discussed with reference to the wedding display as well as the traditions and assumptions that are still strongly associated with weddings. While tradition is still important to many participants, weddings were also talked about as sites of individualisation; this will also be discussed, together with the idea of including

individualism within the commercialisation of weddings. A wedding being a site of consumption and expense is then examined and this is followed by an outline of participants' ideal and actual wedding plans. Finally, I consider the role of bridal magazines in the consumption and commercialisation of weddings; the way in which such magazines are read by participants, and the role they play in influencing wedding aspirations.

7.2 WEDDINGS: A CHOICE TO COMMIT OR PRESSURE TO PERFORM?

Boden (2003) comments that a wedding is a union of two people who choose to commit to each other. Among my participants, however, there is not so much a choice to commit but a drift into a committed relationship that may develop into marriage[16]. From my own experience and from participants' accounts, there is instead a pressure to have a wedding, particularly when the couple have been together for a number of years. This pressure comes from family and friends, who have expectations about the appropriate course of their relationship, and from the normative conventions of wider society.

Chrys Ingraham (1999) suggests that the 'romance with wedding culture works ideologically to naturalize the regulation of sexuality through the institution of marriage' (1999: 14), while the popularity of the wedding also reasserts the dominance 'of one of heterosexuality's key organizing rituals' (1999: 14). The wedding, therefore, is central to the heterosexual imaginary because it naturalises heterosexuality and reasserts the dominance of this institution through a highly organised and strictly maintained ritual. Although same sex couples can now have a wedding to enter a civil partnership, these are frequently framed through heterosexual traditions and customs. The romanticised wedding 'prevents us from seeing how institutionalized heterosexuality actually works to organize gender while preserving racial, class, and sexual hierarchies' (1999: 16). Women grow up within the heterosexual imaginary, capitalism and media, which work collectively to convince them that it is normal and desired to marry and have a wedding.

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[16] See chapter 5 for the drift into relationships.

Moreover, as Ingraham notes, a woman is told that 'she's had this dream since she was four' (1999: 39). The media normalise the link between weddings and consumption, display and spectacle, in the interests of a consumer culture, and women experience increasing pressure (and desire) to conform to the directions of bridal magazines.

Many participants expressed an awareness of the expectations surrounding weddings and marriage, but this pressure to have a wedding or conform to standard wedding notions is highlighted, in particular, by Lucy and Hermione. Lucy comments:

> Society [has] this notion of ideal wedding scenario where you have a white dress in a church and then you have loads of guests and... so I think there's still pressure kind of put on people... and maybe even more so than there used to be.

There are certain expectations held in our society concerning marriage that are now focused on the wedding, where previously they may have focused on life afterwards. This is also recognised by Hermione who acknowledges the pressure on couples that has arisen as a result of the growth in the wedding industry. Hermione comments, 'I think there's a lot more pressure to have like a big super wedding and not as much on whether you're gonna be married after that'. Hermione talks about this pressure to have a wedding in the context of discussing the possible separation of weddings from marriage. It would seem that by focusing on the wedding rather than marriage, the wedding is the central focus, becomes wrapped up in its own assumptions and meanings, and is divided from life after the wedding: the marriage.

7.3   THE SEPARATION OF WEDDINGS FROM MARRIAGE

According to Boden (2003), weddings have become disassociated and separated from marriage and they are little more than cultural performances. In addition, Barlow et al. (2005) suggest that the show and display of the wedding becomes

the marriage itself, rather than signifying the beginning of a marriage. Thus, the wedding *is* the marriage; the wedding represents all that is left of what was once a meaningful social institution. While many participants discuss the divide between weddings and marriage, they do not, on the whole, support either Boden's (2003) idea of cultural performances or Barlow et al.'s (2005) reduction of marriage to the wedding.

In talking about weddings, participants seem to imply that there is more meaning behind the event than mere performance. Weddings are seen as rituals comprising long lasting and meaningful traditions. A 'proper wedding' (Leonard Barker, 1978; Leonard, 1980; Mansfield and Collard, 1988) or a white wedding has a strong appeal for young women and consists of individual ritual practices such as the wearing of a white dress and the giving away of the bride. This significant event is 'the form of ritual best suited to the purpose of marking the major status transition which is being made' (Leonard Barker, 1978). According to Durkheim (1961, cited in Hochschild, 2003), moreover, 'rituals create for any social group a circle within which things come to seem extraordinary, amazing, sacred, and outside of which things seem ordinary, unremarkable, profane' (Hochschild, 2003: 120). Thus, the rituals of the wedding create associations of extraordinariness with the 'big day' and these associations, as well as the notion of the wedding as a rite of passage, mean that the wedding represents more than a social and cultural performance.

In addition, the suggestion that marriage has become reduced to just the wedding cannot be maintained when taking into account the participants' discussion of the meaning of marriage for them. None speculate that the meaning of marriage is simply the wedding or that the wedding has come to represent the importance and significance of marriage. All participants recognise that marriage must involve strong commitment between the partners and a commitment to the relationship. Marriage is viewed as encompassing a variety of meanings and significant associations including commitment, love and respect that go above and beyond the meaning of the wedding.

However, while recognising the significance of marriage for themselves and the important role it will play in their futures, participants are quick to suggest this might be different for 'other people'. Abigail comments, 'I think everyone just gets so wrapped up in the big day and they actually... think like afterwards oh my god they have to commit and I think people find it a big struggle'. For Abigail, the wedding obscures thought of life after marriage and may even entice a couple to marry who have not previously considered the commitment marriage involves. This is echoed by Adele who comments, 'the actual wedding tends to be the big deal don't it and then the marriage kind of comes second a little bit'. Shirley also discussed this, commenting, 'I think it's quite easy to get carried away by the thought of the wedding day and to kind of forget that there's a lot more to it'. The idea that the wedding day obscures the marriage is a common theme, yet it is discussed in different ways by participants. In Abigail's comment, she talks about 'everyone' becoming wrapped up in the big day and forgetting about the committing part; eliminating herself from this group by referring to them as 'they' and 'people'. On the other hand, Adele and Shirley talk in a more abstract sense that could include their own thoughts about weddings. In talks with interviewees, it became apparent that participants would most often construct the divide between weddings and marriage as occurring for 'other people' but not for themselves; a device that at once distanced the participants from these undesirable views and implicitly criticised those 'other people'. Once again the self/other divide haunts participants' discourse.

This separation of self from others is apparent in many women's discussions of the divide between weddings and marriage. As Amy says,

> I think it [the wedding] kind of becomes a focus point and people
> don't think about it afterwards [...] the ideas of marriage like after the
> wedding have kind of faded a bit now and they've kind of been taken
> over by what's going to happen on the day.

By talking about 'people', Amy positions herself as separate from this category. Fiona creates this separation of 'self' from 'others' in a more obvious way when

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she says,

> It was the marriage between us that was important to me and not the sort of actual day but I think the day can take over and people may get married just because they want to sort of spend a day in the dress.

This is echoed by Grace: 'I think some people probably think too much about just getting married and their one big day and forget about what it actually means'; Helen: 'I think some people get married just for the wedding they're not bothered about the marriage afterwards'; Hermione: 'they don't think of the day after you get married'; and Ruth: 'I wonder if people actually kind of just want to get married 'cause they want the wedding they want the white wedding and don't think about actually what it means to be married afterwards'. Thus, it seems there is a common perception that some 'people' just want a wedding and disregard the meaning of the marriage that will result. However, this does not apply to participants who position themselves as different.

As previously suggested, this separation of the self from 'other' people could be due to a desire to assert agency and individuality. However, there could be another explanation in this case. Rather than there being a genuine difference between my participants' views and those of 'others', or a need to assert agency in their views, this particular divide could be a result of a lack of critical reflexivity by participants. Weddings have become increasingly commercialised and consumed in magazines, on TV and elsewhere. This may be one factor that has led to the assumption that weddings, rather than marriage, are increasingly the focus of the wedding day. The default position then, when talking about weddings and marriage, is that they have become separated for other people, as is displayed in bridal magazines for example, but still have meaning for themselves. Thus, from participants accounts, it becomes clear that while this may be the perception, the reality for them is that the wedding still holds a great deal of significance and marriage is not entirely obscured by the wedding itself.

A few participants, however, do show a high level of reflexivity when discussing

weddings, or at least admit to being caught up in the process. Claire is in the process of organising her own wedding and states,

> I think a lot of people look forward to weddings and not so much the marriage. People tend to forget about the actual marriage I mean even I am finding it... it's like oh yeah I'm getting married that means I'm going to be married and I'm going to be a wife.

Although Claire begins by talking about 'people', she then begins to identify herself within the situation; she recognises that she is also perhaps focusing on the wedding rather than the marriage. Eleanor also acknowledges that it is the wedding that appeals to her rather than the marriage, 'I know that it's the wedding bit that's the fairytale in my head not the marriage bit'. Mandy also comments, 'I would have the wedding again not just a legal civil thing because of the romance that was involved and it was absolutely lovely but then afterwards not the marriage'. Having had a wedding the previous year, Mandy explained that the wedding was the best day of her life and it was this that she really desired, not the marriage. These participants appear to be critically reflexive in their views of weddings and this is perhaps because they have reflected on their feelings about weddings and can acknowledge that the wedding can and does mean something different from marriage. This small number of young women recognise how easy it is to become caught up in a wedding and, as a result, to view this as separate from marriage. This recognition accounts for views that differ from other participants, who stress the importance of the marriage over the wedding.

Thus, some participants see weddings as being separated from marriage in a general sense (Adele and Shirley), a large number view weddings as being separated from marriage for others but not for themselves (Abigail, Amy, Fiona, Grace, Helen, Hermione and Ruth), and a small number view weddings as separated from marriage for others *and* for themselves; perhaps due to an awareness on their part of the ease of being caught up in the moment (Claire, Eleanor and Mandy). The remaining participants believe either that weddings are separated from marriage but only to some extent, or that they are not separated at

all.

When Zoe was asked about whether weddings had separated from marriage, she replied, 'no no I think people still view their wedding as the start of their marriage'. This view was also echoed by Adele who, despite commenting that for some people the wedding and marriage are separated, goes on to say, 'I think for some people the wedding is the start of the marriage and they have got them both in mind'. Contrary to Barlow et al.'s (2005) suggestion that the show of the wedding becomes the marriage, for many of my participants, the wedding meant the beginning of married life together. Claire captures this distinction: 'I think for me it's probably about having a nice day and... yeah and then just kind of solidifying our commitment'. There is an element of display and show to weddings but this was interpreted as demonstrating love and commitment. Weddings play a symbolic role in life and the display associated with weddings partially represents this symbolic role. Weddings symbolise love and commitment between a couple and they can also recreate 'categorical imperatives' (Leonard Barker, 1978) of the family and the state: 'participation in rituals and the use of symbols may cause people to feel particular sentiments, to accept norms and concepts, to objectify and thereby confirm social roles' (Leonard Barker, 1978: 76). Thus, when a couple have a wedding, they are symbolising their feelings towards each other as well as notions of the family, social roles and cultural norms.

7.4   WHAT ARE WEDDINGS FOR?

Weddings were commonly talked about as public displays of love and commitment for friends and family. They were also conceived as being for the couple, and as a confirmation and celebration of their relationship. Thus, the wedding has a number of roles to fulfil. The wedding is seen as offering the couple an official status and it was most often talked about in terms of recognising the commitment between the couple. This is commented on by Ruth: 'you're recognising the commitment they're making', Elizabeth: 'it's more showing people the commitment' and Penny, 'it's not just about the like whole wedding

day you know it's like it's just showing that you're committed to that person'. Amy also talks about this show of commitment: 'you might know how committed someone is to you and how much they love you but I think the vows are also a way of telling everybody else like how you feel about someone'. Thus, the wedding is ultimately a display for these participants, a show for others to witness the commitment they feel in their relationships. It appears that commitment is not 'shown' or obvious enough through just a relationship, cohabitation, longevity, or even a marriage between two people; the wedding is there to prove that the commitment exists, to display and symbolise it. As Grace says,

> It is sort of making that commitment in front of everyone so you know that that other person at least in terms to be stay together they're not going to run off and leave you with his children or whatever.

There are witnesses to answer to, if necessary, at a later date. Rather than commitment being represented through a lasting and stable relationship, it has to be displayed on one day, through a ceremony, dress, cake, and in the presence of family and friends.

For some, the wedding is a distinct contrast to cohabitation which is 'so gradual and so unnoticeable and it doesn't really have any different status to friends' (Ruth). Eleanor echoes this view commenting,

> A wedding is or should be a celebration of the fact you've decided that you're going to spend the rest of your lives together and that's not marked if you just move in together it's not marked in a family or social kind of way.

Therefore, the wedding is necessary to set it apart from 'just' cohabitation and to show people around the couple that they are committed to one another in a greater sense than is represented by the perceptions of cohabitation. The wedding is a social and family event that marks the relationship between a couple.

Thus, weddings are about display, as Elizabeth says, 'there has to be an element of show because otherwise you would just be doing it by yourselves in a church'. The meaning of weddings goes beyond the ceremony between the couple; it has now come to mean display: a wedding is not a wedding unless there is an element of show or display aimed at other people. Therefore, to some extent, Boden is correct in assuming that weddings have become cultural performances. They are performances by brides, grooms, bridesmaids, best men, audiences, who all collude to uphold the operation of the wedding. Each actor has her or his part and role to play in the performance and this is reinforced through popular notions and the etiquette that surrounds the show. Yet this is a meaningful display for participants who see the show as necessary for conveying the meaning of marriage and commitment.

Ingraham (1999) links this spectacle of the wedding to popular culture that prepares young women from childhood to desire to take centre stage at the wedding, since, as Hochschild (2003) notes, 'From childhood on, we actually "rehearse" for our wedding' (2003: 120). Marriage and the wedding are viewed as much more of a rite of passage for women than for men. As Westwood (1984) notes, even the celebration of engagements was 'a rite of passage for the move from girl to woman, from daughter to wife' (1984: 112); for women and not for men. This transformation of women within the wedding is also highlighted by the clothing worn. Leonard Barker (1978) notes, 'The ritual dress of the bride marks out her transitional status, and she usually keeps the dress as a memento and for luck' (1978: 71) while the grooms outfit does not attract such significance: 'we would find ludicrous the idea that his clothing should signify anything about his sexuality' and he 'is not singled out from other men present in terms of his costume' (1978: 71). While the women I interviewed did not discuss in detail this notion of the wedding as a rite of passage for them, the very nature of the wedding ensures they are the centre of attention. The focus is on her transformation and movement from one family to another and from one status to another.

