

**THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMME,
UNEMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT: MENTAL HEALTH AND
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES**

VOLUME 1

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For Mariel and John

CONTENTS: VOLUME 1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
ABSTRACT	ix
CHAPTER 1: THE EXPERIENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT: PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS, INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES AND THEORETICAL ACCOUNTS	1
1.1 Introduction	2
1.2 Empirical Research on The Effects of Unemployment	3
1.2.1 Background	3
1.2.2 Early Research	5
1.2.3 Recent Quantitative Research	8
1.2.4 Longitudinal Evidence	11
1.2.5 Conclusions on Quantitative Research	13
1.2.6 Recent Qualitative Research	20
1.2.7 Moderating Variables	23
1.2.8 Attitudinal, Behavioural and Personality Variables in Unemployment Research	33
1.3 Research on Collective Interventions against Unemployment	44
1.4 Theoretical Explanations of Unemployment Distress	63
1.4.1 The Phase Models	64
1.4.2 The Deprivation Model	65
1.4.3 The Vitamin Model	67
1.4.4 The Agency Restriction Approach	70
1.4.5 Overview	74
1.4.6 Implications for Research Into Interventions	79
CHAPTER 2: THE CONCEPT OF MENTAL HEALTH	82
2.1 Introduction	83
2.2 A Thematic Review of Previous Conceptualisations of Mental Health	85
2.2.1 Mental Health as Happiness	86

2.2.2	Mental Health as Absence of Illness	89
2.2.3	Mental Health as Normality	91
2.2.4	Mental Health as Adaptation	92
2.2.5	Mental health as Intrapsychic Harmony	93
2.2.6	General Comments	96
2.3	Specific Criterion-Based Accounts of Mental Health	99
2.3.1	Jahoda's Account of Mental Health	100
2.3.2	Warr's Account of Mental Health	102
2.3.3	Ryff's Account of Mental Health	104
2.3.4	A Comparison and Contrasting of The Three Accounts	106
2.4	Conceptualisation of Mental Health in The Present Study	110
2.4.1	Limitations of The Account	116
2.5	Empirical Evidence About The Structure of Mental Health	118
2.6	Factors Influencing Mental Health	123
2.6.1	Demographic Characteristics	124
2.6.2	Job Characteristics	127
2.6.3	Income	132
2.6.4	Personality	133
2.7	Conclusions	137
2.7.1	General Conclusions	137
2.7.2	Specific Implications for Unemployment Research	139
CHAPTER 3: A GUIDING FRAMEWORK		142
3.1	Introduction	143
3.2	The Need for A Conceptual Framework	144
3.3	Previous Models for The Examination of Individual Responses to Unemployment	146
3.4	The Variables to be Included in The Present Framework	161
3.5	The Proposed Structure of The Framework	193
3.5.1	Some Expected Relationships	195
3.6	Strengths and Limitations of the Framework	196

3.7	The First Aim of The Study	198
CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY PROGRAMME		200
4.1	Introduction	201
4.2	Rationale for The Choice of CP as A Focus for The Current Empirical Research	201
4.2.1	CP as A Major Unemployment Intervention	201
4.2.2	CP as A Vehicle for Further Investigation of The Psychological Experience of Employment and Unemployment	205
4.3	Community Programme: An Overview of The Scheme and Review of Research	208
4.3.1	The Historical Development and Operation of CP	208
4.3.2	Research on CP	211
4.4	Researching Community Programme: Alternative approaches and the development of a research strategy	224
4.5	The Second Aim of the Study	241
CHAPTER 5: METHOD		243
5.1	Introduction	244
5.2	Design and Methodology in Applied Social Science	244
5.3	The design and methodology of the present study	252
5.3.1	Research chronology and the development of design	253
5.3.2	The Two Community Programme Agencies	258
5.4	Qualitative Method	260
5.4.1	Procedure	260
5.4.2	Data Analysis	264
5.5	Quantitative Method	266
5.5.1	Measures	266
5.5.2	Procedure and Sampling Method	274
5.5.3	Sample and Response Rates	276
5.5.4	Sample Characteristics	277
5.5.5	Comparisons between The Two Agencies	281

CHAPTER 6: QUALITATIVE RESULTS	283
6.1 Introduction	284
6.2 The Interviewees	286
6.3 The Experience of Unemployment	286
6.4 Individual Differences in The Experience of Unemployment and CP	301
6.4.1 Group 1	302
6.4.2 Group 2	308
6.4.3 Group 3	312
6.4.4 Descriptive Summary of the findings	320
6.4.5 Implications for the conceptual framework and some alternative interpretations of the findings	321
6.5 The Experience of CP	329
6.5.1 Positive Aspects of The Experience of CP	329
6.5.2 Negative Aspects of The Experience of CP	337
6.5.3 Summary of Findings Concerning The Experience of CP	342
6.5.4 Comparison of The Findings with The "key features"	345

CONTENTS: VOLUME 2

CHAPTER 7: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS	351
7.1 Introduction	351
7.2 Summary Descriptive Statistics	353
7.3 Aim 1: Analyses relating to individual differences in the mental health of unemployed adults	354
7.3.1 Introduction	354
7.3.2 Path Analysis (Whole Sample)	358
7.3.3 Path Analysis (Unemployed, employed and CP groups separately)	363
7.4 Aim 2: Analyses Relating to The Experience of Participation on Community Programme	370
7.4.1 Employment Status Group Comparisons	370
7.4.2 Comparisons with Data from Other Studies	376

7.4.3	Consideration of Specific Features of CP	381
7.4.4	Summary of Findings Relating to the experience of CP	386
CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION		388
8.1	Introduction	389
8.2	Individual Differences in The Mental Health of Unemployed Adults	389
8.2.1	Activity Level and Affective Well-Being	390
8.2.2	Influences upon Activity Level	396
8.2.3	Gender and Affective Well-Being	400
8.2.4	Perceived Competence	404
8.2.5	Perceived Control	410
8.2.6	Employment Commitment and Work Commitment	413
8.3	The Experience of Participation on Community Programme	416
8.4	Conclusions	429
REFERENCES		436
APPENDICES		478

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores some theoretical, conceptual, empirical and methodological issues concerning psychological research into unemployment. A review of the literature revealed some important limitations in the approach which has hitherto been taken to examine this phenomenon. Specific weaknesses included an undervaluation of the role of theory, a dearth of empirical research on intervention programmes or other responses to unemployment, as well as oversimplification, overgeneralisation, imprecision and unfalsifiability in the theoretical contributions which have been offered. Moreover, it was noted that there had been a lack of attention to dispositional factors in empirical research or theory, and inadequate (particularly undifferentiated) conceptualisation and operationalisation of mental health variables.

The empirical part of the study, therefore, was developed as an initial exploration of (a) Individual differences in the mental health of unemployed adults, and (b) the experience of participation on Community Programme (CP), a UK government intervention for long-term unemployed adults. A multi-method, multivariate design was used adopting a theoretically grounded, guiding conceptual framework. Qualitative in-depth interviews (N=60) were conducted with CP participants from two CP managing agencies. In addition, a large scale cross-sectional quantitative survey (N=484) was undertaken incorporating individuals who were: (a) Participating on CP (b) Employed (c) Unemployed.

The findings of the study demonstrated a number of relationships between personal characteristics (i.e. demographic and personality related variables), intervening variables and dimensions of mental health. Some theoretical and empirical implications of these findings were discussed and directions for future empirical research and theoretical development were suggested.

With respect to the experience of Community Programme, the findings suggested that within these two managing agencies, the content of the scheme (i.e. the nature of the work) was evaluated positively by the respondents, but that the context of the scheme and its temporary nature were perceived in a negative light. Some suggestions are made as to how these different aspects of the scheme impacted upon the mental health of the participants.

**CHAPTER 1: THE EXPERIENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT:
PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS, INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES AND
THEORETICAL ACCOUNTS**

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, three domains of research within the field of unemployment are considered. These are: (a) Empirical research into the psychological effects of joblessness (b) Research on intervention programmes and (c) Theoretical accounts of unemployment related distress.

Empirical research on the psychological effects of unemployment

After a brief account of early studies in the field, the recent quantitative research in the area is reviewed. It is argued that although findings in the area are generally consistent, (showing a negative impact of unemployment on psychological health), the effect sizes reported in these studies tend to be disappointingly small. An explanation is suggested in terms of a number of methodological, empirical and conceptual difficulties, which in turn are claimed to reflect a more fundamental weakness in empirical unemployment research; *the undervaluation of the role of theory*. The consequences of this neglect are considered in some detail, and attention is then turned to a discussion of qualitative research, which it is argued, illustrates clearly the wide variation in the experience of unemployment and the need to consider the *mechanisms* through which distress comes about. This theme is continued as the role of moderating and mediating variables is discussed. I argue that research on individual differences in this area lacks an integrated perspective and in addition, has tended to focus largely on unemployed groups. Researchers have often pursued a single avenue of interest without regard to other work being conducted on similar topics. I therefore suggest that an integrative framework is needed to enable the investigation of several of the variables simultaneously.

Research into intervention programmes

A review of the literature in this area reveals that empirical evidence about the effect of intervention programmes is meagre in quantity and poor in

quality. The possible reasons for the lack of research in this area are discussed in some detail, and I then turn to consider the scientific, social ethical and financial arguments in favour of such research. It is argued that research on this topic is urgently required.

Theoretical accounts of unemployment-related distress

Four explanations of the psychological effects of unemployment are considered: Phase models; The deprivation model; The vitamin model; The agency restriction account. Of these four, it is argued that phase models offer little in the way of genuine explanation, and therefore attention is focussed on the latter three accounts. It is suggested that these three models have much more in common than is frequently recognised in the literature, but that a number of inherent weaknesses (oversimplification, overgeneralisation, imprecision, unfalsifiability) impose serious limitations on their utility as tools for guiding research into interventions. They are able to provide guidance in the most general terms, but more careful conceptualisation and operationalisation would greatly benefit progress in this area.

1.2 Empirical Research on The Effects of Unemployment

1.2.1 Background

The problems created by the mass unemployment of the early 1980's have not disappeared, though a brief consideration of the current academic literature and popular media sources might easily lead the reader to such a conclusion. The initial wave of academic research which charted the social, political and economic aspects of unemployment in the UK has subsided. In part, this loss of impetus is due to the fall in the official unemployment rate since 1987, but more recently, this trend has reversed and unemployment has started to rise again.

In January 1992, unemployment in the UK was running at 9.4% (of the working population) representing more than 2.7 million people. Regional variations made this picture considerably worse in some areas. In the South East of England the unemployment rate was 8.4% whereas in the North of England, it was 11.2%. In Northern Ireland, 14.5% of the working population were without jobs. Disabled people, women, the young and ethnic minorities were especially at risk of being unemployed.