The centrality of the bride and importance of her 'big day' ensure that display and consumption are pivotal features in most weddings. Bridal magazines play a part

in this, as do displays of celebrity weddings in wider media, which 'play a powerful part in linking romance with accumulation' (Ingraham 1999: 105). Ingraham argues that while represented as 'real', 'celebrity weddings appeal to readers as actual manifestations of the fairy-tale or storybook romance' (1999: 105). Therefore, celebrity weddings serve to convey to the reader or observer what they should believe about romance, weddings, marriage and heterosexuality (Ingraham, 1999). This idea is mentioned by Helen, who comments,

> I think at the moment especially, you get people you know like Jordan and Peter who've had that massive wedding and stuff. I think some people look at that and think wow I want to do that and I think every girl deep down wants to be a you know the whole white wedding sort of thing.

Thus, celebrity weddings may create an ideal and something to aspire to. Yet, Helen later reveals that she does not aspire to a wedding like this herself. In fact, most other participants who mention celebrity weddings do so in a disparaging way, suggesting that they set a bad example for young people to look up to. Celebrities are seen as 'getting married every two minutes' (Rebecca), and their weddings are viewed as 'a bit garish' (Adele), 'a bit tacky' (Claire), and 'just stupid' (Susan). Therefore, while celebrity weddings may influence some people with regard to how they should be organising their weddings, it is clear from my participants that they do not adhere to or appreciate the fashion of big 'garish' celebrity weddings.

For most participants, this show or performance is about demonstrating their commitment to their partner, although there are some other interpretations. For Hermione, this show is an unnecessary extra:

> I think it should just be what you and your fiancé say to each other, I think that is the little tiny part where you're in the church or in the registry office or wherever you are getting married, and the rest of it is just...it's just show isn't it.

For Hermione the most important part of the wedding is the ceremony and the rest of it is 'show'. In order to avoid this 'show', Hermione and her fiancé eloped to Las Vegas where they were married before returning to England to inform their family and friends. This action avoided the display part of the wedding that is so essential to other participants for showing their friends and family how committed they are.

Helen and Eva view the display element of the wedding performance as a show of their achievement; what they have achieved together as couples. Helen says, 'I'd like to get married you know 'cause it's something you can plan together and then you can say look what we've done', and Eva says,

> I just imagine it being just full of my friends and my family and being just a wonderful big celebration and just feeling really special so like *look* and this *look* at what we've got isn't this great and *look*ing at him and thinking *look* isn't this *look* at what we've achieved *look* at this (emphasis added).

For these participants then, the wedding is a *show* of achievement, of planning something together and also a celebration of being a couple, of being together. This fits into the idea that being in a couple is a success in itself; that coupledom is an achievement ('look at what we've achieved') and singleness a failure. As Geller (2001) notes, 'For the woman who perceives herself as "single," friendship, intellectual life, and professional success are not enough [...] A wedding ring is still the primary indispensable symbol of external validation' (2001: 12). The wedding is a site to celebrate being a couple and a sign to others of their validation and social success.

Barlow et al. (2005) suggest that the wedding is no longer considered a rite of passage into adulthood but has instead become a rite of passage into the ranks of the socially successful. This progress is supposedly achieved through bigger and more extravagant weddings. This is seen to occur, to some extent, for other

people. As Hermione says, there is pressure to have a 'big super wedding' and Penny explains that weddings could turn into 'a bit of a competition'. For example, 'your friends have got married and you think well they've done that and I should do that and they've had a chocolate fountain and I've got to get like a diamond encrusted one'. Thus, there is an element of competition, in terms of weddings, that is linked with entering the ranks of the socially successful and showing this success through increasingly expensive weddings. Other participants echo this view that 'others' are in competition: Alice comments, 'everyone's trying to out-do each other aren't they' and Abigail says 'I think weddings do like especially now like you've got so much choice and it's so expensive and I think the sad thing is people try to out-do people'.

This view of weddings as competition was, however, only a minority view and even then it was what 'other people' thought and was not relevant for the participants themselves. From other participants' accounts, it would appear that acceptance into the socially successful really just requires a standard wedding that conforms to the norm, rather than a particularly extravagant affair. Almost all participants wanted a wedding of one form or another and as long as the dress was white and family and friends were present this was enough to demonstrate their success as a couple: a social celebration of coupledom.

Although weddings are viewed by participants as involving an element of display and performance and a demonstration of social success, the idea that weddings are *just* about display and expense is strongly rejected. The notion of tradition in the wedding is mentioned repeatedly, as well as the idea that weddings are about an expression of commitment. Display is vital in the modern day interpretation of a wedding, for fulfilling the function of showing commitment between the couple, their success at being together. The wedding sits in opposition to cohabitation: the wedding is like a firework, it represents a sudden and explosive display of a couple's togetherness whereas cohabitation is slow-burning, it is not an obvious display of the couple and does not satisfactorily elevate the couple to the ranks of the socially successful in the way that the wedding does.

7.5   THE TRADITIONAL WEDDING: DESIRE AND RESISTANCE

Elements of display associated with the wedding are commonly justified by the assertion of their traditional role in the ritual; part of the display is, therefore, the notion of tradition. Participants appear to idealise a tradition that has only relatively recently become associated with weddings: the tradition of the church, dress, bridesmaids, cake and so on, which have become commercialised to such an extent that 'tradition' has been completely rewritten. The 'traditional' big white wedding is a product of the Victorians, who claimed components of the wedding as British traditions, despite none of these elements predating their own century (Geller, 2001); 'Giving away a bride adorned in virginal white, hosting a family reception, and sending the couple off on an exclusive honeymoon enshrined the Victorian's romantic notions of female purity, conjugal love, and the nuclear family' (2001: 26) and continue to this day. These traditions serve to romanticise the marital relationship above all others, as well as the remaining elements of hierarchy and patriarchy within weddings ('giving away' the bride for example). The marital relationship takes precedence above all other emotional ties and, as Geller goes on to say, marriage 'has a sentimental luster [sic] that most of our ancestors would have found bizarre if not laughable' (2001: 26). These Victorian assumptions and pretensions have formed the modern day 'traditional' wedding that is idealised and longed for by a majority of participants.

Charsley (1992) has examined the significance of the wedding cake in the ritual and came to the conclusion that this has undergone a process of 'marooning'; this is when 'what is common, even standard and merely practical, at one time, assumes a new aspect when it is prolonged into an era of changed practices and practicalities' (1992: 133). While the making of a cake was once done to mark a special event, the wedding cake has come to symbolise something quite different. It may be concluded, therefore, that a number of 'traditions' associated with weddings have been marooned from previous eras. For example, the tradition of the white bridal dress, which once stood for virginity, purity and cleanliness, has endured through the decades, become separated from its original meaning and is now considered romantic, special and traditional. As Charsley comments,

tradition is part of the process of marooning, particularly when connected with occasions that happen infrequently and are considered of especial importance. Although this often results in the creation of 'invented' traditions, Charsley goes on to say that such 'invention',

> may always have a part to play in the origination and modification of custom in all societies, and in no society does invention become tradition without being taken up and becoming part of the taken-for-granted apparatus in terms of which people conduct their lives. (1992: 135)

Thus, invented tradition can be just as valid as 'real' tradition since it can play an important role in creating customs by which people live their lives.

Not only have certain rituals been marooned and turned into invented traditions only created in recent history, they have now also been reinterpreted and capitalised by big business. 'Virginal white', once so demure, is now a fashionable (preferably designer label) and often revealing white dress costing upwards of £500. 'A family reception' requires a suitable venue with food, alcohol and dance floor, and honeymoons are increasingly lavish, luxurious and expensive. This is all encouraged and maintained by the wedding industry and yet disguises itself as 'tradition' and necessary to achieve the required wedding standards: the 'proper wedding' (Leonard Barker, 1978; Leonard, 1980; Mansfield and Collard, 1988).

As with other topics of discussion, there was a distinct desire among some participants to have a 'traditional' wedding; tradition was desired rather than rejected. Fiona was particularly traditional when she married and says, 'the whole wedding was quite traditional really and I wanted to be quite traditional with taking his name'. For others, tradition was idealised in their wedding fantasies: 'I would like to have a nice traditional sort of wedding' (Alice), 'a relatively traditional one in a church' (Adele), 'I suppose I'd like something quite traditional' (Grace), and Michelle describes the traditional trimmings, 'I'd want a white dress I'd want my Dad to give me away um I would have bridesmaids'. For some, the church was the ideal setting for a wedding although those who were not

religious did recognise the contradiction; for example, Grace says, 'I'd kind of like to get married in a church but then I'm not religious so I'd feel totally hypocritical'. The tradition of the church wedding is a strong ideology although many participants had alternative settings to the church. One theme that recurred in a number of discussions was the desire to marry outside or on a beach, despite the illegality of this in the UK and its riskiness in the British climate.

The imperative to have a 'traditional' wedding did lead to a couple of participants recognising the uniformity of the modern ritual. Mandy highlights this notion commenting that a wedding should be about the bride and groom 'loving every minute of it because it's how they wanted it' rather than because it 'feels very familiar like every other last wedding I've been to'. Lauren notices the sameness of weddings portrayed in bridal magazines, 'it was essentially the same wedding in different areas of the country you know oh everyone looked the same everyone had the same flowers and the same dress'. It is this sameness that appears to have led some participants to resist the homogeneity of weddings by desiring small differences within their own wedding.

Although Grace says that she would ideally like a traditional wedding, she goes on to say that she would 'have a few little different things in it to make it a bit memorable and not like any other wedding'. Susan and others echo this sentiment and explain that expense can be avoided by being more 'imaginative' in terms of organising a wedding and having the ability to 'make it the wedding you want' (Fiona). Greater acts of resistance can be seen among those who express a desire to go abroad to have the wedding, in order to escape from the expense, attention and certain expectations. Catriona comments, 'I think a big wedding like that is a waste of money 'cause it's like talking 15, 20 grand I think it's ridiculous so I wanna get married abroad I want to go away'. Helen also wants to do something other than 'just get married in a hotel or something', she goes on to say, 'I've always said I'd love to get married on a beach'. Helen, however, is undecided about her ideal wedding setting as she also comments that 'ever since I were little I've always thought of it church wise' so she wavers between her traditional fantasy of a church wedding and the more recent notion of doing it differently on

a beach. This ambivalence is also echoed by Penny who says, 'half of me's think that [...] I really want to get married in a church but half of me's thinking go abroad'. This indecision has arisen for Penny because she says she would prefer a small, intimate wedding but this is not seen to be compatible with a traditional church wedding, which is necessarily big and extravagant. The alternative is to go abroad for the wedding.

Thus, it becomes clear that while the pull of the traditional wedding is strong, some participants want to deviate from this norm to a greater or lesser extent. Boden (2003) suggests that although weddings are cultural performances, their constructed nature allows for the potential of individualisation and reinterpretation of weddings. Moreover, Lewin (2004) found that weddings could be designed to represent more than just commitment and could display messages about identity or community. While no participants I spoke to had such radical ideas, some participants talked about doing things slightly differently or were undecided about what they wanted from the wedding. This suggests that in small ways, young women are questioning the tradition of the wedding and are thinking of ways to individualise their own. On the whole, however, these alterations are largely within the boundaries of suggestions in bridal magazines.

For one participant, the desire to avoid the traditional wedding motivated her to elope abroad just to avoid the attention that is linked with the white wedding. Hermione describes her decision to marry abroad:

> We just wanted to get married and come home and celebrate it when
> we got home. I didn't want everybody looking at me every bit of the
> day I just I couldn't have been bothered with that. I didn't want a
> massive dress didn't want to be wandering around in shoes that hurt
> me all day and a hair piece that was going to wilt and stuff like that. I
> just didn't want any of that, neither of us did and I just thought oh
> we'll just, we might as well do it our way.

There appears to be some tension then, between having an extravagant wedding

and doing it 'our way', almost as if the pressure to have the white wedding outweighs the desires of the couple marrying. There is ambivalence evident in participants' idealised weddings because of the assumptions associated with the wedding: that a certain amount of money must be spent, that a certain number of people must be invited, that all attention is on the bride and so on. These assumptions and expectations are inseparable from the modern wedding and are only resisted to a certain extent by most participants.

The wedding industry is another area of high conformity that provides the potential for resistance. Bridal magazines, wedding exhibitions, and other wedding paraphernalia are most frequently directed at the bride, assuming that the bride takes on the majority of wedding organisation. This is reinforced by a number of participants. In planning her wedding, Fiona comments that 'I've tried to get Joseph to have some sort of input but he's just like at the end of the day he's just like I trust your decisions so I pretty much chose everything' and Eva says that 'I just don't think guys are such a big fan of weddings'. Men are seen as not interested in engaging with weddings after the initial proposal. Yet weddings are also seen as being solely for the bride:

> It's a fantasy, you know. For the day you are the princess, you might as well be queen, you know, 'cause you're the one everyone's interested in looking at. Alright kings get a bit of a look in but they're not on show really (Ruth).

Weddings are for the bride and are a rite of passage for the bride, while the groom is just an extra. Claire recognises the stereotype as she says,

> It's expected the woman has a lot of say and the bloke just shuts up and lets the woman get on with it...which probably will happen in our case but yeah I think the idea is that two people are coming together you know as equal partners and things and then that one person just has all the say in the wedding is a bit silly.

Thus, it is a recognised stereotype that the wedding is about the bride alone and she has much of the say in the decision making. This is reinforced by bridal magazines and commercialisation. In addition, when Fiona is talking about her wedding she comments that she did want the 'big white wedding' but that if her partner had not wanted the same, 'I would have given in and given it to him 'cause at the end of the day it was the marriage between us that was important to me and not the sort of actual day'. Thus, for Fiona, the format of the wedding was hers to give away to her partner if she so wanted; there is an automatic assumption that she had control of the wedding that was not even necessary to articulate to me. Yet she does also acknowledge that it was the marriage that was important rather than the day. This suggests a focus more on equality since the marriage involves a couple whereas the wedding involves a bride and, to a lesser extent, a groom.

As Claire goes on to say, the wedding is supposedly about two people coming together as equal partners and the traditional notion of women's greater involvement with weddings is 'silly'. Thus, this gender divide in the planning and organisation of weddings is being questioned and resisted on a small scale. Other participants recognise the 'equality' of the wedding day. Helen comments that the wedding day is something a couple can plan together and Elizabeth says more explicitly:

> They always going it's your day, you make it how you want. It's not
> my day, otherwise what's the point of him being there? Everyone
> come worship me? So we've always been very clear that it's about the
> two of us, it's not about me.

Although weddings do focus very much on the bride and her 'perfect day', for some participants it was important to show that the wedding was about the couple rather than just the bride (even if the bride did make the majority of decisions concerning the wedding).

The image of the traditional wedding is extremely strong and persistent and

participants struggle to reconcile this image with their desire for individuality and equality. Much of the tradition of weddings is maintained because it appeals to traditional notions of femininity and is constructed as encompassing women's dreams of marriage from childhood (Ingraham, 1999). The extravagance and expense associated with weddings is upheld because the couple deserve to splash out on their special day (a message reinforced by magazines).

7.6 THE WEDDING EXPENSE

Many participants discuss the growing expense of weddings. This is talked about in various ways, from weddings being very expensive (Eleanor, Lucy, Adele, Elizabeth), being too expensive (Penny), being a waste of money (Lauren) and the expense acting as a deterrent to marry (Catriona and Hermione). Similarly, Lewis (2001) found that out of an omnibus sample of 185 cohabitants, the most popular reason for not marrying was that they could not afford it. Thus, the expense of the wedding can act as a real deterrent to marriage. Moreover, since an expensive wedding is viewed as the 'proper' wedding, if a couple cannot afford this, marriage will be postponed. Others see the growing cost of weddings as a result of the commercialisation of the day. Michelle highlights this aspect as well as the justification for the expense: 'because there's a lot of money to be made out of it and people are prepared to spend a lot of money on making sure that they have that perfect day that they think has got to be perfect'. Therefore, because we are told that our wedding day should be 'perfect', we are justified in spending excessive amounts of money on making it so.

In *The Commercialisation of Intimate Life*, Hochschild (2003) explains what happened when a wedding did not conform to the standard ideals of perfection. In this case the bride's sister does not help her to dress before the wedding, close friends could not attend the day and the bridesmaids did not fulfil their functions. When these key elements of the wedding failed to meet perfection, the bride broke down in tears. However, the day was restored when she told herself that this was *her* wedding, that she should make it special for the people who had attended, and when she entered the church and gazed in her husband's eyes. Thus, certain

fundamental elements of the wedding day were restored: the centrality of herself in the day and the romance between herself and her future husband. Even though the day had not started well, this bride goes on to describe her day as 'beautiful' and 'indescribable' (Hochschild 2003: 120). Yet she can only characterise the beginning part of her day as not going to plan if she already has preconceived notions of what she should expect: 'This is supposed to be the happiest day of one's life' (2003: 119). Therefore, the notion that the wedding should be perfect is the standard against which all weddings are compared.

This view of the wedding as special, unique and perfect is central to its position in capitalist society. Otnes and Pleck (2003) sum up the status of the wedding: 'from its relatively humble roots that featured ceremonies in the parlor [sic] and receptions in the church basement, the wedding has been elevated to the special status of luxury good in contemporary consumer culture' (2003: 10). This notion is echoed by Adele who notes, 'you're putting on all this glitz and glamour but you're just a person it all seems very extravagant and luxurious really'. Weddings have become a luxury good only available to those who can afford it. The commercialisation of weddings has led to the construction of a model of the 'ideal' wedding, to which all weddings should conform as closely as possible, and that cost a certain amount of money.

Otnes and Pleck (2003) note that weddings valorise romantic love and consumption and one reason they can do so is because consumers are spared any guilt about the excess of money spent on the 'perfect' wedding. Standards of perfection, which date back to the 1920s, imply no limit on spending and are 'created by advertisers, marketers, and bridal magazines' (2003: 18). These emphasise over and over again the need for weddings to be perfect and every element to radiate perfection. Unfortunately, this perfection can rarely be achieved on a budget; in consumer culture, 'perfection is synonymous with lavishness, because what perfect really means is spectacle, romance, luxury, fashion, and entertainment–the combination of which is never cheap' (2003: 19). Illouz (1997) also recognises this connection between romance and expense. Illouz suggests that a process she terms the 'romanticization of commodities' took

place during the Twentieth Century when the theme of romance became increasingly associated with consumption. At the turn of the last century, 'cultural entrepreneurs and established industries began promoting commodity-centered [sic] definitions of romance to further their own economic interests' (1997: 11). Following this, romance and consumption have become increasingly interrelated to the extent that commodities 'have now penetrated the romantic bond so deeply that they have become the invisible and unacknowledged spirit reigning over romantic encounters' (1997: 11). It could be argued that this is what has happened to weddings: commodities associated with the wedding such as the dress, the food, the entertainment, and so on have become the unacknowledged backbone of the romantic wedding event. The goods associated with the romantic wedding have become romanticised themselves so that they are seen as romantic components in their own right.

The expense associated with weddings is justified by a number of participants in the name of perfection. This notion of perfection is also justified by explaining that the wedding day should be a unique event in a person's life and therefore it should be perfect and one is allowed to splash out. According to Westwood (1984), 'The firms that service weddings have a trump card: they can appeal to the "once in a life-time" nature of a white wedding' (1984: 133). Grace also highlights this commenting,

> It just all adds up doesn't it? I mean you've got the dress, which are all just probably so expensive, and then buying all that food for everybody, and then booking the halls, there's just lots of little bits and I suppose 'cause it's like you only do it hopefully once everyone's prepared to pay that.

Helen also mentions the unique element to weddings and links this with perfection:

> If I got married, [...] as much as I want it simple, I would want everything to be perfect as well so yeah I can see it costing a lot but I

mean you're only going to do it, well people say you're only going to do it once.

Rebecca agrees with this as she says, 'splashing out doesn't seem that harsh if it's supposed to be the best biggest only wedding day of your life'. Finally, Ruth recognises the excessive expense but goes on to explain how this might be justified: 'it is ridiculous when you look at the sort of bare figures of it but... on the other hand it's a once in a lifetime supposedly event'. Significantly, there is some equivocation regarding the unique nature of the wedding. For Helen, *people say* you will only marry once, Rebecca notes that it is *supposed* to be your only wedding day and Ruth comments that it is only *supposedly* 'once in a lifetime'. This perhaps reflects the increased temporariness of marriage, growing separation rates and the ease of divorce and remarriage.

This might explain why almost all participants (with the exception of Abigail, whose wedding is costing upwards of £40,000) agree that the expense of weddings now is 'ridiculous'. Yet this extravagance is also justified by a large number of these participants because of the nature of weddings: they are unique, special and should be perfect. Perfection can only be achieved through spending vast amounts of money. This connection is summed up very insightfully by Shirley:

> I have this theory that because it's your big day and because you want everything to be perfect, I think that's probably played upon by the industry and any time you have money and thoughts of it creeping into your mind they sort of emphasise: but it's your day you must have exactly what you want, and it's like well yes I should treat myself really shouldn't I? It's my big day and you end up spending far too much.

In addition, not only does the wedding industry play upon women's expectations of the 'perfect' wedding day, it generates and maintains the ideals of perfection to which women aspire (see Otnes and Pleck, 2003). Consumer culture has the

ability to create meaning and it has done so with elements of the white wedding, to promote consumption.

This is taken to such an extent that a link begins to be established between money and commitment and the longevity of the commitment becomes defined by how much money is involved. This is outlined in further detail by Otnes and Pleck (2003): lavish weddings are so popular now in part because 'rituals become more elaborate when the public perceives the social institution being celebrated (in this case, marriage) as tenuous and vulnerable' (2003: 7). Thus, people are now anxious about the state of marriage and are concerned about the number of marriages that ultimately end in divorce, evidenced through their equivocation over the uniqueness of weddings. An expensive wedding can, therefore, sometimes be understood as '"divorce insurance"; if a couple spends a great deal of time and money on a wedding, it surely must follow that they are committed to the marriage' (2003: 7). Conversely, if a couple are not willing to spend excessive amounts of time and money on their wedding, it is assumed they have not 'devoted time and effort to contemplating the seriousness of their marriage' (2003:7). Thus, money becomes a symbol of commitment.

The lavish, expensive wedding symbolises the love that is felt between the couple; the more extravagant the wedding, the longer the love and commitment should last. The wedding as an investment is mentioned by Eva. On explaining the average cost of a wedding, Eva exclaims, 'gosh that is a lot of money isn't it that is a lot of money if you can afford it then why the hell not I mean it's your, if it's gonna last I mean it's an investment'. The wedding could thus be seen as an investment in the future of the relationship and, therefore, the greater the amount of money invested via the wedding, the more secure the future of the couple. Adele, however, talks about this link between money and commitment in relation to the breakdown of celebrity weddings. She comments, 'with the celebrity thing you know there's a great big fancy wedding and you know two months later they've broken up and it was such a lavish wedding that you know everyone thought oh they're really in love'. Thus, a lavish wedding creates expectations of 'they're really in love' but despite this message, it clearly does not guarantee a

stable future.

On the whole, expensive weddings were not viewed by participants as symbolising a greater commitment to the relationship. In participants' accounts, it was often weddings they had attended that were smaller and more intimate that they recounted as having more meaning for the couple and for the guests. Moreover, Susan explains that it is the extremely 'glamorised' weddings that are less likely to last: 'they're the weddings that do break up and they don't stay together 'cause they've had such a hype about the actual wedding day and then it's over'. Therefore, spending excessive sums of money on a wedding may also be interpreted as focussing too much on the day itself and not thinking sufficiently about the future of the marriage. In this respect, extravagant weddings could be seen as symbolising the exact opposite of commitment to the relationship.

For most participants, weddings are seen as absorbing a large amount of money and they assert that they themselves would not exceed their budget and that excessive expense is generally unnecessary. However, exception is given 'if a couple can afford it', and then spending a great deal of money on a wedding is acceptable and desired. Alice reflects this position when she says, 'I don't see the point in having a really expensive [wedding] unless you've got the money if you've got the money then that's fair enough but if you haven't I don't see the point'. Susan has a similar response as she says, 'I wouldn't pay or want to spend that much.. I think again if you've got the money then why not but I don't think you need to spend that much'. Claire agrees commenting that she does not like the celebrity wedding example that is just about showing off their wealth and how much money they can 'waste on one day', however, 'if you've got the money to spend then fair enough'. Once again, the expense of weddings is justified and viewed as reasonable as long as you have the money. If a couple were to spend beyond their means, as they are encouraged to do by the wedding industry, they would be seen as ill-advised at best. As these participants suggest, spending on weddings should be within the means of the couple and should not exceed their budget. Thus, extreme wedding expense is seen as unnecessary and extravagant unless the couple can actually afford it; then it is justified. Participants

demonstrate a lack of critical reflexive thought on such economic inequality that allows extravagance among the wealthy but condemns it for the poor.

This is particularly true for one participant who was in the process of planning her wedding at the time of interviewing. When I asked Abigail whether she had a budget for her wedding she replied, 'no because I'm kind of lucky my dad's going to pay for my wedding and our reception and Paul's mum's going to pay for our honeymoon'. Since she is from a privileged background, this meant that Abigail effectively had a limitless wedding budget. I enquired as to how much she was expecting the wedding to cost and she reported that the wedding alone would reach £20,000 and with entertainment, dresses and so on, she estimated the entire affair would exceed £40,000. Abigail, however, did not express any qualms about spending this much money:

> I don't mind because it's not- if I was paying then no way but my
> parents wanna do it and it's not like they hav- they've got the money
> to do it and if that makes then happy then that's great.

Again, wedding expense is justified because 'they've got the money', but on top of that, Abigail explains that spending this much money would make her parents happy. This expense perhaps demonstrates to guests and onlookers the success of the family; not only the success of the daughter in finding a husband but also of the family's financial success in funding such an expensive affair.

For some, however, there are other ways of demonstrating a bond, beyond hosting an expensive wedding. Barlow et al. (2005) report that one couple they talked to would rather spend that much money buying a house together, particularly since this seemed more symbolic of their commitment to one another than a public ceremony. Eleanor, despite asserting that she would like to marry, also acknowledges that it is a lot of 'fuss' and 'it's very expensive and I think money can be put to better use'. Lucy places the amount of money spent on the wedding in the context of this happening on just one day: 'how can people spend so much on a day when I think proportionally you could have so much more of a quality

time with your friends by doing other things'. Hermione agrees with this sentiment: 'I think you'd be better off just having a little quiet wedding and spending that 30 grand on the rest of your life you know like saving that money and doing something else with it'. Finally, Susan sums this issue up in a succinct manner:

> I don't think you need to spend that much on your wedding when you got like.. like your children that will need that money and I don't think there's any point in wasting it...unless I'm like a multimillionaire or something.

Spending some money on weddings is inevitable because of the commercialisation of the industry and this is justified to some extent because of the specialness and unique nature of the day, which must also be perfect. Perfection is achieved through spending money. Yet, paying out excessive amounts of money just for show, or spending beyond the couple's means, was not justified since weddings could be done on a budget if necessary and the money is better spent elsewhere. That is unless, of course, the participants married a millionaire (or had millionaire parents) and then extravagance was justified: at the end of the day, 'everyone' wants that perfect, special day and to spend as much on their day as they can afford.

7.7   'SOME BIG MAD DOODAH': HOW ARE WEDDINGS IMAGINED?

Weddings are inextricably linked with money, expense and consumption. As Hochschild (2003) notes, weakening family relations creates a need for a commercialised domestic life that is reliant upon advice (books and magazines) for support and information. As weddings have become highly commercialised, bridal magazines, with all their advice and guidance for brides-to-be, have become very popular. A large number of participants recognised the commercial nature of weddings and how this was linked to the growing expense. Many also talked about bridal magazines and the role these played in their or other people's interpretations of weddings. Ingraham views bridal magazines as being 'Central

to the primary wedding market and to securing dominant class and race interests' (1999: 89). Given the expense of wedding magazines, it follows that they are primarily aimed at the 'owning class and the professional-managerial class' (1999: 89), since only those who are relatively well-off could afford to buy the magazines on a regular basis. However, magazines are often viewed as a luxury item and given this status, they may be bought on a less regular basis, as a luxury or treat, by those who are less affluent.

Yet, buying bridal magazines is taboo if you are not a bride-to-be. Ruth and Susan both mention this idea that you should only buy a bridal magazine if you have a legitimate reason to do so. Susan, who is due to marry in a few months' time, explains, 'the only reason I've been buying them is 'cause it's something nice to do when I feel that when you're engaged you can buy these magazines and it's hopefully going to be your only time'. Thus buying these magazines is a reward for being engaged. Ruth expands on this when she says,

> It's almost like a barrier you don't cross, it's almost like a statement
> you reading it, 'cause you can imagine someone coming up behind
> you and saying oh are you getting married then? And if you're not it'll
> be like er no I'm just sort of fantasising.

One must be part of the 'bride-to-be' club before one can acceptably read a bridal magazine (or part of the bride-to-be entourage such as the mother of the bride). To read one and not to be part of this club is shameful and the reader should be embarrassed if they are caught in the act. Ruth separates those who can legitimately read bridal magazines from those who are 'just fantasising'; these fantasists should not cross the invisible barrier and read such magazines that are not written for them. Therefore, those participants who had read bridal magazines and who talked about them most extensively were those who were married or in the process of planning their wedding.

According to Ingraham, 'The images bridal magazines present distort reality and unify particular beliefs about heterosexuality, race, class, and gender' (1999: 92).