In other industrialised countries, the picture was similar, with only a few exceptions. Although it is difficult to compare figures, because different countries adopt different definitions of unemployment, it nevertheless seems clear that Spain (17.3%) and the Irish Republic (20.2%) had particularly high numbers of people without jobs, and it was only countries such as Switzerland (1.7%), Sweden (3.5%), and Japan (2.0%) which had escaped the spectre of mass unemployment. The USA had an unemployment rate slightly lower than that of the UK, at 6.8%, and Australia (10.6%) had a similar proportion of jobless workers to the UK. (All figures: Employment Gazette March 1992). Given that unemployment is a feature of industrialised nations which still involves very large numbers of people, disengagement from unemployment research would not yet appear to be a judicious move.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the effects of unemployment on *psychological health*, but the consequences of joblessness extend far beyond this limited area. Although the evidence is not entirely clear, a relationship between poor physical health and unemployment has been suggested by a number of authors (Beale and Nethercott, 1986; Brenner, 1987; O'Brien and Kabanoff, 1979) and other writers have found unemployment to be associated with family problems (Wacker, 1976; Jackson and Walsh 1987), suicide rates (Platt, 1984), and even the academic performance of children of parents without jobs (Madge, 1983). Finally, unemployment will have effects on the

community as well as having consequences for the individual (Cassell, Fitter, Fryer & Smith, 1988). It is important to realise that although problems with physical health, family relationships etc., are contrasted here with the "psychological" consequences of job loss, this is to some extent a false dichotomy. Such problems are *themselves* likely to adversely affect mental health and in turn, the individual's ability to *cope* with such difficulties is likely to be affected by their level of mental health. Thus, in reality, the distinction between "psychological" and "other" consequences of unemployment may be very difficult to make. In order to understand the experience of unemployment, therefore, a complex and dynamic pattern of relationships between people, situations and events needs to be taken into account.

1.2.2 Early Research

It is generally considered that research into the psychological effects of unemployment began during the depression of the 1930's, but as Fryer and Payne, (1986) have observed, interest in the area has a much longer history. They refer to a "Bibliography of Unemployment and the Unemployed" compiled by Taylor (1909), and even go back as far as Thomas More's "Utopia" (1518) in which the author refers to the problems of those unemployed "whom no man wyl set a worke" because of their deteriorating health and demeanour, even though "thei never so willyngly profre themselves thereto".

Garraty (1978) has also referred to historical writings on unemployment. He cites Poulot (1872), who described the impact of unemployment as a "terrible calamity" at which the unemployed person "feels strangled, shakes, trembles with emotion". The worker who actually loses his job "trembles, grows pale, gets goose flesh...When he collects his last pay he cannot speak, his teeth are clenched, he holds back a torrent of tears....In the street his legs give way, he totters like a drunk".

Though these early commentators showed an interest in the consequences of unemployment, a genuinely social scientific approach emerged much later during the 1930's. The publication of the seminal "Mariantal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community" (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld & Zeisel, 1933) marked the beginning of systematic social scientific research into unemployment. Jahoda and her colleagues spent several months living in Mariantal, a small Austrian village in which the major source of employment, a flax factory, had recently closed down. They collected data by a commendable variety of methods and reported on the widespread apathy and resignation experienced by the unemployed. The authors also comment on the strain placed on family relationships, the abandonment of budgeting, and the loss of structure to the day. The Mariantal study was sociographic in nature, and though methodologically unsophisticated by today's standards, its importance as a starting point cannot be overstated. A particular strength of the work was that it pioneered a collective level analysis, emphasizing the importance of studying the community as well as the individual.

As will become apparent later in this chapter, most of the more recent research in the area has turned away from this collective level approach to look at the psychological effects on the individual. The present study follows this trend, but in some senses focusing exclusively on the individual can be seen as an incomplete analysis. Although unemployment is a lonely and isolating experience, the context in which it occurs is of great significance. Unemployment is a socially constructed phenomenon and its personal meaning to the individual is mediated by its social meaning. Focussing exclusively on the individual is associated with two very different risks. The first is that of lapsing into psychologism - attempting to explain the experience of unemployment simply in terms of the characteristics of the individual. This can lead to dangerous and politically loaded stereotyping of the unemployed

as lazy, incompetent or workshy. The second risk is that of interpreting findings in terms of the passivity and dependence of unemployed people, and ignoring the capacity of human beings to be active, creative and self-motivated. I shall attempt to avoid these pitfalls but as we shall see, these traps await throughout the theoretical and empirical literature and are frequently difficult to avoid.

Five years after the publication of Jahoda, Lazarsfeld & Zeisel's work, Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld (1938) reviewed over one hundred publications relating to the effects of unemployment in a number of different countries. This paper presents a consistent overview of the findings concerning the experience of unemployment, with shock, lowering of morale, and resignation as the key features. The authors do however acknowledge differences between individuals, groups and cultures and the complications of interpretation associated with the close link between unemployment and poverty.

Bakke (1940) in a compendium of his work on unemployment conducted during the 1930's, reaches broadly similar conclusions. Using interviews, time diaries, and participant observation to collect data, Bakke describes depression and resignation amongst the unemployed. As O'Brien (1985) has observed, his explanations for these effects are far from being simplistic. Bakke maintained that economic deprivation accounted for much of the distress caused, and argued that although the unemployed had lost a considerable degree of control over their lives, they displayed great resilience in adapting to their impoverished environment.

The last of these early studies which will be considered here was conducted by the Pilgrim Trust, (1938). Unusually for research undertaken during this era, this took the form of a large scale survey which involved interviewing 880 unemployed people about a variety of socioeconomic, psychological and

medical issues. The authors emphasize the dire economic consequences of unemployment for the individual and for the family, and the anxiety that this creates. Again the themes of isolation, loneliness and apathy are prominent.

During the years of reconstruction after the Second World War only scant attention was devoted to unemployment as a research topic. It was not until the late 1970's that the numbers of unemployed people could be compared to those of the 1930's and unemployment once again became a social problem of the first order. I turn now to consider this second wave of research stimulated by the rapid rise in unemployment almost fifty years later.

1.2.3 Recent Quantitative Research

Much of the more recent research on psychological health and unemployment has been conducted in the UK, the USA and in Australia, and it is from these three countries that most of the empirical work reviewed here originates. In the last few years there has been more research undertaken throughout Europe, and some of these studies have also been included. Several excellent reviews already exist (e.g. Hartley and Fryer, 1984; Warr 1984a, 1987; Fryer and Payne, 1986; Smith, 1987; Fryer, 1988a; Schaufeli, 1988). Youth unemployment as a topic forms a separate literature of its own, and although some of this research is included, it has been largely excluded from the following. The experience of unemployment for young people is of course in some ways similar to the experience of adult unemployment, but as Hartley and Fryer (1984) point out, there are many differences in the type of problems young people can expect to encounter, in terms of income, self-esteem, social interaction and personal identity.

Aggregate-level research

One way of considering the relationship between unemployment and well-being is to use an aggregate time-series approach. That is, to attempt to

predict aggregate outcome indicators from aggregate economic change. As outcome indicators, researchers undertaking aggregate level analyses have most commonly used psychiatric admissions (e.g. Catalano, Dooley and Jackson, 1985) or suicide rates (e.g. Catalano, Dooley and Jackson, 1983). Most such studies show unemployment to be associated with lower levels of well-being in the population, but this type of research is faced with a number of methodological problems. Because the studies measure the morbidity of whole populations, they cannot separate the morbidity of the unemployed from that of the employed; minor procedural changes (for example in the time lags allowed between changes in the unemployment rate and changes in the outcome indicators) can produce dramatically different results; and they cannot tease out the effects of unemployment from those of poverty, availability of health services, changes in diet etc. For these reasons, the progress of aggregate level analysis, whilst not stalling entirely, has been severely hampered.

Cross-sectional evidence

A second method of approaching the question of whether unemployed people suffer psychological distress has been to compare employed groups with unemployed groups. The majority of researchers working in this field have adopted this type of cross-sectional design, often using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) (Goldberg, 1972), as a self-report measure of distress (of which more later). Banks and Jackson (1982), for example, interviewed two large cohorts of young people and found that for both cohorts the psychological distress scores of the unemployed groups were much higher than those for the employed groups. A number of other cross-sectional studies support this finding: Estes and Wilensky (1978), Miles (1983), Donovan and Oddy (1982), Pearlin and Liebermann (1979), Hepworth (1980), Cochrane and Stopes-Roe (1980), Brinkmann (1984), Westcott (1985) and Grayson (1985).

Other cross-sectional studies have obtained similar results using different measures of psychological health (see Table 1.2.3).

Table 1.2.3: Cross-sectional evidence about the relationship between unemployment and psychological health

Happiness:	Bradburn, 1969; Tiggeman and Winefield, 1980, 1984.
Life Satisfaction:	Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, 1976; Cohn, 1978; Donovan and Oddy, 1982; Gaskell and Smith, 1981; Hepworth, 1980; Miles, 1983; Schlozman and Verba, 1979; Warr, 1978.
Positive Affect:	Bradburn, 1969; Warr, 1978.
Pleasure:	Warr and Payne, 1982.
Negative Affect:	Bradburn, 1969; Spruit, Bastiaansen, Verkley, van Nieuwenhuizen and Stolk, 1985; Warr, 1978
Strain:	Warr and Payne, 1982.
Negative Self-Esteem:	Feather and Bond, 1983; Lawlis, 1971; Warr and Jackson, 1983; Patton and Noller, 1984; Stokes and Cochrane, 1984
Anxiety:	Donovan and Oddy, 1982; Fineman, 1983; Kasl, 1979a; Lawlis, 1971; Margolis and Farran, 1984; Viney, 1985; Warr 1978.
Depressed Mood:	Doherty and Davies, 1984; Donovan and Oddy, 1982; Feather, 1982; Feather and Bond, 1983; Kasl, 1979a; Margolis and Farran, 1984; Melville, Hope, Bennison and Barraclough, 1985; Patton and Noller, 1984; Radloff, 1975; Tiggeman and Winefield, 1980, 1984.

Adapted from Warr (1987).

All the empirical studies in the table have shown that unemployed groups experience lower psychological well-being than comparable employed groups, but the pattern of causality cannot be determined by cross-sectional data alone. It may be that unemployment causes distress, or it may be that those people who are distressed are less likely to gain employment (or more likely to lose it). Indeed, it may be that another variable entirely, such as social class,

influences both mental health and employment status. Cross-sectional comparisons cannot provide the answers to this type of question. Instead, longitudinal designs are required.

1.2.4 Longitudinal Evidence

Longitudinal studies have greater explanatory power than cross-sectional studies, because they follow the progress of individuals as they become unemployed or as they move back into employment. The use of a quasi-experimental design (Cook & Campbell 1979) taking repeated measures, allows researchers to control for pre-existing differences in psychological health before such a transition, and because time is uni-directional, the results permit the drawing of conclusions about causality.

Longitudinal evidence relating to unemployment and psychological health is somewhat scarcer than cross-sectional evidence because of the longer timescale and higher financial costs involved. Hartley (1980c) has also pointed out that there are likely to be considerable practical and political difficulties in undertaking this type of research. The findings which are available however, show a clear adverse effect of unemployment on psychological health.

Jackson, Stafford, Banks and Warr,(1983), for instance, conducted a study of young people, interviewing them three times over a period of two years. The results showed clearly that for those who became unemployed there was an adverse effect on their psychological health. In another study, Warr and Jackson (1985) re-interviewed 629 unemployed men nine months after an initial measurement of their psychological health. The mean psychological distress score of the men who had found employment by the time of the second interview had fallen from 35.42 to 19.41. Empirical studies by Layton (1985); Linn, Sandifer and Stein (1985); Payne and Jones (1987) and Banks and Jackson (1982) support these findings.