However, the extent to which the messages conveyed through the magazines are taken on board by the readers is questionable. While Winship (1987 in Gough-Yates, 2003) suggests that resistance to discourses is (at best) partial and temporary and McRobbie (1997) argues that messages can enter our subconscious regardless of our conscious wishes, Gough-Yates (2003) counters that women are able to resist messages and discourses found in women's magazines. As Frazer (1987) found, young women reading *Jackie* were able to transcend and resist the 'ideology' in the texts and showed a great deal of reflexivity and reflectiveness in their interpretations (1987: 419)[17]. Readers can be active producers of meaning, and consuming media can provide a site of potentially different readings of the text (Morley, 1980 in Moores, 1990; van Zoonen, 2006)[18].

I would argue, then, that there are at least three reader types of bridal magazines in my sample. These are not mutually exclusive and can occur within the same person at different times. These are comparable with Hall's (1980 cited in Moores, 1990) three hypothetical positions from which decoding of discourses can be constructed (1990: 17). These are:

- The 'dominant' interpretation: the viewer operates within the dominant discourse and reads this discourse 'full and straight' (Moores, 1990: 17). In my research, I found individuals who read with limited agency, accepted the meaning within discourses and did not question the content of the magazine.
- The 'negotiated' interpretation: the reader adopts a 'negotiated code' (1990: 17) where the reader acknowledges the dominant definition but also, at a restricted level, operates with exceptions to this rule (1990: 17). Among my participants, this reader emerged as an individual who is aware of the discourses within the magazine, who reads with some agency and takes steps to resist the messages imparted.
- The 'oppositional' interpretation: the reader decodes the message in a

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[17] In addition, Weedon (1997) suggests that individuals can exist free from discourses, while they can openly reflect on the discourses that constitute their identity.
[18] For more on this and readers' interactions with texts (McNay, 2000) see Chapter 3.

wholly contrary way (1990: 17). Among my participants, such individuals read with active agency, were aware of the discourses and messages within the material and, I would contend, were able to choose to reject it completely or to adopt the dominant discourse because this is most desirable or acceptable (which a number of participants did).

These three reader types do, however, ignore the presence of pleasure in the reading of bridal magazines, something that is very obvious from the interviews. This is also an aspect missing from Hall's (1980 in Moores, 1990) construction of audience positions.

Bridal magazines are read for a particular purpose and Abigail, Adele, Fiona and Susan all talk about looking at bridal magazines for information and suggestions: as Abigail states, 'I didn't know half of that until I got these magazines'. Therefore, bridal magazines play an important role for some in educating and providing information about the requirements for a wedding: they serve a purpose for readers that other magazines do not. Bridal magazines also provide a distinct pleasure in the reading about, anticipation and planning of weddings for participants; again, this is not something that is offered by other commercial magazines. This pleasure is openly discussed by some (Susan) but is also implicit in others' accounts of their reading. Pleasure can be present from all audience positions: dominant, negotiated and oppositional. The nature of this pleasure is perhaps different, and linked to the level of resistance to the dominant discourse. The dominant reader will take pleasure from aligning herself with the main discourses in the magazines, while the oppositional reader may take pleasure from opposing herself to these same discourses. Fiona also talks about the usefulness of the magazines, 'I think it helped a great deal but I kind of knew what I was looking for really it was just to sort of help with ideas I don't I wasn't influenced too much by the um magazines'. Fiona acknowledges that the magazines are useful for ideas but she clarifies that she was not influenced too much by them, indicating a level of awareness of certain discourses and a desire not to be seen to be too easily influenced. Fiona may perhaps be classed as reading from a negotiated position where she oscillates between accepting the dominant message

and resisting the implications of this.

This notion of agency within reading and the acceptance of certain messages within the magazines are reinforced by Susan's account. Susan had been planning her wedding for a number of months when we met for the interview. She explains that she had bought *Wedding Ideas* every month since she became engaged and was sad that she could not justify buying the next issue as it was released during the month of her wedding. For Susan, the magazine was 'really helpful and it was kind of like about ideas and budgeting ideas and kind of different ideas of things to do'. This may demonstrate a lack of agency in her reading of the magazines. However, Susan goes on to say, 'they're horribly commercial and they're full of adverts and full of you should look like this and you should do this the only reason why I've been buying them is 'cause it's something nice to do'. This second account shows a great deal of agency in her reading, a great pleasure in reading the magazines, and a large amount of resistance to the dominant discourses contained within them. Therefore, Susan appears to embody a negotiated position: she is reading with agency, pleasure, and acceptance of some discourses and resistance to others.

To further examine exactly which discourses are depicted within the magazines; what messages they represent; which traditions they uphold or reject and how they encourage weddings to be organised, I carried out discourse analysis on 12 magazines collected at one time over the summer of 2008.

7.8   THE 'BRIDAL MAGAZINE' WEDDING

Bridal magazines are clearly aimed at a female audience: they were all found in the 'women's magazines' section in the shop from which they were bought, the front covers show women in wedding dresses and the content is mostly concerned with dresses and real life weddings. Where a groom is mentioned it is in the context of reminding him of what he needs to do for the wedding, i.e. choose a best man, have a stag do, organise outfits and turn up. Moreover, the magazines are almost exclusively concerned with heterosexual weddings. Just one magazine

considered gay weddings and this was *Black Meringue:* 'The UK's only alternative wedding magazine' (now, sadly, out of circulation).

In order to establish a picture of the advice and guidance provided by the bridal magazines I begin by detailing the ideal wedding according to the magazines. This will include how they should be organised, what should be done and when, who should be invited, people management, gifts, wedding etiquette and so on. Most importantly, the magazines emphasise that your wedding day should be perfect and you should have what you want and what you love (with little regard to cost). As *InStyle Weddings* says, 'We say you should buy the dress you love and work your budget around that' (2008: 250). Romance is key to the wedding day and everything should be organised to be as romantic as possible. Weddings should ideally be lavish and costly but if this is not possible there is also a great deal of advice on how to budget your wedding, save money and keep costs low. The following passage is based on a selection of articles, images, letters and features chosen from the magazines by relevancy to certain themes. The topics discussed will have been raised in more than one item in more than one bridal magazine and this serves to illustrate the pivotal elements that are considered to be intrinsic to weddings.

The bridal magazines position the reader as the bride. Therefore, all features, adverts, directions and articles are directed to 'you' as bride-to-be. The images in the magazines suggest that you, as bride, should be white, slim, heterosexual and happy. You will be organising the wedding yourself or with the help of wedding organisers, and you will want to spend as much money as you can afford to make this your 'perfect' day. This is 'your' day and, as such, you will want to personalise it with little touches. You will also want to lose weight before the wedding to look your best. After informing all your family and friends of the exciting news, you will perform the following essential tasks needed to complete your perfect day:

- It is essential to set a date as soon as possible and then set a budget, book a ceremony, book the reception and choose the bridesmaids and best/grooms

men.

- You will need wedding stationary, a photographer, an exotic honeymoon abroad, music, flowers, wedding insurance ('better to be safe than sorry' *Inspired Weddings*, 2008: 84), a cake, entertainment, a caterer, transport, a gift list, wedding lingerie, dance lessons and wedding favours. All of which are provided by the vast wedding industry.

- Shopping for the wedding dress should be 'the most fun and exciting experience for a bride-to-be' (*Inspired Weddings*, 2008: 47) and you need to find your 'dream dress' (*InStyle Weddings*, 2008: 249). You will need at least three fittings for this dress to take into account all the weight you plan to lose for your wedding.

- You will need to remind the groom and grooms men about their outfits, fittings, speeches and other responsibilities.

- You should have a dedicated hairdresser who will practise your hairstyle at least twice before the wedding, with your hair pieces in. You will also have a make-up artist who will practise your wedding make-up. On the day you will need a manicure, pedicure, facial and so on to make sure you feel your best.

- As wedding etiquette dictates, you will need to buy presents for the best man, bridesmaids, mothers of the bride and groom, and favours for guests.

- You should inform all the necessary organisations that your name will be changing after the wedding to pre-empt the hassle of doing this afterwards.

- Since your wedding shoes will be new and potentially uncomfortable, they will need to be broken in before the wedding.

These ideas were ubiquitous throughout the magazines and they gave the impression that any wedding would be incomplete without all these requirements. One theme that was particularly striking as I read the magazines was the normalisation of contradictory statements. The run up to the wedding was represented as being frantic, busy and in need of high organisation. Yet, when it came to the day itself, the bride should 'relax, smile and enjoy your day' (*Inspired Weddings*, 2008: 85). On the one hand the magazines exhibited prohibitively expensive wedding dresses and then, later in the magazine, money saving ideas.

Women are encouraged to spend and told that this extravagance is acceptable because it is 'your big day' and you can save money in other areas. Tradition was exhorted throughout the magazines, with etiquette guides and explanations of who should do what, when. Yet, at the same time, women were told that they would want to personalise their weddings with 'fresh ideas' (*Cosmopolitan Bride*, 2008: front cover). The magazines were full of such contradictions: hectic and calm, expense and thrift, tradition and innovation. This may result from the attempt by the wedding industry to broaden and diversify into extra money-making ideas while keeping the original, popular themes in place. These contradictions perhaps also reflect the nature of the wedding as stemming from historical tradition yet undergoing rapid transformation over the last century; the wedding is constantly in flux because it follows fashion, capitalist dictates and society's expectations. In order to keep up, the magazines have to find a balance between these demands and this emerges as contradiction: trying to appeal to all tastes and preferences as well as follow fashion and maintain tradition.

7.8.1 Diet, the body, weight(loss) and control

One of the clearest examples of this contradiction in messages was one concerning weight and the body. In the 'Diet' section of *For the Bride*, brides are told to 'choose to lose': 'trimming down for your wedding day is a matter of eating better and moving more' (2008: 108). A number of assumptions are made in this simple statement: the first that women will want to trim down for their wedding day. In addition, 'eating better' implies that readers are not eating healthily at present, and 'moving more' that they are not already exercising enough. The article goes on to tell the reader to record what she eats, obsessively read food labels to check what they contain, avoid certain foods and engage in an intense exercise regime including 'join a gym', 'a variety of classes', and investing in exercise equipment. Leonard (1980) explains that 'It is a cultural imperative that a bride should look beautiful and a great deal of time and energy and money is spent to ensure that as far as possible she conforms to this expectation' (1980: 130). A bride is clearly expected to quite radically alter her lifestyle, if she does not engage in these activities already, simply to lose weight and look her 'best' at her wedding; this cultural imperative is apparent in all of the

magazines.

Now Celebrity Weddings features '28 day bridal bootcamp', which encourages you to 'look and feel your very best for your wedding' and goes on to say that you 'could lose up to 14lb – and two dress sizes – with this easy-to-follow diet' (2008: 60). This is immediately suggesting that in order to 'look and feel your very best' you should lose weight (up to 'two dress sizes') by dieting. This supposes that you do not look or feel good without losing this weight and that weight-loss is a positive step. The article goes on to outline a diet plan with eight different options for breakfast, 12 options for lunch and 14 options for dinner. This article is situated in the 'Beauty' section of the magazines under the sub-heading 'Look your best'. Thus, it is clear that the magazines make a connection between appearance, display, beauty and weddings. Weddings are about display and this is particularly true for the bride, who is the centre of attention. Therefore, she must do whatever she can to look her best, whether this is controlling her diet, her body or activities.

This 'bootcamp' article follows on from a feature entitled 'How to look good...in your wedding dress!' and is accredited to 'style guru' Gok Wan (*Now Celebrity Weddings* 2008: 51). While the two articles mentioned so far have endorsed diet and weight-loss to achieve the best bridal look, this article encourages readers to 'ditch the diet' and 'be happy with the body you have'. The writer goes on to say 'if you are carrying a little extra weight, don't try to cover it up – just enhance the areas that you are happy with'. However, in the very next paragraph, 'Gok Wan' explains that in styling a friend for her wedding, she wore about six different support pieces of underwear to nip the waist and 'support' parts of the body that needed controlling. It seems like a strange and obvious contradiction to encourage women to feel happy and comfortable with their bodies in one sentence and then in the next sentence to say that in order to have an acceptable 'silhouette' they should nip and tuck their bodies. Women should be comfortable with their bodies, but at the same time control and contort them to fit in with standards of beauty.

Moreover, the article proceeds to claim that if you feel good, you look good and in order to 'feel' good, women should ensure they make time for eyebrow threading, waxing their bikini line and having their nails done. This body control is justified through claiming it will make women 'feel' good but I have never known one person who could claim that they felt good when they had their bikini line waxed. The way they look after the treatment may make them feel good so the adage should really follow, 'if you look good, you'll feel good'. Finally, despite claiming that women should be happy with their bodies, the article proceeds to inform women how to pose in their pictures to appear 'your slimmest when snapped'. Slim is the ideal and the underlying message seems to encourage women to be dissatisfied with their appearance. Although this article tries to claim that women's feelings and happiness with their bodies comes first, this only thinly veils the dominant message, which is that looks and appearance are most important, and that the ideal image is slim, plucked and polished. The actual message reads, be happy with your body but nip, tuck, pluck, wax, polish and pose so you look as 'good' and 'slim' as you can. Thus, the magazines contain the double contradictions of encouraging body control and weight loss but also being happy and confident in appearance; and encouraging relaxation and comfort on the wedding day but also maintaining the idea that brides should be concerned about their bodies and appearance.

This notion of slim as the ideal can be seen throughout the magazines, from front cover to back page: the women modelling the wedding dresses rarely exceed a size 10 (UK). In fact, the only situation in which women above this size are allowed page space is in the two articles I encountered about the absence of plus size dresses in the wedding industry. Both articles from *Black Meringue* and *Inspired Weddings* feature the same shops and similar lines of explanation. The two women in the stories both encountered difficulties when searching for dresses for their weddings because they were above a size 14. It appears that the majority of mainstream bridal shops do not sell more than one or two styles of dresses for 'plus size' women. These two women have, therefore, set up their own bridal shop specialising in such dresses. Patterson (2005) suggests that there is an 'even though' logic within discourses on plus size brides so that 'even though' they are

plus size, these women can still be beautiful brides. This logic is present to some extent in my magazine sample. One example of this is a quote from a plus size bride's mother, who says, 'Thank you for helping her to see that she can look just as beautiful as any other bride' (*Inspired Weddings*, 2008: 49). In other words, even though she is plus size, she can still be just as beautiful as other, slim brides. A quote from the advertisement for the dress shop in question reads 'curvaceous ladies deserve to look fabulous too', even though they are plus size.

Patterson (2005) also found that in American bridal magazines plus size bridal models look very different from their slimmer counterparts. In contrast to the thin models who look disdainfully from the page with smouldering expressions, the plus size brides have large smiles, their heads are tilted upwards and their teeth are on display. According to Patterson, the body positions of the plus size brides suggest a wonderment and sense of achievement at their marrying and they show happiness and even gratitude in the face of marriage. This pattern was not, however, evident in my sample, and women modelling wedding dresses wore a mixture of smiles and smouldering looks; this was the same for the plus size models. This is perhaps one difference between magazines from the USA and UK; both *Black Meringue* and *Inspired Weddings* originate from the UK. Overall, however, there was a conspicuous absence of plus-size brides and dresses in the magazines, despite the presence of related articles. This represents another contradiction within the magazines: a deliberate presence yet considerable absence of larger models and dresses.

7.8.2   Heterosexuality, The Dress and Perfection
The (thin) wedding dress was, however, omnipresent in magazines. There is a distinct wedding dress obsession that can be observed from the images, articles, letters, throughout the magazines. The process of buying of the dress, booking appointments, trying them on, taking friends and relatives with you, having fittings, is considered to be a major part of the wedding and every part of this process is commented upon in the magazines. The experience of searching for the perfect dress is positioned as being the most exciting for brides-to-be and one of the happiest moments of their lives (*Inspired Weddings*, 2008: 47). This is clearly

one of the biggest events of the wedding, as portrayed by the magazines at least, and is so pervasive that it serves to almost obscure other aspects of the wedding.

Weddings reinforce the dominance of heterosexuality (Ingraham, 1999). This is done through the romanticism of the dress, the 'magical' and 'perfection' language that is used throughout magazines, the absence of gay weddings, the naturalisation of wanting a dress, of distorting the body, of obsessing with the details of the wedding. These discourses obscure difference and maintain the heterosexual norm. By encouraging women to become obsessed and absorbed in the wedding process, the realities of heterosexuality and marriage can be ignored, or at least need not be considered. Moreover, weddings romanticise the hierarchy within heterosexual marriage, represented by the giving away of the bride by her father to her husband, speech etiquette at the wedding, the importance of the wedding for the bride as a rite of passage and so on. This gender hierarchy in weddings is also recognised by Leonard Barker, (1978) who comments, 'The father of the bride in handing her over to the groom affirms who is the head of both her family of origin and the family being created by the marriage' (1978: 74). 'Perfect' is mentioned on six front covers out of the 12 magazines and 'dream' is mentioned three times. This alone reinforces the notion that women should have been dreaming about their 'perfect' wedding since they were four (Ingraham, 1999).

I chose two articles that further highlight this compulsory heterosexuality. The first is an article titled 'Marriage Is Good For You' in *For the Bride* (2008: 116). This article asserts that being married to 'Mr. Right' will lead to a longer life because, for women, marriage means 'improved financial well-being and emotional security', while for men marriage means adopting 'less risky and more healthy lifestyles'. Obviously, men do not need to worry about their financial well-being or emotional security and women need not worry about their risky lifestyles. This clearly reinforces traditional heterosexual stereotypes about what men and women do and need. This article also suggests that married couples are happier because 'marriage provides you with a sense of meaning in your life'. This simple quote illustrates the power of compulsory heterosexuality; marriage provides meaning to life, making married people happier than single people who

do not have the sense of meaning that marriage engenders. Therefore, if single people want to be happy, they should marry and obtain some meaning to their lives.

The second article is 'The Name Game' in *Inspired Weddings*. This article discusses the pros and cons of a woman changing or keeping her name after marriage[19]. In favour of name changing, the article asserts that this does 'make life easier' since there is one less decision to make: 'After all you two have become one. You have surrendered yourself and possibly your independence to him, no legal work is necessary, all government departments expect you will follow tradition'. The romantic notions of two becoming one and surrendering oneself to the other, uphold the heterosexual imaginary of romantic marriage and obscure the darker sides of losing identity and subordination. A woman giving up her name (and her independence?) is the default position and it is exceptional for a woman to decide to retain her name (and keep her independence): the decision has already been made.

The only cons that the article produces for keeping one's surname is that it might prove 'troublesome' for a host at a party when making introductions, or 'embarrassing' when signing into a hotel under different names. The extent to which these issues really pose a significant problem in modern society is, however, questionable. The unstated objection must be that a women keeping her surname does not conform to romantic heterosexual standards of 'surrender' and union. When 'two become one' this really means the woman losing her individual identity to become a subsidiary of the man. While double-barrelled names are considered, these are dismissed as 'pretentious' and other options, such as choosing a new name, or (shock-horror) the husband taking the wife's name, are not even considered. Although the woman changing her surname is considered the easy option because it is the default, the article ends with a list of more than 20 organisations that she will need to contact in order to let them know her change of name.

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[19] For more on the name change debate see Chapter 8.

Thus, in these articles and throughout the magazines, heterosexuality is normalised and maintained. Women are informed of their roles and obligations and told how they should organise and behave at their weddings. Heterosexuality is privileged and women are made into dress-obsessing wives. They are told how to control and organise their bodies to conform to ideal notions of the bridal figure. The dominant discourses in the magazines concern these issues of body and weight; appearance, dress and display; and perfection for 'your' day. However, there is little evidence among my participants that these discourses are adopted and many show resistance to the main messages of the magazines, instead using them simply for ideas and information.

7.9   CONCLUSION

Some participants felt a pressure to have a wedding and this may be due to heterosexual notions of romance and the regulation of women and relationships. Bridal magazines uphold the heterosexual imaginary and heterosexual privilege and reinforce the regulation of women's bodies. Display and appearance seem to be a large part of weddings now and this is highlighted by participants, who see weddings as a display of commitment, and by magazines, which focus on the display of the bride. Weddings are cultural performances for family and friends but they are also performances with meaning for participants, as many said that the meaning for them was not separated from marriage. Therefore, for these young women, the wedding did represent the beginning of a marriage, as well as providing an opportunity to display their commitment and have a celebratory party with friends and family. The meaning associated with the wedding enabled participants to defend the cost of the ritual; perfection was required for this one-off, unique, special day, and this costs money. One-day-of-perfection was traded against the-rest-of-your-life, as independence and names were lost. This message was reinforced by the bridal magazines that emphasise perfection and magic, using dreamy features and language. The bridal magazines probably also perpetuate the idea that 'other people' are behaving a certain way and a large amount of their content was dedicated to 'real life weddings'. This perhaps

contributes to participants' notions that 'other people' separate weddings from marriage, marry just for the wedding, and just want a big party. Yet, participants did report reading the magazines with some agency, which suggests they did find areas of resistance to the dominant discourses.

Weddings are expensive, heteronormative, fluid, contradictory but utterly appealing. Despite being aware of the inequality and oppression associated with the ritual, I cannot help but feel the deep meaning that is associated with the ceremony and I have a tear in my eye every time I attend one. They are sites of deep conformity but I believe there are also (limited) opportunities within them to do things differently and to create an occasion with integrity and honesty.

8.   'SOMEBODY'S WIFE': IDENTITY, SURNAMES AND THE WIFELY ROLE

8.1   INTRODUCTION

The wedding provides the starting point of a marriage and is the signifier of a woman becoming a 'wife'. This chapter aims to explore the meaning of identity for my participants, how this is influenced by marriage, whether there is a married and sexual identity, how roles change on marriage and how participants identify themselves within their narratives. When examining the definitions of identity, lay interpretations differ wildly from those in the academic community. While lay notions may consider the concept to be integral to self, to be composed of personal perceptions, beliefs, morals and behaviours, sociological understandings traditionally view identity as pursuing individual interests (Barth, 1969 in Jenkins, 2008) or belonging to certain group memberships (Tajfel, 1981 in Jenkins, 2008). Jenkins broadly defines identity as 'a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivities' (2008: 5). For this chapter, I will be relying upon a more common-sense understanding of identity to fit in with participants' own interpretations.

I define identity as an individual's perception of self as well as their perception of how others view them, taking account of their interaction with other social actors and situations. Thus, I define myself through my own interpretation of self as well as my interpretation of how others see me, taking into account how I act and react in various social situations. Identity is a subjective notion and is integral to individuals, who can only identify in detail what it can mean for themselves. Yet common features associated with notions of identity include community, social location, family, the body, names and beliefs. These concepts, among others, will constitute to a greater or lesser extent an individual's understanding of their identity. For example, I believe my identity is constructed by my family, my feminist beliefs, my name, friends, and my work. This, however, is the case only for this current moment in time; seven years ago my identity would have looked very different. Thus, identity is highly subjective and fluid, it is not a fixed

concept and neither is it fixed in time.

Yet it is a concept that participants can talk about with relative ease as they readily discuss whether and how their identity would change once married. The fluid nature of identity is, then, acknowledged and taken for granted. In talking about identity, participants most commonly draw on the following themes: name changing on marriage, perceptions of self by self and by others, friends, and the couple relationship. This chapter focuses on examining these themes, as well as sexual identity: what it means to be a sexually active young woman and the continuing significance of sex and gender roles. Changes in identity and the formation of a couple identity are discussed alongside the importance of maintaining one's own identity and how this is achieved for participants. I will also explore their various justifications for changing their surnames as well as various instances of resistance to the traditional pattern. On entering marriage, participants discuss the roles that they have or that they intend to undertake, such as childcare and housework. The notion of becoming 'wife' will be explored: the extent to which this is endorsed by participants and how the concept of 'wife' interacts with notions of identity. This notion of becoming a 'wife' is significant, and is evident from Scheuble and Johnson's (1993) observation that by the 1930s, 'Social customs and norms assumed that a wife had no legal identity apart from her husband' (1993: 748) .

8.2   SEXUAL IDENTITY

Although young women did not talk about their sexuality directly in relation to identity, certain aspects of sexuality were mentioned that fit with women's negotiation of sex and self: sex stereotyping, harmful sex, silencing desire and the sexual double standard. First, highly sexually active young women are viewed in a certain way in relation to their self because of the tension between femininity and desire, which positions promiscuity as unsafe. Sex should be kept within the confines of a loving relationship and those who reject these prescriptions are pathologised. For Abigail, this deviant behaviour is caused by insecurity: 'I think people who do that they obviously very insecure they wanna be wanted even if it's

just for like a couple of minutes'. Rather than women actually desiring and wanting sex, they are viewed as needing sex to feel 'wanted'. Similarly, Mandy says, 'if a woman was sleeping with hundreds of men I'd worry if she was feeling alright about herself and would start to think maybe there was something going on there'. Michelle also says, 'I would probably question why they were doing it check that they were OK in themselves and weren't you know seeking some kind of validation'. Sex is viewed as a source of validation for women and excess sex may be a symptom of illness; this idea is not suggested for a man in a similar position. Since an excess of sex is so at odds with feminine dictates and relationship rules, a woman engaging in too much sex must be deviant in some way, insecure, unwell or seeking 'validation'.

Sex and desire are not feminine, but they are expected of men. As Zoe comments, 'I think it's just different expectations for men and women and she yes she would be basically looked down on I supposed because she's just not what's expected I suppose'. Fiona says something similar, 'it's expected of men to sort of be like that whereas ladies are meant to be more feminine more lady-like'. Heterosexuality is constructed under a male gaze (Tolman, 2002) so men are in the position of power; they have access to discourses of sex and desire, while women's desire is silenced. Abigail believes men just want sex because 'like they get more horny and things than women do'- women either do not desire or are supposed to hide their desire, make it invisible (Tolman, 2002). Thus the double standard still exists; women are still concerned with their perceived sexual reputation, they remain unable to utilise a language of desire, and women still experience unwanted sex.

Zoe and Catriona justify the existence of a sexual double standard. Catriona explains, 'I think girls that do that get more of a reputation but I think then they should do cause it's more it's more intrusive to a girl's body so I think you have to respect yourself more'. Sex is viewed as an act of bodily penetration and historically, according to the laws regarding sexual consent, women are the passive receivers. Women should 'respect' themselves more and take greater responsibility for sex because it is their bodies that are invaded. With sex defined

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in such binary terms; women being passively intruded upon and men actively intruding, Catriona implies that women who are more sexually free deserve to be labelled because they *allow* this invasion. Sexual agency is lost when women rely on such gender stereotypes. According to Lees (1997), the double standard in viewing sexually active men and women differently, raising men's status while lowering women's, is a form of control by men over women. This controlling of women's sexual lives fits in with the ideals of femininity: ignoring agency and ascribing to dominant discourses of romance and love, which determine that meaningful sex should only take place within a loving committed relationship.

When participants were asked about a double standard, many responded with derogatory terms often used against women. The following are just a few examples: 'men can sleep with loads of girls and called players but if a girl was to do it she be called a slag' (Abigail), 'it conjures up the stereotype is like a tart' (Adele), 'girls are still called slappers and men are still you know get a pat on the back' (Fiona), 'if a guy sleeps around then he's a stud and if a girl sleeps around then she's a whore' (Susan) and 'she'd be viewed as a slag basically' (Zoe). The policing of women's sexual identity is in part regulated with the use and re-use of such derogatory terms. Hermione sums this up nicely:

> I think it's fine for a man to sleep with as many people as he wants but
> if a woman's got that amount of sexual freedom if she's that confident
> in her sexuality I think she gets looked upon for it yeah and definitely
> double standards.

For others, however, the double standard is seen to be on the decline. For Amy, there is a decrease in the judging of women: 'I don't think like girls get as much flak now as they used to'. The regulations guiding women's behaviour are perhaps becoming less strict. Yet for Shirley, Elizabeth and Michelle, the double standard seems to be equalling out: 'maybe previously it was OK for men to have more partners than girls but I think now it's not if anyone's sleeping around a lot then I think that would get frowned upon whatever sex you were'. Rather than sexual freedom for women increasing to meet men's level of freedom, the

regulations seem to be becoming more strict for men, who are beginning to be met with disapproval if they have too many sexual partners. Sexual mores appear to be tightening as they are becoming even more restrictive for men. This perceived reduction in the sexual double standard may, therefore, be less to do with women gaining sexual freedom and more to do with men losing some of the sexual privileges they have traditionally held.

The double standard may also appear to be declining because derogatory terms are predominantly used at school (Measor, 1989; Cowie and Lees, 1987). Elizabeth remembers the double standard at school and Claire comments, 'when I was at school you know girls that met a lot of boys were slags and things like that whereas the blokes weren't at all'. The sexual labels begin at school and yet, as Claire goes on to explain, 'I think when I went to university there was a lot more of a banding around about the male tarts and things like that so maybe it's becoming more equal'. There is a sense from these accounts that sexual labels and the double standard are especially acute when at school, and as one moves away from these highly sexed arenas the double standard fades into the background of dominant feminine discourses and masculine heteronormativity; sexual labels are applied equally to men and women, and are occasionally reclaimed (Allen, 2003).

Rather than using 'slag' or 'slut' as derogatory terms, women can reclaim them and resist the negative associations by using them to describe themselves and their behaviours. Mandy, the only participant to do this, explains to me, 'I had quite a lot of partners before David I was quite a slapper basically'; this is how she resists the subject position of what is traditionally meant by 'slapper': by employing it for her own use. By doing this she subverts the original meaning of the term. She does not avoid it but rather alters the meaning by applying it to her own behaviour. Yet this is not a common occurrence and women were more likely to apply derogatory terms to other women using their traditional meaning, than subvert their meaning and refer such terms to themselves.