Research evidence concerning other aspects of psychological health is shown in Table 1.2.4

Table 1.2.4: Longitudinal evidence about the impact of unemployment on psychological health

Happiness:	Tiggemann and Winefield, 1980, 1984; Winefield and Tiggemann, 1985.
Life Satisfaction:	Cohn, 1978; Feather and O'Brien 1986; Tiggeman and Winefield, 1980.
Negative Self-Esteem:	Patton and Noller, 1984; Warr and Jackson, 1983
Anxiety:	Linn, Sandifer and Stein, 1985.
Depression:	Cobb and Kasl, 1977; Feather and O'Brien, 1986; Frese, 1979; Kasl 1979a; Linn, Sandifer and Stein, 1985; Patton and Noller, 1984; Tiggemann and Winefield, 1980, 1984.

(Adapted from Warr, 1987)

All the studies above provide support for the notion that loss of a job causes significant deterioration in psychological health and some demonstrate that this deterioration can be reversed if the individual become re-employed. However, a minority of studies have produced contrary findings. One of these is the frequently wrongly cited "Termination Study" conducted in the mid sixties in the USA (Kasl, Gore & Cobb 1975). Although this study has been cited in some reviews as supporting the idea that unemployment is a causal agent in depression (eg Warr 1984) the authors in fact found no significant differences in depression *attributable to changes in employment status*. Quite to the contrary, Kasl (1982), one of the authors, suggested a "reverse causation interpretation": that a selection effect operated whereby initially poor mental health interfered with the ability or desire to find jobs.

Dooley, Catalano and Brownell (1986) also offer findings which conflict with the bulk of evidence. Their study, conducted in 1972, is important in that it controlled for initial depressive affect amongst their sample before employment status transitions occurred. When pre-existing levels of depression were taken into account no difference between employed and unemployed respondents could be found at follow-up. The best predictor of follow-up depression was initial depression. The authors concluded that: "the negative result from this cross-level, panel approach raises doubts about the 'recession-causes-psychopathology' view and, by inference, lends credence to rival views, such as 'recession-uncovers-psychopathology'" (p 103). This view is similar to that suggested by Kasl: a selection effect takes place whereby; "the already disordered are squeezed out of a shrinking workforce" (p 115).

One possible explanation for both these dissonant findings concerns the labour market context at the time of the studies. Both studies were conducted at a time when the unemployment rate was much lower than in Europe or the USA at present. Where labour markets are more buoyant, it may be indeed be that those individuals with lower initial levels of mental health are the first to be "squeezed out" of the workforce. But this explanation cannot account for the findings of more recent studies conducted at a time of mass unemployment (eg Feather & O'Brien 1986). The findings of these studies clearly indicate that for the majority of former employees, it is unemployment which has led to higher levels of distress, not disorder which has led to unemployment.

1.2.5 Conclusions on Quantitative Research

Overall, large scale quantitative research offers considerable evidence that, in general, the loss of a job causes a significant deterioration in psychological health, and that this deterioration can be reversed if the individual becomes re-employed. This effect has been demonstrated over and over again, by

different researchers, using different samples, in different countries at different times.

However, although the association of unemployment with negative psychological consequences has been found to be significant in most studies, the magnitude of the effects tend to be rather small. Fineman (1983) observed that:

"Generalities based upon correlations of .30 - .50 and percentage majorities of 50-60 leave a lot of exceptions to the rule." (p.14)

Taking this a step further, Fryer and Payne (1986) calculated from a number of studies that employment status only accounted for about 14% of the variance in psychological distress. Bearing in mind the enormous significance which employment is claimed to have for many workers as a source of self-esteem, self-respect and self-confidence (as well as a source of income), the inability of researchers to demonstrate more than modest links between unemployment and distress can be seen as somewhat disappointing. As we shall see later, similar difficulties have been encountered elsewhere in the field of life events research (eg Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend 1974). A number of methodological, empirical and conceptual weaknesses in the research carried out to date might be put forward to explain the hitherto less-than-spectacular findings of rather small effect sizes. Amongst these are: the treatment of "the unemployed" as a homogeneous group; the failure to recognise the distinction between "work" and "employment"; the lack of attention to individual level variables such as personality; and the use of undifferentiated outcome measures of mental health. These weaknesses are discussed in more detail later, but it is important to realise that they are all manifestations of a more serious and fundamental weakness in quantitative unemployment research; the undervaluation of the role of theory.

A note on the role of theory within unemployment research

Historically, theory has hardly been accorded any role in quantitative unemployment research. Where it has been used, it is usually deployed in a post hoc fashion, to explain specific findings. Although theoretical attempts to explain unemployment related distress are available (eg Jahoda 1979; Warr 1987; Fryer 1987), these theories have rarely been used to guide quantitative research. Instead, this type of research has, for the most part been method-driven and results-centred. In other words, researchers in this field have selected their research questions on the basis of the methods they intended to use, and have often gathered facts for the sake of fact gathering.

It is important to acknowledge that "scientism" (Koch 1974) or "dustbowl empiricism" is not the exclusive preserve of unemployment researchers. Mackay (1988) has commented that over the last seventy years, across many areas of psychology, empiricism has prospered whilst rationalism has fallen by the wayside, a view which echoes earlier commentaries by Weick (1978) and Koch (1974). Even a cursory glance at the literatures in the applied fields of stress research (Fisher and Reason 1988), life events research (Paykel & Dowlatshahi 1988), psychotherapy research (Greenberg 1986), and mainstream occupational psychology (Landy 1982) serves to confirm this view of widespread theoretical impoverishment. But simply because this affliction is widespread and unemployment researchers are in good company, does not mean that this neglect is excusable. In the area of unemployment research this atheoretical orientation has had a number of grave consequences.

Firstly, it has led to the selection of unduly narrow and unimaginative research questions. Although the existing body of quantitative findings is impressive in its consistency and thoroughness, research development has been pedestrian and myopic. It is both surprising and disappointing to find that exactly the

same question: "Does unemployment cause distress?" has been tackled so many times. Undoubtedly, as the spectre of mass unemployment re-emerged in the late 1970's this question merited serious and detailed consideration on scientific, social and political grounds. But this question was (or at least should have been) only a starting point for understanding the phenomenon of unemployment. Once this link had been established beyond reasonable doubt, there was a need, as several writers pointed out (eg Hartley & Fryer 1984) to consider the mechanisms and processes whereby unemployment leads to distress; that is, to ask *how* and *why* unemployment leads to distress - questions which could be derived from theoretical accounts of unemployment distress.

Unfortunately, this call has not been heeded. Instead, researchers in the field have adopted a "condition-seeking" approach (Greenwald, Pratkanis, Lieppe & Baumgardner 1986) turning their attention to the circumstance under which distress might or might not be expected to occur. As a consequence, the perspective of quantitative research has narrowed, with workers investigating increasingly trivial questions which had long since become detached from the concerns which initially generated the research. Theoretically interesting and important questions such as "What is it about unemployment which causes distress?" have to a large extent remained unexplored empirically whilst the focus of empirical research has become narrower and narrower, until it has (almost) reached a dead end. In short, unemployment research in the UK in recent years has worked itself, slowly and steadily into a scientific cul-de-sac. (This historical pattern bears interesting comparison to the field of psychotherapy research where the focus on outcomes rather than processes has similarly led researchers into a blind alley) (Greenberg 1986).

A second consequence of the undervaluation of theory in unemployment research is that there has been a blinkered approach to the choice of research methods in the field. The large scale quantitative survey has enjoyed

overwhelming dominance as a research method because empirical workers have adopted an approach which reverses the appropriate scientific relationship between theory and empirical research. As Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski and Steinberg (1988) have pointed out, the primary goal of science is to provide an understanding of phenomena. *Theories* (not empirical findings) are the basis of such understanding in that they provide explanations of how and why particular phenomena occur. Instead of viewing empirical work as a tool for facilitating the development of theory, unemployment researchers have viewed theoretical development as being secondary to empirical progress. It is noteworthy that this view has acquired the status of established fact within this area. Even one of the most thoughtful and respected commentators, Marie Jahoda has fallen into this trap. She writes: "In this area theory building is not the overarching aim, as in some other fields; rather, it is a background tool for thought in planning research and interpreting its results" (Jahoda 1988). In short, data collection or fact-gathering has been accorded priority over theoretical development.

One aspect of this approach is that the choice of research method has dictated the choice of research question. Researchers have looked for questions which can be answered using a particular method rather than deciding on the questions and then seeking (or developing) an appropriate method. The inevitable consequence of this strategy is that the range of questions which have been asked is, as noted above, somewhat limited. Moreover, there has been a concentration on "dependent" variables without a clear assessment of what the "independent" variable actually is. As we shall see later, not only is the distinction between unemployment and employment less clear than has frequently been suggested, but also, it can be argued that many of the supposed psychological effects of unemployment could alternatively be regarded as effects of poverty.

Unemployment research design has also suffered as a result of insufficient theoretical input. Quantitative empirical work conducted in this area has frequently been limited to comparisons between the psychological health of employed and unemployed groups, or measurement of the changes in levels of well-being experienced by individuals moving from employment to unemployment or vice versa. In other words, the focus in the vast majority of studies has been on employment versus unemployment. But this distinction is not always easy to make; how should we categorise people who are temporarily laid off, women who would like to have a job but have accepted a full-time parenting role as a second-best alternative, or people participating on government schemes? These examples are important ones, because not only do they illustrate that the distinction between employment and unemployment is far from straightforward, but also because they point to the possibility that making simple comparisons between employed and unemployed people (or even following people as they move between employment and unemployment) may be a theoretically limited approach to research design. Research using this type of design may be able to tell us that there are differences between groups, but it tells us little or nothing about why this is the case, about which aspects of employment/unemployment are responsible, and whether it is only certain aspects of employment which lead to this effect.

One final weakness of unemployment research which can also be attributed to the undervaluation of theory, is that insufficient attention has been paid to the variables being predicted. All too often, researchers have failed to consider carefully what they mean by "mental health", "psychological distress" etc. This has led to terminological chaos, with different researchers using different measures but referring to them with the same terms, and researchers using different terms to describe the same measures. This is illustrated by the fact that in the studies reviewed above, at least six different terms were used to designate the concept measured by the General Health Questionnaire

(Goldberg 1972): ie. minor psychiatric disorder or morbidity; psychological distress, psychological impairment; psychological health; mental health and psychological well-being.

This issue will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 2, but for the present I shall focus on one aspect of this lack of conceptual clarity; the treatment of mental health as an undifferentiated construct.

Many authors writing about research on the effects of unemployment have chosen to aggregate the findings concerning different aspects of mental health, and this has led to statements of the kind that "unemployment causes distress". But to make such sweeping generalisation may not be entirely accurate. In fact, it seems that not all aspects of mental health are equally affected by unemployment. For example, Hartley (1980) found no differences between the self-esteem of managers who were employed and those who were unemployed (and therefore argued for the need for a more sophisticated view and theoretical understanding of self-esteem), and longitudinal studies by Linn, Sandifer & Stein (1985), Stokes and Cochrane (1984), and Balz, Drewski, Schultz-Gambard & Mowka (1985) have demonstrated that positive self-esteem is unaffected by employment status transitions. It would seem that these studies, when taken together indicate that positive self-esteem is one aspect of mental health that is particularly resistant to change as a consequence of job loss. Given this finding, it is easy to see how the treatment of mental health as an undifferentiated construct may make it more difficult to demonstrate associations between employment status and distress. Since different aspects of mental health have different patterns of association with employment status, when these aspects of mental health are merged together, these different relationships may begin to cancel each other out.

A final point about quantitative unemployment research is phenomenological. It is perhaps best phrased in terms of a question: What do we *mean* when we say that the unemployed people experience distress? Large scale surveys which compare employed and unemployed groups and use normative data to make statements about levels of distress cannot (and are not intended to) portray the meaning of the experience for unemployed individuals. In order to get closer to the actual experience of unemployment an alternative approach is needed. Qualitative research provides one such alternative.