There were three participants who believed it would be almost impossible to alter

this perceived sexual double standard. For Fiona, this is simply something that is never 'really going to change I don't know why' but she goes on to say that it is expected of men and women to behave in these ways. Gender and sex roles seem to be so ingrained in our identities that it will be extremely difficult to change these and their consequences. Rebecca agrees, commenting, 'I think there'll always be a bit of something there always be a bit of something just with the idea that like what I was just you know women should be at home or whatever'. Susan explains why changing gender expectations seems so impossible:

> I think that women, if they wanna change that stereotype, they have to change a stereotype really of what it is to be a women to be like shy and demure and sort of like that stereotype would have to change as well I think 'cause otherwise it's not.. to be sleeping around isn't what it is really in like ideal like social standing what it is to be a woman so I think that would have to change and then I don't think people would like that to change heh so heh it's a bit yeah it is a double standard but I think as long as you're not too brazen about it then heh there's not really anything we can do about like social views.

In order to change women's sexual identity and the stereotypes of stag/slag, the gender expectations of men and women and what it means to be a man and woman would also need altering. Feminine ideologies would need overturning since it is not acceptable for women to be sexual, according to current gender expectations. Most importantly, Susan explains that this cannot happen because she does not think people would like to change these roles and therefore, the double standard is here to stay.

In talking about sexual behaviours, Abigail comments, 'in this day and age girls can be just as bad [as men] as they're very easy now'. The use of the word 'easy' to describe sexually active women is an alternative to using 'slut' or 'slag': a derogatory term used as an insult (almost exclusively for women) based on her real or perceived sexual experience. A woman's sex life becomes public property as it is currently acceptable for other individuals, the media, criminal courts, and

so on, to judge a woman on her sexual behaviour. The notion of the 'bad' woman is one frequently imagined in sexuality debates and according to Johnson (1988), women can resist the silencing of their desire through the male gaze by becoming 'bad'. Women can become prostitutes and take control of their sexuality, as well as gaining financially and exploiting male desire; they can become lesbian and desire the 'wrong' sex; or they can seduce men, initiating the sexual contact and retaining power over the situation (Johnson, 1988).

8.3 THE SELF (AND THE OTHER)

Throughout interviews and throughout this analysis, it has become apparent that participants will often talk about 'others' such as these 'bad' women. This self/other divide is used for many reasons, including: a verbal tool to theorise about social behaviour; a distancing technique used to talk about behaviours that are disapproved of; a separation method to discuss the way that some people behave in opposition to the way the individual behaves; speculation, reinforced by representations in the media of how 'the other half lives'; or assertions of independence to imply difference and individualisation from others around them. It appears, therefore, that one significant aspect of identity is the need to separate self from others, to stand out in opinions and appear independent and distinct. This implies a need from participants to justify their own importance but also a certain amount of reflexivity; they want to stand out from the crowd and be recorded as not conforming to the norm. This divide between self and others is also noted by Scheuble and Johnson (1993) in discussing marital name change. They note that while their participants were tolerant of non-traditional marital name choices, they did not view these choices as appropriate for themselves. One rule applies for 'others', another rule applies for 'self'. Interestingly, it was while talking about identity that this self/other divide was least apparent among my participants. This is probably because the topic is entirely subjective; speculations about 'others'' behaviours are unnecessary, and there is no need to distinguish self from 'others'.

Other people are significant for providing a comparison with which individuals

can judge and identify themselves. While 'others' are needed for this comparison, they are also important in providing outside perceptions of an individual's identity. For some participants this represented a meaningful part of their identity, while for others this was unimportant. For those who commented that their identity would not change on marriage, this was largely explained as a desire not to alter. A few of these participants did, however, suggest that there would be a change in the way other people viewed them. Hermione says, 'I don't think it [marrying] changed my identity, it changed how I felt about myself and it changed... I think it changed how others saw me'. It is interesting to note that Hermione does not consider an alteration in how she felt about herself as impacting a change in her identity. When I asked Michelle if she thought her identity would change once she was married, she replied, 'yeah I think maybe a little bit but only probably because people perceive you differently rather than I thinking I was anything different'. Thus, rather than experiencing any difference in her sense of identity as a result of marriage, Michelle suggests that others would view her differently, which may then impact on how she views her identity. Hermione, on the other hand, acknowledges that marriage changed how others viewed her, but she does not see this change as having altered her sense of identity. Perception of others, therefore, is clearly an important aspect of identity for some and not so for others. While Michelle endorses this view to some extent, Hermione clearly distinguishes between her identity, which has remained constant, and others' views of her, which may have altered.

Among those participants who did expect their identity to change upon marriage, a large number connected a part of this change to an alteration in how they would be perceived. Adele mentions that being married would 'probably change other people's perceptions' and when questioned further on this she expands:

> I think probably you'd get questions oh when are you starting a
> family? And that kind of thing which seems to sort of go with it but
> might not necessarily be the case. I think people would probably um
> maybe feel not relieved that's too strong a word but sort of glad, sort
> of think oh good she's married that's it she's sorted now that kind of

thing.

This change in how she is viewed by others inevitably leads to changes in how she views herself, as Adele also says that once married, she would 'just feel more secure and that in myself'. Since people who are married are viewed as 'sorted', when married herself, Adele conjectures she would herself feel 'sorted' and 'secure'. This status of 'sorted' is something only marriage can offer. The way in which an individual believes she is perceived by others will unavoidably be affected by the way in which she views others. Thus, as a post-graduate student for example, if I admire students who successfully pass their viva, I imagine others will admire me if I successfully pass my viva. For participants, therefore, who view married couples as different from non-married couples, they will expect to be viewed differently upon their marriage. Conversely, for those who view married couples as no different from their non-married counterparts, the way they are perceived by others on marriage will play no part in their considerations of identity. As an example of this, Catriona, who anticipates changing to a small extent after marriage: 'you think oh I'm married now I need to be more respectable I need to be more sensible', also sees her 18 year old cousin as changing once she is married: 'it would sound so much more like grown up oh you know she's married now she's somebody's wife'. Furthermore, Grace, who other than a change in name does not anticipate her identity changing on marriage, also does not view married couples differently: 'nope they're just married'.

A number of participants did, however, agree with Catriona that being married somehow seemed more 'grown up'. For Claire, this is evidenced in being taken more seriously as a couple: 'since we got engaged I feel like people are looking at us slightly differently like taking us more seriously as a couple'. For Fiona, being married and buying a house has 'made me grow up a lot' and this is echoed by Susan who explains that she has 'grown up maybe quicker than I don't know is expected of someone my age' as a result of marrying and buying a house at a young age (20 years old). Shirley explains that she views her married friends differently, 'I think it's quite weird when friends of mine refer to their wives and husbands it does seem quite strange because it's quite new um I guess in a way it

makes you seem more grown up'. Finally, Rebecca comments that when a couple are married, 'I think people treat you more grown up like'. There is a perceived connection then, between being an adult and being married; marriage is an initiation into adulthood.

A few participants also anticipated feeling a sense of pride once married, and that being identified as a wife would be a positive experience. Eva reports that had she married a previous long-term partner, 'I would have felt it would have been a sense of pride in me' and Lucy concurs, commenting, 'I imagine when you're a Mrs that you're quite proud to be a Mrs and be married to that man'. Thus, marriage is not only something to be proud of; the pride in becoming someone's wife is also perceived to create an alteration in identity. Ruth explains this connection when asked how her identity would change when married: 'I think it will [change] in a way that I want it to, you know, I think I'll be identified as being somebody's wife and that's a good thing'. Ruth is pleased to imagine how her identity would change and sees this transformation into becoming a 'wife' as a desirable step.

Since these participants view married couples as more adult and report anticipated pride in their wife status, it is implied that they do expect their identity to change to some extent when married. This can already be seen from Catriona's account of becoming more 'respectable' and 'sensible' once married, and the growing up of Fiona and Susan once they were engaged and married. In addition, married women should present themselves as 'less available' (Shirley) and 'off the market' (Michelle) to conform to standard notions of women's availability (single and open to all) and unavailability (married and available to just one). Thus, marriage is an achievement in two senses: being 'sorted' in life and being 'off the market'.

This unavailability is interpreted by some as a decrease in or lack of freedom that occurs once married. Mandy comments, 'I guess it maybe feels to me like a loss of independence' and Shirley also notes this, commenting, 'I imagine you maybe feel a little less free'. For these two participants then, one impact of marriage is a loss of freedom. This constraining element is, however, viewed very differently

by other participants. Hermione, for example, explains that marriage has given her more confidence because 'whatever happens I can go home and there's somebody there for me'. The freedom of being single and living alone is exchanged for the security and confidence of marriage, which is seen as greater security than cohabitation. Hermione, however, goes on to say that 'I don't think it changed who I am'; although she felt an increase in confidence on marriage, this did not significantly impact her identity.

On the other hand, Adele and Eva talk about their notions of identity changing because of the increase in security offered by marriage. Adele says, 'how it might change my identity? I think I would just feel more secure and that in myself really' and Eva comments, 'I would never be alone...so I think I'd probably feel stronger and kind of um supported that's how it would change my identity'. Thus, feeling supported, secure and safe in a relationship would alter Adele and Eva's level of confidence and thus their perceptions of their identities.

8.4   A SHARED IDENTITY?

Although participants often found it difficult to articulate what they meant by identity, something they were able to discuss was the need for the couple to combine identities, while simultaneously maintaining an independent identity, when married. Eva and Zoe are the only participants to discuss the combining of identities without going on to emphasise the importance of simultaneously maintaining one's own identity. Zoe talks about this in terms of becoming an official couple: 'you're known as part of one half of one when you get married it's Mr. and Mrs. such and such', while Eva talks in more romantic terms: 'he's part of my life he's an actual part of me now and then you know I would have been doing things in our name'. For Zoe and Eva, marriage would produce a shared identity for the couple; a third identity beyond the two individuals involved, which is not present before marriage.

Amy, Claire and Lucy discuss this notion of a shared identity, but these three also highlight the significance of keeping some independence. Lucy sums this up

when she says, 'I like to think that even though you're married you massively have your own identity still but you also completely have an overlap and um accept that you're part of a couple and have a shared identity too'. It is important, then, to create a shared identity with a partner but equally important not to lose a sense of self and identity in the relationship. Amy comments,

> You become part of a couple and but um well it's obviously going to change your identity slightly but I think it's still important to be who you are and keep the same friends that you had and not just become this totally different person just because you got married and not just become totally devoted to one person.

This romantic image of a couple becoming absorbed with each other to the exclusion of others is fiercely rejected by Amy and other participants, who emphasise the importance of retaining some distance, independence and own friends. This is perhaps a reaction to the assumption that a woman would abandon her friends and activities on marriage, in order to become devoted to her husband and interested in his friends and activities. Lee Comer (1974) documents this trend that was prevalent in the 1960s and early 1970s. As Comer suggests, it is ordinary and desirable for a woman to give up her own interests and activities when married: 'It is the woman's public demonstration of her part of the marriage contract' (1974: 61). A woman would traditionally become subsumed under her husband's identity. This rejection by participants of becoming totally consumed by their partner and relationship is, therefore, likely to be resistance to the assumption that women lose their identity on marriage, and a statement that they intend not to be subsumed by their partner or the marriage. Women's changing societal roles mean they desire and are expected to maintain their own lives and identities, while also incorporating those aspects of a life partner.

This aversion to losing their identity can be seen in participants' repeated assertions of the importance of keeping their own identity. Rebecca says, 'I wouldn't want to lose who I am it's took me so long to make myself to like who I am' and Shirley says, 'it's important to be able to share things but at the same time

to have balance and not to be living out of each other's pockets so you can maintain your own identity'. In agreement, Michelle says, 'I'm always very careful when I'm in a relationship not to lose my sense of identity to keep my own friends and to keep my own social life'. As Catriona adds, 'I think it's important to like consider your other half um but to remain like have your old friends as well'. For some participants then, keeping their own friends when married is an important way of ensuring that they maintain their own identity.

Although a small number of participants do not expect an alteration to their identity once married, the majority do foresee some amount of change and, on the whole, change for the better. They view themselves as feeling more secure and supported and thus, more confident in themselves. They anticipate creating a shared identity within the couple and having a sense of pride in becoming a 'wife'. Moreover, perceptions of married couples, of participants themselves and of what they view others as perceiving, are generally positive. However, the interviewees also recognise the importance of maintaining a sense of their own identity and this is particularly expressed in terms of keeping their own friends. One element of identity deemed unimportant, on the other hand, was the significance of their surnames.

8.5   THE NAME CHANGE DEBATE[20]

All but two participants (Lauren and Rebecca) reported that they would change their surname on marriage. Ten participants said there would be no change in their identity when married although four of these added, with the exception of changing their names. A further ten participants believed their identity would inevitably change *because* their names would change. Therefore, while for some a change in name meant an alteration in identity, for others, identity would not change, except for the 'slight change in name' (Grace). As Fiona says, 'apart from my surname not no I'm still the same person' and Penny comments, 'well

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[20]   See Chapter 7 for a previous discussion in relation to bridal magazines, weddings and surname changing.

obviously your name changes but I don't think I'd feel any different'. On the other hand, Adele, Catriona and Lucy believe that their identity would change *because* their names would change. As Adele comments, 'I wouldn't be Adele Lewis any more it'd be Adele somebody else so even so yeah I think that there probably would be some sort of shift'. Lucy appears to agree as she says, 'I feel it [marriage] would change my identity 'cause I'd be changing my name so that makes me feel different in the first place'. It appears that for some participants, their name is integral to identity and changing it would inevitably alter their identity. For others, however, their name is not so central to their concept of self and changing it would not alter self-perception dramatically. It is likely that young girls grow up expecting to change their surnames upon marriage, adopting the romantic image, so perhaps it is not entirely surprising that many women do not feel that changing their names would significantly impact their identity.

When asked about their identity or about changing their names on marriage, many women responded with a taken for granted assumption that 'obviously' their name would change (Penny). By the 1930s, it was standard practice in the UK for a woman to take her husband's name when she married (Scheuble and Johnson, 1993) and for many, there is still an assumption and expectation that a woman will change her surname. Abigail highlights this when she says, 'I'm so looking forward to being a wife and having my surname changed' and Adele says, 'it's nice to have to be able to say husband and take someone else's name and call yourself Mrs'. For these participants, the taking of another surname on marriage is not only assumed and unquestioned; it is desired and eagerly awaited. Although some participants do admit their names constitute a part of their identity, it is not a significant enough part to question the long-standing custom of eschewing their names on marriage (Geller, 2001). Only a few participants even questioned the tradition and only two were decidedly against changing their surnames in the future, one of whom was also against marrying. On the one hand this adherence to custom is surprising, given the supposedly increasing individualised nature of relationships and women's growing autonomy. Yet, on the other hand it is not surprising, given the extremely traditional nature of the interviewees' responses and desires, as well as the compelling romanticism and enduring popularity

associated with a woman changing her surname to match her husband.