1.2.6 Recent Qualitative Research

The recent academic literature on the experience of unemployment is heavily biased towards quantitative research, and in particular, large scale survey studies. Qualitative investigations have been undertaken, but they are less often to be found in the established academic journals. As a consequence, reviews of the literature have tended to ignore qualitative studies, or at best used them simply to illustrate quantitative findings. However, as Smith (1987) has observed, statistical and scientific reports on the impact of unemployment cannot portray adequately the distressing quality of the experience. It is only first hand accounts of what it is like to be without a job which can give the reader some understanding of the desperation and pain of unemployment. The Marienthal researchers of the 1930's understood this well, spending a great deal of time talking to, living with, and observing the community. More recently however, this type of involvement has frequently been left to non-academics.

Campbell (1984), a feminist journalist and political writer spent six months living in the Midlands and North of England talking to unemployed workers and their families. She quotes a former semi-skilled machinist from Coventry who had been unemployed for two years:

"I used to get up at 6am, like I was going to work. I thought I'd get a job in a couple of weeks, but now it's a couple of years. That's frightening, my confidence is going. When people ask me how long I've been out of work, I think, shall I lie? When you're unemployed, you feel like you've committed a crime somewhere, but nobody tells you what you've done. The first thing that happened to me was that I realized I'd become almost illiterate after years working in a factory. I fall asleep a lot, it happens if you've got nothing to do. One bloke round here, the only place he goes is to sign on the dole. Sometimes I think I'll go barmy. Of course you get depressed, you convince yourself it's you. Sometimes I feel really ashamed, especially with things like Christmas. This will be the first time I've ever not given my sisters something for Christmas." (p.179)

Although Campbell's methods and style do not even approach scientific credibility (this was not her objective) such case material provides powerful and accessible data about the outcomes of being unemployed, and provides crucial insights into the processes involved.

Within a more academic framework, Bostyn and Wight (1987) adopted this type of approach in their study of a Scottish mining village where 30% of men and 60% of women were without jobs. The sociographic methods included questionnaires, interviews, participant and unobtrusive observation. In reporting their findings, Bostyn and Wight stressed the importance of limited financial resources and lack of time structure in contributing to the loss of meaning in the lives of unemployed people. They also point out that some aspects of the experience of unemployment are irreducibly social ones. In order to understand the meaning of unemployment for those who experience it, these factors need to be seen in context. For example, they point to the

symbolic importance of drinking: "Seeing unemployed men enjoying their pints undermines the traditional connection between hard work and rightful access to alcohol as its reward. Although such attitudes are changing, an unemployed man was made to feel 'not entitled to a pint of beer' by his own working brother when they met in the pub. For the most part, the unemployed feel "it's ignorant' to go into a pub unless they have got enough money for several drinks" (p.141).

In an ethnographic study of unemployed black youths, Ullah (1987) was concerned to turn the focus of attention "...away from tests of hypothesised relationships between variables towards the social and psychological meanings of those variables for young blacks" (p.111). Ullah argues that the experience of unemployment for these teenagers has to be seen "...within a wider context which takes into account their experience of being black in a predominantly white society" (p.111). For example, applying for a job or going for an interview involved facing potential racial discrimination:

"It makes you more nervous going for a job, because you know that - people are prejudiced, that is obvious like - and you know that if there's white people going for the job, they're gonna take the white person. (p.130)

In a similar vein, Walsh (1986) argues that the consequences of unemployment need to be seen in their family context. In a qualitative study of unemployed families, Walsh found that the whole family unit is affected by unemployment, and that positive adaptation to unemployment was greatest for those individuals whose families gave them support and autonomy to develop new roles. Hartley (1987) emphasises the supportive role of the wife for unemployed men who had been in managerial posts before becoming unemployed.

Research of this kind has often been criticised for its lack of generalisability. This is indeed a weakness of small scale qualitative studies, but it is precisely this type of ideographic research, with its focus on the individual experience rather than the general effects of unemployment, which has illustrated so clearly that the experience of unemployment is far from being uniform and that the use of large scale survey methods necessarily excludes many important social and contextual factors which are critical to understanding of the meaning of unemployment for those who experience it. "The unemployed", though they share one thing in common, are not a homogeneous group. Their experience of unemployment will depend on their differing values, beliefs, expectations, roles and past experiences. These in turn may depend partly upon factors such as age, gender, social class, how long they have been unemployed, the social, historical and economic context, and so on. All of these factors need to be taken into account when considering the meaning of unemployment for those who experience it and the mechanisms through which distress comes about. There will be wide variation in both the nature and the degree of distress and it has been pointed out that some individuals may not suffer at all whilst others may even experience improved psychological health since job loss (Warr 1984b). Accordingly, some research has been directed towards the identification of characteristics which mediate or moderate the impact of unemployment.

1.2.7 Moderating Variables

There has been some confusion over the use of the terms moderator and mediator within the unemployment literature, and they have commonly been used interchangeably. Baron and Kenny, (1986) state that the moderator function of a third variable "...partitions a focal independent variable into subgroups that establish its domains of maximal effectiveness in regard to a given dependent variable", whereas the mediator function "represents the

generative mechanism through which the focal independent variable is able to influence the dependent variable of interest" (p.1173). This may not at first appear to clarify the issue greatly, but as Schaufeli (1988) has noted, moderation and mediation are conceived as functions, and not as features of specific variables. Thus a variable such as employment commitment might act as a moderator or a mediator depending upon its place in a model. Usually however, moderating variables represent attempts to describe *when* or *an* effect will occur whilst mediating variables are designed to explain *how* an effect occurs. I shall turn now to the research which has considered some of these variables, but as will become apparent, it is often the case that those who have considered the role of such variables are not themselves clear about whether they are mediators or moderators.

Age

Age has consistently been found to be curvilinearly associated with psychological distress in unemployed samples (Daniel 1974; Hepworth 1980; Rowley and Feather 1987). In essence, middle aged men experience greater distress than those who are younger or older. It has been suggested that the greater financial and family commitments of the middle aged respondents are partly responsible for the differences. Teenagers usually have fewer financial pressures, often living in their parents homes, and may still have a social network of friends and pattern of leisure activities from school. Older men may also have fewer financial commitments and family responsibilities, and may simply re-interpret their unemployment as early retirement (Jackson, 1988).

Whilst these explanations seem plausible, there is little empirical evidence to support them. Rowley and Feather (1987) in a study of Australian men, found no differences in the level of reported financial strain between younger and middle-aged unemployed groups, although they did find a difference between

the two age groups for the relationship between financial strain and duration of unemployment. For younger people there was no relationship, but for those in the middle-aged group, longer duration of unemployment was associated with greater financial strain. However, in a study of unemployed British men, Warr & Jackson (1984) found that being middle-aged still predicted poorer mental health even when variables such as income change and number of dependents were controlled in analysis.

These findings are confusing and although it does seem important to take age into account in considering individual variations in unemployment, there is a need for much more research into exactly why age is associated with levels of distress. Consideration of the life-span developmental literature (eg Levinson 1978) may suggest explanations which are psychological rather than situational in nature. For example, it may be that differences in personal values, beliefs and expectations which change as individuals grow older can help to account for differences in experienced distress.

Duration of unemployment

The psychological impact of job loss is usually rapid, with well-being declining sharply after the transition into unemployment. This decline in health continues for three to six months at which time there seems to be some stabilization in levels of distress or even a slight improvement (Jackson and Warr, 1984; Warr and Jackson 1985). A small but significant average improvement in distress scores at between 12 and 24 months of unemployment has been reported by Warr and Jackson (1987). For people who have been unemployed even longer than this, Payne, Warr and Hartley (1984), and Payne (1985), found small improvements in both general distress and depression scores at between two and three years of unemployment.

Although these changes are statistically significant, Fryer and Payne (1986) have noted that they tend to be relatively small in clinical significance. As they write: "Differences in length of unemployment would appear to be much less important than the fact of being unemployed at all" (p. 253).

A second point about these findings is also worthy of note. It is possible that apparent improvements are due to the wording of the measures being used. The most commonly used measure of psychological distress, the GHQ, asks the respondent to compare how they have been feeling over the last few weeks with how they have felt in recent years. Clearly, if the respondents have been continuously unemployed for two or even three years, this comparison is less likely to yield the differences which score as symptoms, and the finding of reduced distress may be artefactual. However, other measures of psychological health, which use a different question format, such as the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al, 1961), have also suggested that there is a small improvement in health when individuals have been out of work for long periods.

Race

Given the extensive evidence concerning the disadvantages experienced by non-whites in industrialised societies, comparatively little empirical work has been undertaken on ethnic differences in reactions to unemployment. Warr, Banks and Ullah, (1985) in a study of 1150 young people found unemployed black youths to have significantly lower levels of distress and depression than young whites. They explain this partly in terms of the lower commitment to the labour market amongst black youths, who have responded realistically to their disadvantaged position as jobseekers. On re-interviewing those who were still unemployed 12 months later, Banks and Ullah, (1988) found no differences in distress scores between blacks and whites, this presumably was associated with

the reduction in employment commitment and job applications amongst the white teenagers.

Thus, whilst there are differences in the reactions of blacks and whites to unemployment, it seems that these differences are interpretable primarily in terms of other mediating variables. Shams (1990) has collected interesting data within a sample of unemployed British-Asians. Her research replicates the findings in white populations for the effects of age and employment commitment on mental health, but she also found that high value for religion had a protective effect for her sample.

Gender

Most research into the psychological effects of unemployment has been restricted to samples of men, and as Leana and Feldman (1991) have commented this may say much about common stereotypes about the importance of employment for women. Nevertheless, it is true that women in western cultures occupy a variety of employment and domestic roles, and sampling of female groups is complicated. Of particular importance are the issues of whether some women have chosen to be nonemployed or would prefer to be in employment and the extent to which family responsibilities may covary with gender within some western cultures. It is reasonable to suppose that these factors strongly influence any psychological health outcome of being without a job. Consequently, straightforward comparisons of random samples of men and women are inappropriate. Instead, sub-samples of women who want to be employed need to be selected if comparisons are to be meaningful.

Breakwell, Harrison and Propper (1984) compared groups of registered unemployed men and women and found similar scores for general distress, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. Longitudinal studies (Jackson, Stafford,

Banks and Warr, 1983) have also shown that the pattern of distress caused by unemployment is the same for young women as for young men.

In contrast, studies which have considered the experience of married women with children reveal no differences in mental health between those with jobs and those without paid employment (Warr and Parry, 1982a; Warr, 1987). As Warr, Jackson and Banks (1988) have observed, "Some married women will undoubtedly gain from paid employment, whereas others will suffer, both in terms of poor-quality jobs and through the strain of coping with dual work roles". (p.59)

In summary, it seems that any differences between men and women in terms of their reactions to unemployment follow from the social roles which they adopt rather than to any genuine biological differences.

Social class

Whether blue-collar or white-collar workers are more likely to suffer from unemployment has been the topic of some discussion. It can be argued that white collar workers are likely to experience greater loss in terms of status and money, added to which they may suffer more stigmatisation. On the other hand, blue-collar workers are likely to suffer greater financial pressures, and will probably have few other resources to cope with unemployment. Payne, Warr and Hartley, (1984) studied 399 men who had been unemployed for between 6 and 11 months, and found no significant differences in distress scores between white and blue collar workers, but note that the working class sample reported greater anxiety over financial difficulties and greater problems in filling their time. They concluded that unemployment homogenises the psychological experience of different occupational classes. Given the evidence in employed samples for better mental health amongst white collar workers (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison and Pinneau,

1975), these findings suggest a greater effect of unemployment on middle class than on working class men.

However, Schaufeli's (1988) findings in two carefully designed longitudinal studies of Dutch professionals directly contradict this conclusion. He found *no* overall adverse effects of unemployment on the psychological health of the professional sample. Schaufeli offers a number of explanations for his findings including proactive behaviour, high levels of self-esteem, and opportunities for alternative employment, but one of the major factors for the failure to find differences may have been the high level of state benefits available to the unemployed (80% of gross wages for six months, and then 75% for a further year). These benefits are available to all Dutch people and therefore it might be assumed that Schaufeli's findings are not specific to professional workers. In this case they would not contradict the earlier findings of Payne et al (1984). However, other Dutch studies of *non*-professional groups (Spruit, 1983; Jaspers and Heesink, 1985) have found unemployment to be associated with lower levels of mental health. The respondents in these studies would also have been receiving Dutch state benefits and therefore Schaufeli's suggestion that his findings reflect particularly upon the experience of unemployed professionals cannot be dismissed lightly.

Social support

The notion that social support may moderate the effects of negative life events has been discussed by a number of authors (La Rocco, House and French, 1980; Thoits, 1982). Gore (1978), conducted a longitudinal study of 100 unemployed American men following a plant shutdown. Social support was measured by frequency of activity outside the home, perceptions of supportive activity, and perceived opportunity to engage in supportive activities. She found that those men who were less supported had more illness symptoms and were more depressed than well supported respondents. Kilpatrick and Trew

(1985), in a study of unemployed men in Northern Ireland, also found that greater social support was associated with better psychological well-being, as did Ullah, Banks and Warr (1985) in a study of teenagers.

One weakness of these studies is that they are cross-sectional, and therefore aetiological primacy is difficult to determine. (Do low levels of social support lead to worse mental health, or does poorer mental health lead to lower levels of support?) Warr and Jackson (1985), attempted to rectify this limitation with a longitudinal design, and though they found some evidence of a relationship between social support and psychological health in cross-sectional analyses, social support was not predictive of magnitude of deterioration in psychological health over time. Clearly the issue of whether greater psychological distress is an effect or a cause of low levels of social support within unemployed groups needs further investigation, but perhaps even more important is the question of what is meant by "social support". In this respect Thoits (1982) has provided a devastating critique which highlights the inadequacies, contradictions within, or even total absence of conceptualisation in many studies of life events. Before conducting any further research on this topic, it is essential that unemployment researchers offer clear conceptual definitions in advance of operationalisation.

Contextual factors

A number of environmental variables might influence the psychological impact of unemployment on the individual, and one such factor which has been investigated by Jackson and Warr (1987) is the local unemployment rate. The authors found that, even allowing for differences such as age, and duration of unemployment, the psychological health of the unemployed men from areas of high unemployment was significantly better than the health of men from areas with moderate or lower unemployment rates. As an explanation for this finding, they suggest that communities with high

unemployment rates may develop resilience in the face of a common threat with high local unemployment also giving rise to social support networks and material help. Perhaps most importantly, individuals in areas where unemployment is common are likely to experience less stigmatisation.

However, Dooley, Catalano and Rook (1988), in a sophisticated study combining aggregate and individual level analyses found that, for the population as a whole, high rates of unemployment were associated with worse psychological health. This finding is in line with high mortality rates and other indicators of poor health for areas of high unemployment, where poverty and lower standards of housing are likely to exist.

These two views concerning the impact of local unemployment rate are not necessarily alternative ones, but may hold true at the same time. For example, it may be that high local unemployment rates may negatively affect certain aspects of mental health (such as perceived control), but positively influence others (such as perceived competence). At present, there is insufficient evidence to allow us to discount either view.

Financial strain

Unemployment is closely linked with poverty, and a number of authors have pointed to the difficulty of separating the psychological effects of the two (Lahelma, 1989; Smith, 1987; Fryer and Payne, 1986). Financial circumstances are presented here as influencing the effects of unemployment on health, but it might be equally valid to reverse this, and refer to unemployment as modifying the effects of poverty.

It is well established that for most people, unemployment leads to a major reduction in income. A number of studies (Smith, 1980; Bradshaw, Cooke and Godfrey, 1983) have suggested that unemployed people receive on average

between 45% and 60% of their previous employed income, but the psychological health effects of this reduction are less well documented. Rowley and Feather (1987), in a study of 107 unemployed Australian men, found that greater financial strain was associated both with longer duration of unemployment, and with greater psychological distress. Studies by Frohlich (1983); Kessler, Turner and House, (1987); Warr and Jackson, (1985) and Payne, Warr and Hartley, (1984) all support this finding.

Of course, a lack of money itself cannot directly influence mental health. A further level of explanation is needed, which takes into account the constraints and limitations imposed by poverty within a market society on individuals' efforts to engage in activities (in the broadest sense) which might in turn enable them to gain a sense of control, mastery, self-esteem etc. These activities may range widely from simple attempts to meet environmental demands (for example, paying bills) to the planning and pursuit of personal interests (eg travel, hobbies, socialising) or attempts to provide and care for others (supporting family and children).

In summary, a great variety of risk factors have been identified for individuals who become unemployed. Given the research effort which has been invested in this area it is perhaps surprising that little attempt has so far been made to compare the effect sizes of these different variables on the psychological well-being of the unemployed. Is, for example, financial strain or age a more important influence on the psychological health of unemployed people? Attempts to answer this type of question are likely to encounter a number of methodological and statistical difficulties and it may well be the complexity of the task which has so far discouraged researchers from tackling the issue.

However, even if it were possible to predict exactly what the effects of unemployment were likely to be for which individuals at what time, it is not clear that we would have a full understanding of the phenomenon of

unemployment. In order to understand the experience of unemployment we need know how and why distress occurs. Theoretical accounts have started to do this, but there is also a need for empirical work which proposes explanatory mediating variables as well as moderators of the effects of unemployment. Some of the attitudinal, behavioural and personality variables which I turn to now fall into this category.

1.2.8 Attitudinal, Behavioural and Personality Variables in Unemployment Research

Employment commitment

The notion that people strongly committed to having a job will suffer most from unemployment is well established in the literature. The variable most commonly used to measure the extent to which people want to be engaged in paid employment has been referred to as employment commitment (Warr, Cook and Wall, 1979). Employment commitment can be compared with the Protestant work ethic, (Blood, 1969; Wollack, Goodale, Wijting, and Smith, 1971), but clearly benefits such as an income and social relationships may also account for an individual's desire to be in employment. (We shall return to these distinctions later in the thesis).

Employment commitment as a psychological risk factor has attracted much more detailed examination than any other in the unemployment literature. Stafford, Jackson and Banks (1980), in a cross-sectional study of young people reported a significant interaction between employment status and employment commitment. For the employed sample, higher commitment to having a paid job was associated with better psychological health, and for those who were unemployed greater employment commitment was associated with higher levels of distress. This finding was strongly supported in a subsequent longitudinal study by Jackson, Stafford, Banks and Warr (1983).

It might be argued that an individual's desire to be in a paid job reflects no more than their level of financial difficulties, but Warr and Jackson (1985), found that employment commitment predicted distress levels even when financial variables and financial support were taken into account.

From a theoretical standpoint, it may not appear to be very surprising that unemployed individuals who are highly committed to having a job are likely to suffer greater distress than individuals for whom having a job is not so important. Indeed, this finding could almost be seen as being self-evident. However, it is of interest that this variable seems to be quite stable over time. In other words, individuals tend to maintain their level of commitment to having a job through periods of employment and unemployment (Jackson, Stafford, Banks and Warr, 1983). Thus any suggestion that employment commitment might be simply an attitude which operates with a self-serving bias according to an individual's current situation is precluded.

This raises what is perhaps a more interesting theoretical question: Why is it that unemployed individuals do *not* re-adjust their commitment to employment following job loss? After all, an adaptive cognitive strategy of this sort would be predicted by cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) as a form of dissonance reduction, and it would be consistent with coping theory (Lazarus and Lournier 1978) as an intrapsychic attempt to manage conflict between environmental and internal demands.

One explanation for the failure to re-adjust might be that employment commitment reflects such fundamental beliefs about the personal value of employment, that it is very difficult to cognitively re-adjust in the way suggested above. But this explanation suggests yet another question: What is it about employment that makes it so important to people? The need to earn an income seems likely to be one factor, but studies of non-financial employment

commitment (including the so-called "lottery or pools question") demonstrate that the desire for employment cannot be explained solely as a function of financial necessity (eg Martin & Fryer 1973). The desire for social contact, status and identity, growth, achievement, and recognition all seem to be possible reasons why employment may be important to people, and these issues are discussed in more detail later in this chapter and in chapter 2.

Neuroticism

More recently, Payne (1988) has suggested that a well-established personality dimension, neuroticism, may account for individual differences in the experience of unemployment. This suggestion is interesting because, (on the surface at least) it implies that individuals might be differentially susceptible to the negative impact of unemployment not only by virtue of their circumstances, but also by virtue of stable or enduring personal characteristics. (Eysenck (1970) has characterised neuroticism as a measure of relatively stable individual differences in emotional stability and in vulnerability to "breaking down" whilst under stress). From data collected at the last stage of a longitudinal study, Payne found that unemployed men who scored highly on the Neuroticism scale of the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck and Eysenck 1964), were also more likely to report higher levels of anxiety, depression and general psychological distress.

However, Payne's interpretation of his findings is not quite as has been implied above. Rather he argues that the high intercorrelations between the perceptions of the unemployed environment and the self-report measures of mental health are due to the relationship of *both* with neuroticism. In other words, Payne was suggesting that highly neurotic individuals were not only more likely to report lower levels of mental health, *but also* were more likely to report having more problems, less support etc. He is at pains to point out that this does not simply reflect a methodological problem of content overlap

in the measures used (although this was, as he acknowledges, partly true), but also raises a more fundamental conceptual problem concerning the extent to which neuroticism will (*actually*) affect individuals' experiences (of course this problem will in turn create methodological difficulties for any attempt to measure environmental variables or mental health separately through self-report methodology).

Indeed, neuroticism measures accounted for such a large proportion of the variance in the mental health scores that Payne was led to question whether self-report measures of psychological health could actually measure changes in mental symptomatology, or whether variations between individuals were simply due to the high relationship of the scales to neuroticism.

The difficulties which Payne identifies in this paper have quite fundamental conceptual and empirical ramifications for all work which attempts to relate environmental circumstances to mental health, and particularly for those empirical studies which, (like the present one) rely entirely on cross-sectional designs and self-report methodologies. I shall return to these issues, (which have been addressed elsewhere by Watson and Clark 1984; Depue and Munroe 1986), at several points throughout the present thesis.

Hardiness

Kobasa and her colleagues, in the course of their investigations into a variety of stressful life events, have developed the concept of hardiness (Kobasa, 1979; Kobasa, Maddi and Kahn, 1982; Oullette Kobasa and Puccetti, 1983). Hardiness refers to a dispositional resistance to the debilitating effects of stressful events such as unemployment. Kobasa has identified three stable components of hardiness, these being: a sense of control over what happens in an individual's life, a commitment to personal goals and values, and the perception of change as a challenge. In a prospective study of management

personnel, Kobasa, Maddi and Kahn (1982) found that individuals who scored highly on a composite measure of hardiness were less likely to develop mental and physical illness symptoms following stressful life events. Kobasa and Puccetti (1983) argue that hardiness facilitates the sort of perceptual, evaluative and coping behaviour that is most likely to lead to successful resolution of stressful events and situations.