8.5.1 Tradition

Participants employed various justifications for their desire to have their surnames changed on marriage. One very strong justification was the recourse to tradition. The women assumed their names would change because 'that's you know the done thing' (Adele), 'it's traditional and conventional' (Eleanor), it is seen as 'the right thing to do' (Lucy). Moreover, this is viewed as the correct path when getting married because it is assumed children will follow and 'it's just what's expected as you become a family and that family have one name' (Zoe): the husband's. The cultural expectation that women will change their names to that of their husbands' on marriage is, according to Scheuble and Johnson (1993), 'part of the language system which underscores traditional roles in a patriarchal society' (1993: 747, citing Pearson, 1985). Once married, it is expected that a woman will change her name to reinforce and maintain traditional gender roles. Taking the surname of her husband will serve to strengthen the notion that her individual identity is subsumed under his identity: she is her husband's wife (Scheuble and Johnson, 1993). Participants reinforce these notions and the overwhelming impression from these conversations is that the women are happy to lose their names because of tradition and expectations; society presents no need to question the taking of men's names and so it is not disputed.

The appeal of tradition is so strong that no departure from this is discussed by interviewees. Not a single woman talks about 'the family' adopting her own surname or creating a new family name. Even hyphenation of the two partner's names was viewed with suspicion: Grace says she 'wouldn't want to have a double barrelled name' and Lauren explains that a double barrelled name 'just seems sort of really tacky'. Michelle agrees with this when she comments, 'I think double barrelled names are a bit crap' and Rebecca is 'not into all this hyphen stuff'. Double barrelled names appear to have earned a stigma and just one participant considers the possibility of using hyphenation on marriage. This rejection of hyphenation may be rooted in the traditional association of such names with the upper classes, yet they may also be so determinedly rejected

because they depart from the traditional romantic notion of a woman submitting to her husband and sacrificing her identity for his: 'The ideal selfless woman is a woman without a self' (Comer, 1974: 59).

This notion of women's self-sacrifice becomes even more obvious when Susan and Mandy's accounts are considered. Susan was due to be married a month after the interview. She says she did consider a double barrelled name but she 'didn't like the sound if it either way round'. Susan goes on to explain that 'Nathaniel [her fiancé] said it meant a lot more to him like me having his surname and as I wasn't particularly bothered either way I thought nice gesture to take the name and kind of do the traditional thing'. Susan says she was not bothered about the decision although only a few seconds earlier had said: 'I was quite set on having it as Kelly-Smart or Smart-Kelly'[21]. While she is 'quite set' on her ideas when this decision just involves her own wishes, when her partner's wishes are taken into account as well, she says 'I just sort of went along with it but I'm quite chilled out so I wasn't really that bothered'. This example seems to illustrate quite nicely Comer's point: a wife's 'self-negation, when it is in the cause of husband bolstering, is self-enhancement' (Comer, 1974: 56) for the wife. Thus, sacrificing what otherwise appeared to be fairly important to Susan, when done in the cause of pleasing her husband to be, is viewed as 'a nice gesture'. Susan talks about her name as though it can be given away in a simple gesture- perhaps because for her it is not a significant part of identity.

Another example of this self-negation is apparent in Mandy's account. Mandy says,

> I actually didn't want to change my name but he really did want me to change my name, and that was worth doing it 'cause I could see he wasn't interested in getting married really apart from the fact that I might change my name.

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[21] All names have been altered to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

Mandy explains that after six months of marriage, she told her husband that nothing had really changed except for her name, 'and he said but if that hadn't changed there would have been no point getting married [...] he said the wedding would have meant nothing if I hadn't changed my name'. According to Mandy's husband, marriage means 'nothing' unless the wife legally changes her surname to match her husband. His wishes were prioritised above hers and he reinforces this message by insisting that there would have been 'no point getting married' unless she changed her name. Women become consumed, and willingly so, by their husband's identity (Comer, 1974). Susan and Mandy gave up their names because their partners expressed a wish for them to do so. Yet neither regarded their names as significant aspects of their identities and neither actually considered their identities to have changed very much since engagement or marriage. Therefore, although Susan and Mandy gave up their original names against their initial wishes, they did so to please their partners and were happy to do so because they did not expect this to substantially alter their senses of self.

Women's willingness to give up their surnames is further evidenced by two participants' assertions that they wanted to change their surnames because they did not like their current names. When I asked Helen whether she would change her name on marriage, she replied, 'yeah but that's 'cause I don't like me surname' and Shirley comments, 'losing Soper isn't a very big deal for me' because the name belongs to her step-father with whom she is not close. Yet Shirley does acknowledge that were it not for feeling detached from her surname, 'I think I would feel quite strongly and quite differently'. Since she is not attached to her current name she can easily justify her desire to change it on marriage. Similarly, Ruth explains, 'I've always wanted to change my name partly because I don't actually like my surname'. The inconvenience of her surname provides her with justification for wanting a different name: that of her future husband. Mills (2003) found similar results among her (feminist) participants, some of whom took their husband's name for the simple reason that it sounded better than their own. Thus, as Mills comments, 'aesthetic considerations also come into play and the sense of building a new identity for oneself with the adoption of this new "nice-sounding" surname' (2003: 98). The

desire to exchange one's own name for something nicer-sounding can result, then, from aesthetic considerations. This motivation runs alongside more traditional justifications for women rejecting their current surnames. It appears then, that many of the women in this sample do not have a strong relationship with their maiden names. A majority assume that this name will be dropped upon marriage and this will occur for a number of reasons, including an appeal to the traditional, a desire to please their partners who request a name change, and for purely aesthetic considerations.

8.5.2   The Appeal to the Family

An attachment (or lack thereof) to family appears to be another important consideration in the decision to change surnames once married. The family can be appealed to in two different ways to justify women's name change: creating a single family name for the new family; and becoming a part of her husband's family. As Mills (2003) also found, for some women, changing their name is 'a question of signalling an affiliation with certain members of a family' (2003: 98). Becoming a part of another family was talked about by a few participants although this was not viewed as a very significant aspect of name changing. Moreover, Lucy talks about this change as 'accepting another family into your name', rather than being accepted into another family. Joining another family was brought up by participants but it seems that this was not as important to them as creating their own 'new family' with their partner. In this respect, the 'family' name became very significant.

One of the most frequently quoted reasons for changing their name on marriage was the perceived necessity of having the same name for all family members. This is conceptualised as being important because: 'you feel more part of the family unit you've all got the same name' (Catriona), 'I'd want the family to have all one name not different names' (Elizabeth) and 'some people want to have the same name and like...to feel like they belong or whatever' (Rebecca). A family identity seems to be based on a shared name, which shows that the family 'belong' together, as Ruth says,

I've always imagined I would change my name [...] because it makes
you feel that you're one; you're part of the same thing, you're the
same family and that's it's a really symbolic powerfully symbolic way
of saying we're together.

When the family do not have a common name, this is perceived to be 'confusing
the children' (Michelle). Claire explains in more detail:

I'd like them to know that we were a family and I think names is quite
a good way of doing that...but I know there's a woman at work that's
got her own surname and then her kids have got her husband's
surname and it's all a bit complicated.

Using this example, Claire describes her view of the situation: 'and I'm like the
kids won't know whether they're coming or going and the teachers don't know
[...] I think it's a bit confusing'. This echoes responses from other participants,
who see the use of different surnames within a family as problematic, confusing
and difficult. This view is not echoed, however, by the children with different
surnames interviewed by Haley Davies (2010). In a presentation given in June
2010, Davies explains that the young children she spoke to who do have different
surnames from their parents or siblings are not at all confused with the situation
and are still able to clearly identify family members. This suggests, perhaps, that
some people underestimate the ability of children to accept and embrace
difference in families and fluidity in family formations. Rather than 'confusing
the children', it would probably be more accurate to say that when a family do not
have a common name this upsets and confuses adults and schools, who have a
desire for commonality and convention.

Two participants go further than this to suggest that women who do not adopt
their husband's surnames are actually less committed or the relationship more
temporary. Hermione explains about a family member: 'me Auntie's married and
she's kept her own name and I can- it doesn't feel as permanent I think'. Zoe
echoes this sentiment when she says,

I think like also if you've kept your name it be kind of like saying I'm not really that committed to you because I don't know I think it's just what's expected as you become a family and that family have one name.

A change in name can, therefore, represent a great deal about a couple's relationship and the perceived level of long-term commitment. Mills (2003) also reports one participant who commented that 'she was glad to take her husband's name because she felt that it showed her commitment to him' (2003: 102). A family must share a name in order to be considered a 'unit' and a couple must share a surname in order to show their commitment to one another. It is no coincidence that this surname belongs to the husband. It is reasonable to accept that a family want to share a common surname, simply in order to identify as that particular family, but participants fail to acknowledge that this shared name is invariably the husband's and none contemplate the possibility of a family using the wife's surname or a different name altogether.

8.6   REGRET AND THE LOSS OF A FAMILY NAME

Four participants, who had changed or planned to change their surnames, felt regret for the current or anticipated loss. Amy describes herself as a 'traditionalist' but explains that the decision of whether or not to change her name is difficult because 'if I don't keep my own name my family name would die out'. Moreover, Amy says, 'I don't really think taking your husband's name is like the most important thing I think it'd have to be something you decided a) as a couple and b) with the rest of your family'. This is an interesting perspective from someone who is otherwise very traditional in her views. Amy describes a much more egalitarian approach to the issue of name change and this is perhaps due, in part, to the tension created by the dying out of her family name in her family tree.

Fiona and Hermione both changed their names willingly, but both also reported feeling sadness on parting with their names. Fiona reports, 'I was quite upset to

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say goodbye to um my name because I don't think that Hart is going to be carried on'. Hermione echoes this view:

> The only thing that I was upset about as taking his name was I'm the
> last of the Fosters and I'm a woman so obviously I wouldn't have that
> but if I had any kids there won't be any more Fosters.

This concept of family names becoming extinct is, therefore, significant for participants and causes them some concern when considering changing their names. This concern is not great enough, however, to convince them that they should keep their own names. Tradition, convention, family unity and practicality weigh against their old names and favour the new. Mills (2003) found slightly different results when researching name extinction. While my participants expressed sadness but continued to kill off their names, those in Mills' study added their husbands' names to their own, keeping theirs through a fear of the name dying out. This illustrates, as Mills suggests, 'the conflicting demands of a conservative community of practice within which the respondent would like to position herself and her relationship with her husband' and 'other conservative ideologies of lineage and feminist notions of independent identity' (2003: 99). While this tension is apparent in my interviews, the lack of 'feminist notions of independent identity' (2003: 99) is probably why respondents continue to change their names rather than adopt alternative naming practices.

Three further participants explained that, although they would change their names on marriage to that of their husband, they would keep their maiden names for work purposes. Ruth, who so strongly reinforces the importance of the 'powerfully symbolic' shared family name, goes on to explain that 'for work purposes I might not be able to change my name because in the business that I'm in we write things and my name is on lots of things now'. Although Ruth will keep her own surname for work purposes, this is not a desired option but rather a matter of practicality. Eleanor and Elizabeth also say that they will keep their maiden names for work purposes although this appears to be more of a free choice than a necessity. This perhaps indicates the existence of another identity for these

participants: a workplace identity.

Finally, two participants say that they would not change their names if they married. Lauren does not anticipate marrying and yet she can see the appeal of sharing a family name with partner and children. She goes on to say, however, that this 'is something I definitely wouldn't do'. Lauren is strongly resistant to the idea of changing her surname. Rebecca is also resistant, though in a more hesitant way. She explains:

> I think I would like to keep me own name, I think I would like, you know for a long time I kind of like you know looked around for to be with someone and blah blah blah and now I know I don't need to be with someone, I need to be me and I think like I wouldn't want to lose who I am. It's took me so long to make myself to like who I am like I don't think I'd, I think I probably would like to keep my own name.

It is clear that for Rebecca, her name constitutes a large element of identity and that losing her name would impact significantly on her sense of self.

Thus, it appears that an individual's decision to change surnames when she marries is predicated on the extent to which her surname constitutes her identity and sense of self. Moreover, it depends on whether she wants to take on a new identity once married or not. Some participants view themselves as not changing on marriage *except* for their surnames and others views themselves as changing *because* of their surname change. Rebecca, however, sees herself as changing in role once married but strongly resists changing her name, as this represents her long struggle to accept who she is. Others justify the desire to change surnames by claiming that they are not attached to their current name and they always expected to change it, because of tradition, desiring a single family name and asserting that a double barrelled name is unacceptable. Yet, there are tiny areas of opposition to the custom; some women keep their own surnames for work and others do not anticipate changing their names at all in the future.

8.7   BEING A 'WIFE'

Participants differed in the extent to which they endorsed or rejected the traditional 'wife' role. Although most participants acknowledged that housework and childcare should be shared between the couple, Claire and Zoe showed more ambivalence when it came to these roles. Claire comments,

> I have a feeling that I've probably still got some of those old fashioned ideas of what a wife should do and be in my head, but I'm going to be, put my foot down and try and be equal as much as we can.

Zoe has a similarly confused story as she explains that she would 'want to be the parent like the one that looked after everyone' and that 'naturally I think I it would be the woman that does the cleaning and the cooking' but she also goes on to say that household jobs 'should be spread equally personally I would prefer it that way but it probably wouldn't end up being like that'. Despite assertions that both Claire and Zoe would desire equality in the household division of labour, they also acknowledge that this is unlikely to transpire because Claire has 'old fashioned' ideas and Zoe says that these are 'naturally' women's tasks. Women's relegation to the household is, however, a recent phenomenon, emerging less than 100 years ago. Comer (1974) notes that up until the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, women continued to work in agriculture, industry and commerce, although were gradually forced out of the more profitable trades throughout the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (Rowbotham, 1977). It is only with the spread of capitalism and dominance of Victorian ideals that women's place was considered to be in the home and this ideology has persisted, to some degree, into the current century.

Participants appear to be considerably more traditional in terms of childcare than housework. For example, Abigail comments in relation to housework: 'we'd take it in turns we're very 50/50 in our relationship but then one day if I had children I would I wouldn't want to work until they're like school kind of thing'. While it

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was deemed acceptable to share housework between the couple, childcare was still often considered to be the woman's responsibility. As Zoe notes, 'I personally wouldn't like to have the Dad looking after the kids when I I feel like it should be my job'. Among others, however, this was not described as a 'responsibility', but rather as a desire to take care of the children: 'ideally, if I had my ideal I'd probably stop [working] for a couple of years of having my children and then go back to work' (Catriona). In terms of help from her husband, he would do 'his bit' when he came home from work. Fiona talks along similar lines when she says, 'I personally would want to be the one that would sort of stay at home and look after the children'. Thus, these participants endorse traditional gendered childcare roles. Claire was the only participant to comment that childcare duties would be 'very equal', while other participants did not consider the situation.