However, more recent research has called into question the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the hardiness construct. Hull, Van Treuren and Virnelli (1987) after reviewing the literature and presenting their own study of the psychometric properties of the hardiness scale, drew the conclusions that: (a) hardiness is not a unitary phenomenon, but should be treated as involving three separate constructs (of control, commitment and challenge), (b) of the three sub-components of hardiness, only commitment and control have adequate psychometric properties and are systematically related to health outcomes, (c) lack of control and lack of commitment have direct effects on psychological health rather than simply acting as "buffers" against the effects of stressful life events (although there may also be buffering effects over and above these direct effects). The authors therefore advocate caution in the use of the hardiness construct in future studies of stressful life events.

Perceived control

One element of Kobasa's hardiness concept, perceived control, has received extensive research attention under the label "locus of control". The locus of control construct has been described as a generalised expectancy that events, whether positive or negative, are a consequence of one's own actions (internal) or unrelated to one's own behaviour (external) (Rotter, 1966). Johnson and Sarason (1978), studied the extent to which locus of control acted as a moderator of the adverse effects of stressful life events for college students. They found significant correlations between negative events and

depression and anxiety for individuals with predominantly external locus of control, but no such correlations for individuals with internal locus of control. They argued, in line with Kobasa's thesis, that negative life changes have their most adverse effect on individuals who believe that they have little control over events.

However, the use of locus of control measures in the context of unemployment is complicated. Some authors have suggested that perceived control should not be deployed as a moderator variable, but as a measure of the effects of unemployment. They argue that perceived control is not stable over time, but that individuals tend to report greater perceived externality as a result of becoming unemployed (e.g. O'Brien and Kabanoff 1979; Parnes and King, 1977; Patton and Noller 1984). O'Brien and Kabanoff (1979), utilising locus of control as an outcome measure, suggest that unemployed people tend to perceive themselves as having less control because; (a) they have had no influence over the cessation of their employment, nor are they likely to be able to determine when they should be re-employed. (b) they receive financial assistance without using their own effort and (c) they are deprived of receiving rewards for their actions.

Other studies though, (Tiggeman and Winefield, 1980, 1984; Winefield and Tiggeman, 1985) find no such increase in externality when individuals become unemployed, nor do they find differences in perceived control between employed and unemployed samples. As with other hypothesised dispositional moderators of the effects of unemployment, it would seem that the relationship between perceived control over situations and employment status is complicated and therefore, that simplistic conceptualisation or superficial interpretation of empirical results is likely to lead to misunderstanding and confusion.

Activity

The personal characteristics considered so far all relate to cognitive differences between individuals. Evans (1986), turned to a consideration of behavioural differences between unemployed people. As Warr (1987) has noted, it is clear that "...many unemployed people have difficulty filling their days, with long periods spent without activity, merely sitting around, sleeping, or watching television." (p.214) Evans, however was more interested in variations in personal activity between individuals without jobs. Within a small sample of 36 unemployed young adults, Evans found that higher levels of personal activity were associated with lower levels of psychological distress. Individuals with the highest levels of personal activity reported psychological well-being scores comparable to those of a matched sample of employed young adults:

As the study was cross-sectional in nature, it is not possible to determine causal priority in the relationship between activity and mental health. (Whether greater activity leads to increased well-being or reduced psychological well-being leads to a decrement in activity). Nevertheless, the findings do at least point to the possibility that personal activity level may operate as a moderator of psychological distress amongst unemployed samples. Evans' findings further suggest that individuals who have a significant main activity which plays an important part in their life (as opposed to simply "keeping busy") are particularly well protected from unemployment distress. This result is highly consistent with Fryer and Payne's (1984) findings, and with Fryer's (1987; 1988b) theoretical exposition.

Clearly though, Evans' sample was small and the experience of unemployed young adults, particularly in respect of personal interests and activities may not be representative of the wider population of unemployed people. Of even greater significance is that the primary measure of activity contained only

three items and Evans reports no reliability analyses on this measure. Nevertheless, a number of other studies have drawn attention to the role of personal activity in understanding unemployment distress (Hepworth, 1980; Brenner and Bartell 1983; Swinburne 1981; Feather and Bond 1983; Warr and Payne 1983).

Proactivity

Since the publication of Fryer and Payne's (1984) influential account of eleven people who were responding positively to unemployment, the term proactivity has been widely used within the unemployment research literature (e.g. Haworth and Evans, 1987; Warr, 1987; Schaufeli, 1988; Fryer and Ullah, 1987). Unfortunately, there has been a considerable lack of clarity about the meaning of the term. The notion of "proactivity" has not been explicitly conceptualised or operationalised. Indeed, Fryer himself sometimes appears to have abandoned the term, preferring to refer simply to "agency" (Fryer, 1988b; 1987b).

A particular problem seems to be that proactivity has been used both to refer to individual predispositions ("proactive individuals"), and to the outcomes of those predispositions ("proactive behaviour"). In their original paper, Fryer and Payne (1984) describe proactivity in the following way:

"The essential characteristic of proactivity is that the agent chooses to take the lead, initiate and intervene in situations to bring about change in valued directions rather than responding to imposed change passively and/or revising expectations and requirements of life correspondingly downwards. This may involve actually changing the situation to produce opportunities or creatively re-perceiving it in ways which reveal previously unseen opportunities and then exploiting them". (p.285)

This description seems to indicate that proactivity is viewed by Fryer and Payne as referring to behaviours and cognitive strategies rather than (as subsequent authors have used the term) to predispositions or personality-related constructs.

However, in line with their person-centred perspective, Fryer and Payne do suggest that proactive behaviour results from the attitudes, values and beliefs that the individual brings with them to the situation. In other words it is supposed to be a consequence of individual characteristics:

"This more general proactivity seems likely to be a result of the combination of the urge to be active, high standards, the need to achieve...Some of these traits were probably acquired in childhood: many of the sample's parents adhered strictly to a work ethic. On the other hand, their proactivity is also due to the very strong values and beliefs which characterize each of the group. Although the nature of the values varies from person to person, all have some strong value system which provides direction to their activities; these value systems were mostly acquired in maturity". (p.286)

Moreover, the authors suggest that these predisposing individual characteristics are relatively stable over time:

"When considered as a group, the dominating salient fact is that these people have been active throughout their lives...proactivity in unemployment seems to a great extent to be an extension of proactivity in employment, full-time education or before".
(p.286)

It may be this aspect of Fryer and Payne's original argument which has led subsequent authors to adopt the term proactivity and use it to refer to a set of dispositional characteristics implying self-directedness and self-motivation. Whatever the reasons, it is clear that since the publication of Fryer and Payne's original article, it has been widely used in this way (e.g. Schaufeli, 1988; Warr 1987). Indeed, in a recent review of unemployment research, Fryer (1988a) has himself referred to proactivity as an "individual-level personality-related factor" (p.225).

In order to maintain consistency of terminology therefore, proactivity will here be treated from here on as a personality related variable (or constellation of variables). If then, proactivity refers to a set of values, beliefs and attitudes, how could these predisposing factors be identified or measured? Unfortunately, although the concept of proactivity has been much written about in the unemployment literature, this question has not been pursued empirically. I hope in this thesis to make a systematic start to this process.

This section has illustrated that there is considerable interest in the area of attitudinal, behavioural and personality-related characteristics as mediators of the impact of unemployment, but it is clear that empirical evidence and theoretical understanding of these characteristics is not extensive. Even the empirical studies which have been undertaken have often focussed solely on unemployed groups. It is therefore difficult to know to what extent the effects demonstrated have anything to do with unemployment per se. It could be that these factors affect psychological health regardless of whether an individual is employed or unemployed. In order to address this issue, studies need to include employed as well as unemployed groups.

A second weakness of the literature discussed above is that empirical researchers have often pursued a single line of interest without regard to work being conducted on other similar topics. Consequently, the literature in this area, with few exceptions (eg Fineman (1979) and Payne and Hartley (1987)) is somewhat disparate, unconnected and frequently lacking in clarity. Two important aspects of this lack of integration are that:

(a) It is very difficult to determine whether the different operationalised variables are measuring overlapping constructs (eg neuroticism and hardiness)

(b) There is no indication of whether the different constructs are themselves causally related or whether they have *independent* effects on psychological health.

The present study attempts to draw together some of the themes outlined above by using a set of working assumptions which are presented in chapter 3. By using a theoretically derived framework to explore simultaneously the role of these different characteristics in mediating or moderating the effects of unemployment, it is hoped that a broader understanding and a more integrated account of individual variation in the experience of unemployment can be developed.

Although the research reviewed illustrates that there is wide variation in the experience of unemployment, it is important to emphasise that to a large extent, the literature on moderating variables is concerned with the *degree* of distress experienced. For most people unemployment is associated with substantial negative effects on psychological health. Accepting that for most people unemployment has negative psychological consequences, the policy and research question arises as to what can be done to ameliorate distress.

1.3 Research on Collective Interventions against Unemployment

There is now a substantial body of research which has documented in detail the detrimental psychological effects of unemployment. Surprisingly, however, very few researchers have turned their attention to interventions designed to prevent or ameliorate unemployment-related distress. An appropriate initial step for such research would seem to be the consideration of interventions already in operation. A vast array of statutory and voluntary schemes are available, offering retraining, counselling, education, advice on leisure, ideas on job creation, practical help, companionship and stimulation. The British Unemployment Resource Network (1984) (cited in Dhooge and Popay, 1987) has published a national directory listing more than seven hundred local groups and initiatives. In 1988 the UK government was operating nine different schemes involving more than 700,000 people but neither these nor the voluntary initiatives have attracted substantive research attention from psychologists. A range of interventions and the research which is available on them is discussed below.

The primary objective of recent statutory social programmes for the unemployed has usually been to improve the participants' employment prospects. However, as Kieselbach and Svensson (1988) have observed, prevailing labour market conditions in most European countries make this aim somewhat over-ambitious. For example, in 1986 the largest British government sponsored programme was the Youth Training Scheme, intended to provide "a permanent bridge between school and work"; but Craig (1986) found that only one-tenth of young people leaving the scheme had actually secured a job, or places in full-time education. For this reason, the secondary objective of the schemes, that of psychological stabilization for unemployed individuals acquires much greater significance. This point is particularly important in the present context because the impact of the schemes on psychological functioning is the aspect which is most likely to be of interest to psychologists

and the feature which they are best qualified to evaluate. In the review below therefore, I have focussed on this aspect.

Jahoda (1987) described a surrogate employment scheme for the benefit of unemployed miners based in South Wales in 1937/8. Although this study was conducted over 50 years ago, I shall describe it in some detail, because it highlights several themes which are still critical in understanding the impact of interventions today.

Established by Quakers, this experimental co-operative scheme was known as the Subsistence Production Society (SPS). The members of the society produced goods and provided services for their own consumption but the goods and services were not for sale on the open market. The workers were not paid a wage, but continued to receive their unemployment allowance with which they were able to purchase the goods and services at much lower cost (and higher quality) than on the open market. By providing both purposeful activity and financial advantages, it was hoped that the scheme would help to combat both the economic and psychological effects of unemployment. Although the scheme provided some psychological benefit to the older men involved, ultimately the SPS failed. Jahoda interprets the failure as being due to two sets of incompatible factors. These were, on the one hand, the principles of the organisers that neither coercion to work nor the linking of productivity to material benefit should play any part in the scheme, and on the other, the workers' strongly held traditional values and attitudes about work, employment, rewards and industrial organisation.

Jahoda's study offers a fascinating, absorbing and disturbing insight into the experience of the unemployed miners, their families and the community as a whole. Her findings concerning the effectiveness of the SPS as a psychological intervention only constitute a small part of Jahoda's overall paper, much of

which is devoted to the sociographic description and analysis of the unemployed community, and the functioning of the scheme itself.

Her conclusions at the level of the individual were that the SPS was more effective in ameliorating psychological distress for older men than for younger men. The key to understanding this difference seemed to lie in the differing expectations of the two groups. Jahoda argued that the SPS provided work which in many respects had the same function and significance for the miners as employment. It provided purposeful activity, social contacts and the opportunity to try out new activities and learn new skills. For the older men, these opportunities could be contrasted with the prospect of continued and permanent unemployment. They therefore were strongly committed to the scheme and the benefits it provided. For younger men however, the SPS held less attraction since they still held hopes of gaining "normal" employment. As Jahoda comments: "They did not want an experiment, they wanted industrial reality" (p 35). In other words, the lack of income and future prospects were critical in determining the failure of the SPS as an intervention for this group. As we shall see, these weaknesses of the SPS, identified by Jahoda more than fifty years ago, have been reproduced in many more recent interventions for unemployed people.

More recently, Stafford (1982) has undertaken research on the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) a large-scale national scheme designed to offer 16-18 year-olds in the UK training and work experience. Stafford was interested in the effect of YOP on psychological well-being as measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) (Goldberg 1972). She interviewed two cohorts (N=647) and (N=780) of recent school leavers who were either employed, unemployed or were participating on YOP. The young people who were participating in YOP reported significantly lower levels of distress than

the unemployed group, and there was no difference between the distress scores of the employed sample and the YOP sample.

Because these analyses were cross-sectional it is not possible to be certain whether they reflect a beneficial effect of participation on YOP or whether a selection effect was operating whereby psychologically healthier individuals were more likely to enter YOP. However, Stafford presents further longitudinal data on one cohort which seem to suggest that YOP did indeed have a beneficial psychological effect. She argues that YOP alleviated the detrimental psychological effects of unemployment by providing some of the functions of employment; time structure and limited financial remuneration. However, two subsequent studies seem to offer slightly less encouraging findings about the psychological effectiveness of YOP as an intervention.

Donovan, Oddy, Pardoe and Ades (1986) also using the GHQ, in a longitudinal study of school leavers, found that the distress scores of their YOP group fell midway between those of the employed and unemployed respondents. The authors wrote: "If psychological well-being is taken as an index of the effectiveness of these schemes, then they obviously work, *up to a point*" (p79) (Emphasis mine).

Branthwaite and Garcia (1985), using a slightly different measure of mental health, the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock & Erbaugh 1961) similarly found in their study of young people that individuals attending YOP showed a higher level of depression than the employed, but slightly lower levels than the unemployed respondents. They concluded that: "...although the Youth Opportunities Scheme tends to reduce depression from being unemployed, it does not provide the psychological benefits of permanent employment" (p.67). These authors suggested that the weaknesses of the

scheme lay in its temporary nature and the consequent uncertainty and insecurity about the future experienced by participants.

Thus, these two studies, in contrast to Stafford's research, suggest that YOP, although providing some psychological benefit, cannot fully substitute for employment. How, then are we to reconcile these slightly different findings?

One possible explanation for the different findings focuses on the time interval between the collection of Stafford's data and the data collection in the two subsequent studies. Stafford's data was gathered between 1978 and 1980, whilst Branthwaite and Garcia, and Donovan et al. collected their data two or more years later. Changes in the nature of the scheme itself or in public perceptions of the scheme over time therefore seem to be one possible explanation for the differences in results. Tentative corroborative evidence for such a hypothesis can be seen in Stafford's results. The mental health scores of the YOP group interviewed in 1980 were closer to the scores of the unemployed group than were the scores of the YOP group interviewed in 1978-79.

A second possible explanation may lie in the use of different indices of mental health. Whilst Stafford, and Donovan et al used the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg 1972), Branthwaite and Garcia used the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al, 1961). Whilst we might expect the constructs tapped by these measures to overlap, they are certainly not equivalent. The BDI is a specific measure of depression whilst the GHQ is a broader measure of general mental health. It seems possible therefore that the divergent findings of the studies may partly reflect a differential effect of YOP participation on different aspects of mental health. However, this would not explain the differences between Stafford's findings and those of Branthwaite

and Garcia, since the same measure of mental health was used in both of these studies.

A third possible explanation is that the nature of the specific YOPS courses studied may have differed in ways which affected their potential to influence the mental health of participants. For example, were all the courses structured in the same way? Were they full-time or part-time? How long did they last? How much were participants paid? What sort of work did they involve? Did they offer genuine training and skill development? Were the aims of the courses clear? It is difficult to determine the importance of these factors, because out of the three studies, only Branthwaite and Garcia's provides any details about the schemes.

This leads us on to what is perhaps the most significant weakness of all three studies: no serious attempt is made in any of them to discover what features of YOP might be responsible for the psychological effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the schemes as interventions. In all the studies, a post hoc attempt is made to explain the findings in terms of Jahoda's (1979) latent functions theory, but in two of them (Stafford; Donovan et al.) these explanations are supported with purely anecdotal evidence. For example, Stafford comments that a weakness of the scheme is that "...YOP trainees do not have the status associated with 'having a proper job'" (p 13), but she does not say how she came to this conclusion nor what she means by it. In the third study, Branthwaite and Garcia provide some impressionistic evidence from interviews with the YOP participants to support their latent functions explanation, but they give no indication as to how this qualitative data was analysed or interpreted. It is therefore difficult to judge the extent to which this evidence provides a reliable, accurate and generalisable account of the experience of YOP participants.

Overall then, when taking the three studies together, it seems that YOP has *some* beneficial psychological effect, but we cannot be clear as to the extent of this effect, or the mechanisms through which it occurs. It certainly seems possible, as the authors suggest, that an explanation for YOP's (partial) effectiveness may lie in the provision of certain psychological benefits (such as time structure, enforced activity, social contacts and goals beyond those of the individual), but not others (the level of financial remuneration and the social status attached to most jobs). However, until such time as theoretically driven studies designed to explore these ideas are conducted, they should be regarded as hypotheses rather than explanations.

A final point about these studies is worth mentioning. The sample sizes of the YOP groups in all three studies was comparatively small. (Stafford N=30-69; Branthwaite and Garcia N=26; Donovan et al. N=43). We should therefore exercise caution in generalising about the results of the studies to the wider population of YOP participants (although the fact that all three studies independently found some beneficial effect perhaps points towards the generalisability of the findings).

In 1982, YOP was replaced by another large scale government scheme designed at least partly to tackle unemployment and directed specifically at young people. The Youth Training Scheme (YTS) provided school leavers aged 16-17 years with a course of training and work experience. The course lasted up to one year, and in addition to work experience offered a minimum of three months off-the-job training and provision for induction, assessment, guidance and counselling. In 1985, YTS was extended to become a two year scheme. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research on YTS and to the author's knowledge, no psychological evaluation research, with most of the MSC commissioned studies considering only demographic characteristics of participants, attitudes to YTS, reasons for rejecting YTS, and wider economic

effects of YTS, (see Raffe, 1986; Deakin and Pratten, 1987; Employment Gazette, 1986a). It is therefore not possible to determine the psychological effectiveness of YTS as an intervention compared to YOP.

Another major UK government programme, the Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS) was launched in August 1983, and has continued to expand up until the present day. The scheme encourages unemployed people to start their own small business, and offers individuals an allowance of £40 per week for one year to enable them to become established in self-employment. In addition, participants receive free business advice and counselling. EAS is open to people who have been out of work for only eight weeks, but potential participants are required to have at least £1,000 capital to invest in the new business either from savings, a bank loan or a grant.

Research on EAS has generally been restricted to studies to determine rates of survival of the businesses and therefore whether the EAS participants remain (self-)employed after the period of assistance. The MSC have carried out three such surveys (Employment Gazette 1984; Allen and Hunn, 1985; Employment Gazette, 1986b). The findings show that just over half of all participants remained in business after three years, and that the individuals most likely to survive were those who had a spouse in part-time work, those who invested more capital, and those who were older. To the author's knowledge there is no research which considers the effectiveness of EAS in terms of the psychological well-being of participants. Although it might be expected that unemployed people would experience improvement in well-being on becoming self-employed, it is worth remembering that working for oneself, particularly in the early stages, can be highly stressful, often involving long hours of work, great financial strain, and little social support. For those whose business runs into difficulties, EAS may well exacerbate rather than ameliorate their problems. Psychological evaluation of EAS would help to

clarify such issues and provide desperately needed information on responses to unemployment.

Winefield (1985) has evaluated another large scale scheme for the unemployed, the Wage Pause Program (WPP) in Australia. The author started the study with a sample of 223 unemployed people of whom 119 were WPP participants and 104 were non-participants. Both groups were surveyed in three phases: once towards the end of their participation on WPP, again three months later and finally after six months. Winefield found that participants on the programme experienced improved psychological health and that this improvement was maintained for a short period even for those individuals who subsequently became unemployed. However, as in the studies by Stafford (1982) and Donovan, Oddy, Pardoe and Ades (1986), Winefield makes no empirical attempt to ascertain how or why the programme had these effects.

In the USA, Buss, Stevens Redburn and Waldron (1983) have studied the use made of community centres, mental health services and other service agencies by 4,000 redundant steelworkers and their families. The authors found that redundant workers were reluctant to seek help and that very few actually used the facilities which were available. The ex-steelworkers were less likely to use the services than their spouses, blacks tended not to use the available resources, and no clerical or managerial staff sought help from any of the services. In fact, with the exception of the loan agency, every resource was used more by non-redundant workers than by those who had lost their jobs. Buss et al. suggest that this limited use of available help was partly explainable by the fact that help seeking behaviour can itself be personally threatening. Yet again, this suggestion is neither related to wider theoretical perspectives, nor is it supported with empirical evidence.

Brenner and Starrin (1988), have described a smaller Swedish research project which incorporated an intervention study. Following a manufacturing plant shutdown, 150 blue collar workers were given access to different kinds of activities which were expected to be of value in buffering against the potential negative psychological consequences of unemployment. The activities were divided into five categories: (a) work related, (b) physical training, (c) educational (d) hobby and (e) social activities. The authors measured the mental health of the participants and the extent to which they (the participants) felt that the activities provided the latent functions of employment suggested by Jahoda (1979).

Fifty-three of the unemployed workers took part in at least one activity, with educational and work-related activities attracting the most interest. In terms of provision of latent functions, the primary benefits of participation were perceived as: shared experiences (38% of participants), enforced activity (25%) and external goals (17%), conferring status and identity (12% and time structure (7%). The authors comment that: "Educational activities seemed to serve best as a substitute for work, as indicated by assessments of the activities' functions." (p 134)

Frustratingly, the authors do not elaborate on this point nor do they present any further details about the data concerning the latent functions. They do however report that a statistical attempt was made to relate participation, as well as the number and kind of activities engaged in, to mental well-being as measured by the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg 1972). This analysis produced no significant effects.