Endorsement of the housewife role was, however, discussed more widely. Catriona, Eva, Rebecca and Ruth all sanction the housewife role and do so in the context of their own families. Catriona says, 'I'd like it to be like my house is at home like Mum's like she's a bit of a clean freak but she does all like the housework and then my Dad's quite he does all the DIY' and she goes on to say, 'I don't mind the whole sort of family traditions of the woman looking after the house and the husband sort of doing the DIY and the man stuff'. Catriona says that this is not 'sexist I think that's just I quite like that idea'; this specific interpretation of gender roles as 'not sexist' is perhaps because it is based upon her own family unit. Eva and Rebecca also justify their traditional role expectations using their own families: Eva's Mum 'is always cleaning a lot more than my Dad is she cooks and she cleans even though Dad's a great cook' and Rebecca explains her father is 'a practical man like he fixes he can fix cars he can build his own garage as well and I've always been attracted to people that can do stuff themselves'. Ruth has also learned from her parents:

> I've always thought that was how you did things you know my parents did it, I saw how it went you know I thought well this is how you do things [...] I want to have kids and I want to be the mum and you

know, do the shopping and all the rest of it.

It would seem that while social norms of gender equality and cultural values of sharing domestic chores are of some influence, the greater influence for some is parental. Children grow up assuming that the way their parents organise their lives is 'correct' and this assumption is hard to relinquish.

For some participants, there were no negative connotations associated with being a housewife and the term 'wife' was viewed as a positive label; Michelle, Hermione and Fiona, in particular, highlight this viewpoint. Michelle comments, 'I don't think there's any negativity around being someone's wife', Hermione explains, 'oh I was really excited about being someone's wife' and Fiona says, 'I was sort of looking forward to sort of being his wife really and sort of pleased that I made that decision'. For these participants then, the term 'wife' is viewed positively, as a status to look forward to and be excited about, despite the possession implicit in being 'someone's wife'.

A larger number of participants, however, discussed more negative associations attached to the term 'wife'. Adele and Elizabeth say that the term 'wife' implies a loss of freedom and identity (for 'other women') that does not apply to the term 'husband'. As Adele says, 'I think some people maybe do sort of lose their identity a little bit' and Elizabeth comments, 'other women think that if you become a wife you suddenly have to stop being you can't be your own identity or single self'. Although this does only seem to apply to 'other women', there is a sense that becoming a 'wife' means that women become subsumed to some extent under their husband's identity. Amy talks about making 'some sacrifices' once she is married and has children and Mandy says that being a wife 'just made me feel a little bit tied down because, nothing's changed in our relationship, but with just the what that word means in broader society it just made me feel a bit oppressed'. Mandy is the only participant, with the exception of Lauren, who does not have anything positive to say about 'wife', stating: 'I don't like saying my husband and don't like being a wife'. Lauren explains, 'I'm not comfortable with the idea of being a wife because I think it has negative connotations'.

Lauren goes on to explain that using the terms 'husband' and 'wife' could all too easily lead to the adoption of traditional household roles and as she explains, 'I don't want to end up inadvertently subscribing to that by like just sort of sleep walking into it by being a wife myself'. Rebecca also talks about falling into traditional gender roles in the household. She explains, 'I wouldn't like to be stereotypical do you know what I mean like wife role or anything but I do like that kind of stuff [...] I can imagine falling into a trap of doing it'. Thus, by a small number of participants, the term 'wife' is viewed negatively as representing a loss of freedom and identity. The term also reinforces traditional notions of domestic divisions of labour, which a couple of participants recognise and reject.

Although only a few participants acknowledge negative associations with the term 'wife', a larger number of participants reject the assumption of the traditional housewife role and opt for a more equal split of household chores. Adele says, 'I can't ever see that I would take on the housewife sort of role I think it would be more of an equal sort of split' and Fiona comments that the term 'housewife' seems a bit outdated, 'I just think that's so in the past I don't really sort of know anybody now that's sort of stay at home wife really'. According to these participants, therefore, being a housewife is not desirable and is rather old fashioned. Others also see the housewife role as no longer viable. Alice comments, 'I just think you know women have to work there's not a lot of choice really so they're not just seen as the housewives'. Mandy goes further by suggesting that traditional household gender roles no longer exist: 'the gender divide in other areas of life have come down so it was that you know the wife or the mother doesn't really exist as much any more'. The progress of equality has eliminated the need for and existence of housewives.

For some participants, therefore, the housewife role is no longer viable or desired, while for others, it no longer exists. This is perhaps, in part, due to the negative associations with being a housewife and a desire to resist falling into the trap of traditional gender roles. Moreover, a number of interviewees said that their career was important to them and this would take precedence over perceived household

duties. Equality within the relationship with regard to household tasks and childcare was seen as important by many participants, with others opting for an equitable division of labour. Hermione says 'we just sort of equally divided it [housework] up and we still do that now', while Alice comments, 'not necessarily equally, I think it also depends on how many hours the other person works and what hours they work to whether or not who picks up the children and who feed you know cooks'.

Participants seem, on the whole, to be split on the issue of housework and homemaking and the extent to which this is still a significant aspect of women's lives and identities. While some still embrace the identity of housewife (or even fantasise about it), others reject the traditional roles in favour of a more equal or equitable balance. While some endorse the housewife role because they are following the tradition of their own family's division of labour, at the other end of the spectrum, a couple of participants speculate that the traditional housewife role no longer exists. For some, therefore, being a 'wife' was, or would be, central to their identities and they embraced the associations that are inherent in this term. Others, however, did not embrace the term and commented that 'wife' had negative connotations that they would not wish to incorporate into their identities.

8.8   TOWARDS A THEORY OF IDENTITY

Participants' accounts suggest that there are different aspects to identity that differ in significance for individuals. A key determinant in identity is locating oneself in relation to imaginary 'others'. Moreover, the variation between accounts of identity changing and not changing on marriage suggests that there may be elements to identity that do not change, as well as elements that are changeable. It is apparent that participants hold a notion of self that is integral and unchanging; a 'core' self, central to an individual's concept of identity. On top of this, participants layer other, more fluid aspects such as a couple identity, family identity, workplace identity, sexual identity, or other roles such as mother, wife or student. Thus, it emerges that the self can be fixed and changing; the self is viewed as individual and also in relation to others. The participants who talk

about their identity not changing upon marriage would view their identity as comprising their 'core' self of fixed and permanent components. On the other hand, those who view their identities as altering upon marriage would be considering their layered identities and the transition from 'in a relationship' or 'cohabiting' to 'wife'. The layered identities impact on and shape one's core identity but the core itself cannot be altered lightly. Participants' reflexivity in determining and defining aspects of their identity fits in with Giddens' notion of the reflexive project of the self. People appear to be reflecting on their sense of self and are increasingly able to identify key components of their identity.

Participants' accounts also encompass aspects of traditionalism and this is particularly apparent in discussions of sexuality. There remains a requirement to be feminine, to not be too promiscuous and to submit to men's desires. These prescriptions are also apparent in women's marriage identity, in terms of changing their names without question, and adopting traditional gender roles within the couple. There is, however, a tension between not wanting to lose who they are, their core identity, while simultaneously desiring the label 'wife' and taking pride in the status. While self-identity has, to some extent, become a reflexive self project (Giddens, 1992), other, traditional identities, such as wife, remain appealing to young women. Participants express a longing for the married status and pride in obtaining the status of 'wife' and title of 'Mrs'. Thus, for some participants, the alteration that marriage would effect on their identity and self-perception is another justification for the desire to marry.

9. CONCLUSION

The picture that emerges from my data as a whole is one of highly conventional young women, most of whom desire traditional partnerships and futures. However, it is also important to bear in mind that such opinions do not arise out of a vacuum and are intrinsically linked with life experiences. It is therefore important to consider these views in context. People's beliefs and attitudes are a result of their life experiences and the numerous external factors that influence opinions, such as cultural norms, the opinions of friends and family, and the agenda of the media. Throughout participants' accounts the impact of external constraints and influences on decisions is evident, and these must always be taken into account. Furthermore, since these constraints and influences can impact an individual at any time in their life, it is likely that these participants hold these specific beliefs at only this particular moment in time and they will continue to be influenced, and their views change, over the course of their lives.

Giddens (1992) proposes that we are currently undergoing a transformation of intimacy that is characterised by a shift in intimate relations to pure relationships, confluent love and plastic sexuality. From my own experience I was wary of these conclusions and it appears that my participants are also hesitant in embracing such modern ideals. Only one participant recounted a relationship resembling a pure relationship and this was as likely to have arisen out of past experiences as it was out of a significant alteration in attitudes. The notion of plastic sexuality was not very evident throughout interviews and the majority still link sex with issues of reproduction, STIs and other dangers. Temporary, confluent love was also not significant in participants' relationship experiences and love was essential for a marriage; while love may happen without marriage, marriage should never take place in the absence of love. Thus, love is a primary legitimising ideology for marriage; it provides young women with a reason for marrying that is widely accepted but more than this, it is inexorable and indomitable. No one can question the power of love and its use as a justification for marriage, despite the curious absence of falling in love stories. Commitment was also central to partnerships and was conceptualised in many different ways.

'Push' and 'pull' factors emerged as dominant determinants in the process, and infidelity as a central component to the bond and to the continuation of relationships.

Thus, this centrality of love and commitment for participants and their relationships negates the presence of pure relationships that rely on temporary love and impermanent commitment. In addition, the desire for long-term commitment and increasing standards of commitment also do not reflect a transformation in intimate relations to more individualised and self-satisfying connections. Although attitudes towards sexual freedom and the plurality of relationships are altering, with increased acceptance of sexuality and alternative lifestyle choices, these are not actually adopted by the young women interviewed. They are acceptable for 'other' people but would not be appropriate for themselves. Thus, a division arose between participants and these 'others', which is perhaps a result of the individualisation process: individuals have become increasingly reflexive and are able to compare their own views and attitudes against those of perceived 'others'. Therefore, the process of individualisation has enabled participants to further reject the notions of the transformation of intimacy by 'othering' such behaviours and re-embrace more traditional concepts. The transformation of intimacy could be said to be happening for 'other' people but does not show a great deal of progress among participants. While it is seen to be in progress, the actual effects of such a transformation are not strongly felt.

The women I talked to identified, on the whole therefore, as very traditional and many maintained feminine notions of sexuality, marriage and gender roles. A vast majority of participants wanted to marry or are now married and this does not reflect the declining marriage rates and changing social attitudes legitimising cohabitation or remaining single. The women appealed to tradition to justify their ideal futures and a majority were highly conservative in their opinions with regard to alternative family formations, sexuality and marriage. The process of individualisation is, therefore, reflected not in a *de*traditionalisation of intimate relations and desired family formations, rather it emerges as a desire for *re*traditionalised relationships and futures, albeit a rather altered 'tradition'

including cohabitation and modern weddings. Adkins (2000) found that retraditionalisation was being imposed on women in the workplace by restrictive working practices, yet my participants are choosing and embracing such retraditionalisation to suit their aspirations. This is creating new and novel rules and norms such as the great significance participants place on fidelity and monogamy within intimate relationships. Although important in the past, this now represents a basic level of acceptable behaviour required in all (traditional) partnerships.

While it is possible these participants' responses reflect a shift in attitudes, it may also represent a disparity between what women long for and aspire to and what actually happens. It may also be a result of the recruitment and sampling techniques used. Snowball sampling tends to elicit a sample similar in certain characteristics, since individuals are friendly with others who share their opinions and values. Convenience sampling will also produce a specific sample because those selected are likely to be those interested in the study, known to the researcher or conveniently located. These methods of recruitment resulted in my sample being similar in terms of education level (although there were some notable exceptions), geographic location and social class. Since the interviews were conducted with individuals from the York area and suburbs in Hampshire (both fairly affluent locations), a large number of participants, including those who did not attend university, were from comfortable backgrounds. This then, may go some way to explaining their strongly traditional accounts; tradition apparently remains the prerogative of the wealthy and aspiring classes. Among these participants, and perhaps their representative populations, marriage is a permanent fixture: a popular institution that, this study suggests, is a long way from disappearing.

Throughout the course of this research I have had many ideas for new directions for further research. Most importantly, I was unable to use the case studies I had planned at the beginning because of the word limit. In future workings on this research, therefore, I plan to implement these case studies, situating certain participants within their cultural and social context, as well as the context of the

interview. I developed a system of categorisation for all participants that took into account their varied views and opinions on the different topics and produced a typology graph detailing their characteristics. When this was conducted for all participants, they could be easily situated within their own accounts and in comparison with one another; I will expand upon these ideas in future publications. Two further areas of this research that would interest me are a comparative study with older women and how views may have altered over time; and a comparative investigation with young men's views and attitudes towards marriage, love and commitment, and how these compare with the views of young women. In addition, more research should be conducted in the area of weddings, not only what they mean for young women, but also how they construct and reinforce dominant notions of marriage and love, as well as the impact of their rising and, in some cases, debilitating cost.

I came to this research with the aim of destabilising the concepts of pure relationships and the forward marching transformation of intimacy. My participants have very successfully facilitated this aim. Yet I am now left with a sense of disappointment that these women are not fully embracing varied relationship styles and fluid intimate relations, despite asserting their encouragement of 'others' to do so. The tradition and persistence of marriage is a concern since the institution, in its conventional form, tends to uphold traditional gender relations and roles that are opposite to feminist aims; participants themselves talk about the appeal of 'wife' and housewife roles and the fantasy of being 'given away' by their fathers. As much as this was saddening for me to hear, it was also unsurprising, having been brought up with this generation of young women saying exactly these things. Yet, there are pockets of difference within these accounts; Helen, Rebecca and Lauren give alternative perspectives where marriage is not a life goal or something to aim for and does not automatically indicate success.

Despite my sadness at their lack of ingenuity and imagination in a many areas, however, I also found it heartening that most participants did not reject close ties and family life in favour of highly individualised, selfish wants and desires.

While some areas of life may be becoming increasingly individualised and individuals do want to live according to their own hopes and dreams, in the area of intimate life, this goal is moulded to fit in with more traditional ideas of family life and family roles. In this regard I respect the participants' decisions to prioritise commitment, love and marriage above the demands of a growing individualistic, autonomous culture.

Confidentiality assurance and copyright agreement

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This is to certify that I give permission for the anonymised transcript of my interview to be quoted and published in excerpts or in full in research related publications and for teaching purposes. I also agree that copies of the interview and/or transcript be made available to relevant archives and databases.

I understand that the material will most probably be used by Julia Carter as part of her research, and that it may be deposited in relevant libraries and archives where other researchers will have access to it.

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Signed:……………………………………………

Print name:………………………………………..

Date:

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