Brenner and Starrin's study incorporates a number of commendable features. Amongst these, there are two particular features which mark the study out from the rest of the literature on this topic. These are: (a) the use of a

theoretical framework (Jahoda's latent functions theory) to drive the empirical work and (b) the dual focus on process and outcome. However, as the authors themselves note, an important weakness of the study was that the unemployed people self-selected themselves into the activities. If, therefore, the authors had found differences between groups (participants and non-participants) it would have been difficult to interpret the findings. Any differences in mental health *may* have been attributable to the effects of participation, but equally they may have been attributable to pre-existing individual differences (which also correlated with self-selection into the activities). This raises an important ethical and methodological issue for the design of intervention studies (Is it possible to avoid the problem of self-selection in an ethically sound way?). The authors do not tackle this problem, but they do conclude that: "In our future research, we hope to use more rigorous intervention designs" (p135).

In the USA, Levitan and Johnston (1975) (cited by Kieselbach, 1987) have described an initiative designed primarily for unemployed young people, the Job Corps Program. This scheme integrated counselling with work and training for qualifications, and led to a considerable improvement in participants' labour market prospects as well as heightening interest in further education. The scheme was regarded as helpful by almost all participants, and employers, parents and friends attested to the positive changes in participants.

Winfield (1981) has written about the resources which trade union sponsored centres for the unemployed might offer, including social contacts, financial advice, help with getting jobs, and facilities such as workshops or creches, but he does not attempt to evaluate the success of existing centres.

Evaluation of a potential intervention strategy has been undertaken by Cassell, Fitter, Fryer and Smith (1988) who describe an action research project involving the development of computer applications by unemployed people.

The Sheffield People's Resource for Information Technology (SPRITE) provided computer training, equipment and support to unemployed people in local community centres with the aim that computer applications relevant to the local community should be developed. It was not a primary objective of the project that participants should acquire skills to assist them in gaining computer related employment. The evaluation focussed on five components: monitoring of the processes involved in the project; assessment of the impact of the scheme on the centres; appraisal of the products of the project; consideration of the wider implications; investigation of the impact on individuals and the influence of individuals on the scheme. A variety of research methods were employed, including observation, interviews, discussions and questionnaires.

The authors found that involvement with the project had a positive impact on individuals. The major benefits reported by the participants were the acquisition of new skills and the development of social contacts. Other benefits were increases in self-confidence and a reduction in respondents' excess of spare time. The importance of the evaluative feedback for the project is highlighted by the authors and they note that the needs of the users at the three centres varied widely.

A particularly important feature of this study is that the authors deliberately adopted a different methodological orientation from that of traditional unemployment research. In adopting a process evaluation framework, the authors were concerned that the focus should be on the *processes* involved in the programme rather than simply the outcomes, as well as with the mechanisms through which outcomes resulted. Moreover, they explicitly acknowledge the importance of using theory both to guide the evaluation and to inform the interpretation of the results, as well as using the results to inform theory.

These are laudible aims, but the empirical work itself does not live up to them. The research clearly has great applied and social value, but its scientific contribution is limited. The emphasis in presenting the results is indeed on process, but this takes the simplistic form of descriptive journalistic reportage rather than any serious attempt to provide analysis or interpretation. There is little if anything, of genuine psychological interest in the findings or conclusions. Although the authors have deliberately rejected the "classical scientific model" (and by implication, attempts to achieve "objectivity") this cannot excuse the weakness of their analysis nor their failure to relate their evidence to existing psychological theory. Nor can this failure be attributed to a lack of available theory. There is a wealth of existing theory in the psychological literatures on unemployment (eg Jahoda, 1979; Fryer 1988b), organisations (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1987) and groups (Brown, 1988) which might have provided an appropriate context in which to locate and interpret their findings.

Another action research study (Senior and Naylor, 1984) focussed on a skills exchange project for unemployed people in Liverpool, "The Network". This self-help group aimed to provide a practical solution to the lack of rewarding work activity during unemployment. On the basis of their observations of activities and interviews with some sixty members, the authors suggest that the scheme provided participants with a number of benefits. These included the opportunity to be active; a feeling of usefulness; some increase in confidence and self-esteem; social activities; and the opportunity to learn and develop new skills. However, the authors also comment that at any one time only approximately one-quarter of the group members were active. It therefore seems probable that these benefits only accrued to active members. Eventually, as in Jahoda's (1987) study of the SPS, the group failed as the enthusiasm of the members waned.

In a further study, the same authors examined four interventions for unemployed people (Naylor & Senior 1988). They referred to these as: "Give and Take" (an inner city skills exchange); "Town Unemployed Group" (an inner city drop-in, advisory, and education group); "Rural Unemployed Group" (an over forties project concentrating on crafts and social events); and "Co-operative Opportunities group" (a nursery for co-operative businesses). Using broadly similar methods to those used in their previous study, the authors found that these groups had been only partially successful in providing an alternative to employment/unemployment.

They suggest that all the groups had, to varying degrees, served to keep the participants' time occupied, and helped them to develop confidence and new skills. But they argue that in only one of the groups (the Co-operative Opportunities group) (COP) had the participants experienced "increased mental well-being" (p.174). Indeed the authors suggest that the COP could "...stand in place of, and give some of the same satisfactions as, having a job" (p175) because it created an environment similar to conventional employment by offering two latent functions of employment (time structure and external goals).

This finding, though potentially interesting, is difficult to evaluate for several reasons. Firstly, the authors do not explain what they mean by "mental well-being". Secondly, the term "mental well-being" was used by the authors as a category for grouping "satisfactions" expressed by interviewees. It is not clear which "satisfactions" were categorised in this way, and therefore we cannot be certain as to how the experience of this group differed from the experience of the other three groups. Thirdly, they make no attempt to explain why the provision of activity, skill development and confidence had *not* led to increased mental well-being in the other projects.

Naylor and Senior's research provides an extremely rich and detailed picture of the projects in question. Their study is also commendable in that it starts with a clear theoretical foundation which takes into account the distinction between work and employment, and the major theory of unemployment-related distress. However, ultimately the study is disappointing. Although the authors start with a strong theoretical framework, this emphasis is not maintained throughout the study. By the time that the empirical stage is reached, theory has been pushed into the background and it plays no part at all in guiding the empirical analyses. Instead the theoretical framework is re-introduced at a much later stage to interpret findings in a post hoc fashion.

This may partly help to explain why the analysis at the level of the individual is very limited and confused. This limitation is particularly disappointing because as the authors themselves note: "The acid test of success of a group is the extent to which it satisfies the needs of the individuals who join it" (p 165). Unfortunately, in Naylor and Senior's study the effectiveness of the interventions for the unemployed individuals concerned becomes a peripheral issue, rather than being a core concern.

Buckland and MacGregor (1987) have presented research into a DHSS funded Re-establishment Course for long-term unemployed people in South London. The course was designed to "..revive the will to work, to restore the habit of getting up and going to work, and to give men confidence in their ability to hold down a job under normal conditions." (p179) The authors use case study material to illustrate vividly the personal experiences of three participants, but disappointingly, they make no attempt at serious evaluation of the course. They emphasize the increased self confidence of participants whilst on the course but note that their subsequent employment prospects are

not greatly enhanced. No indication is given as to how general conclusions have been drawn.

Individual counselling as an intervention for unemployed people has been discussed by Fineman (1983) and by Breakwell, Harrison and Propper (1984). More and Howell (1986) have offered a "Toolkit for caring in the context of long-term unemployment" but once again there has been no attempt made by these authors to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

In conclusion, it is clear that in contrast to the substantial body of evidence concerning the negative psychological consequences of unemployment, there is a dearth of psychological research on possible or actual responses to the problem. The wide variety of existing interventionary schemes and programmes provides an excellent range of opportunities for research initiatives, but to date these openings have largely been overlooked. Why then, has there been so little research interest in this area?

It is of course very difficult to identify the reasons why an event, or a course of events has not happened (there are a myriad of possible reasons) but the unemployment literature provides some clues as to why interventions or possible responses have not been favoured as a topic for research.

One possible explanation revolves around the perceived causes of and solutions to the problem of unemployment itself. It might be argued that psychologists *could not* in practice make a positive contribution in this area because the causes of unemployment are essentially structural, and therefore the solutions lie in the hands of politicians, economists and industrialists rather than psychologists. In other words, the ultimate solution to unemployment and the distress caused by it is not to develop interventionary measures, but to create more jobs.

Linked to this idea is a second, ethical objection to involvement in the search for responses. According to this view, psychologists *should not* make a positive contribution to this area because involvement in the development of palliative measures would help to divert attention from the real problem (a lack of jobs), and would help to individualize/psychologize the perceived problem, thus supporting a political stance which "blames the victim".

These arguments, although raising some important issues about the nature of the relationship between applied researchers and policymakers, are not entirely convincing. Although it is undoubtedly true that the causes of unemployment are economic and political, and that full employment would obviate the need for interventions, it is unrealistic to expect that full employment will be achieved in the short or even medium term. It has been widely acknowledged (even within the psychological literature) that mass unemployment is likely to remain a feature of industrialised nations for some time to come whatever the political priorities of future governments may be (eg Walter 1985; Fineman 1987). Bearing this in mind, a refusal to consider interventions as a legitimate topic of concern might be seen as naive idealism rather than practical and humanistic realism.

A third possible explanation for the lack of research in this area emphasizes the theoretical limitations of the psychological unemployment literature rather than the ethical or practical predilections of individual researchers. As suggested earlier, the lack of theoretical guidance in the field of unemployment has led to the selection of an unduly narrow range of research questions. In this respect, then, the failure to address the topic of interventions can be seen as only one symptom of a wider malaise. Instead of asking questions such as "What can be done about unemployment?"; "Are existing interventions effective?"; "Are there alternatives to employment/

unemployment?", unemployment researchers have defined their objectives very narrowly, focussing almost exclusively on the questions "Is unemployment psychologically harmful?" and "Under what conditions is it most/least harmful?".

A fourth possible reason for the failure of unemployment researchers to address intervention programmes is that the dominant methodological and conceptual approaches within unemployment research do not lend themselves easily to this type of study. Evaluation research may require an eclectic methodological orientation and as Lewin (1951) has emphasised, there is a need for evaluation researchers to make close links between theory and data. Both these requirements are alien to a field in which a single methodological paradigm (large scale quantitative survey research) is overwhelmingly dominant and in which theoretical and empirical work has proceeded along parallel rather than overlapping tracks.

A fifth possible explanation focuses on the popularity of a limited range of research designs within the field of psychological unemployment research. Empirical workers have typically selected designs which allow either cross-sectional or longitudinal comparisons between employment and unemployment. Indeed, this type of dichotomous comparison has acquired the status of orthodoxy within the field. This employment versus unemployment distinction has been challenged by a number of authors, who have argued that individuals may adopt a variety of intermediate roles (eg Hartley & Fryer 1984). But these criticisms have had little impact on the choice of designs for empirical work and as a consequence the experience of individuals engaged in activities which fall into neither of these two employment status categories, such as those participating on government intervention schemes, self-help groups or voluntary work, has been ignored.

A final reason returns to the politically sensitive nature of the topic, but focusses on practical rather than ethical concerns. This issue is particularly relevant when one considers that the group of interventions which form the major thrust of responses to unemployment in the UK, are government sponsored schemes or programmes. Public debate about the motives of government in developing such interventions has often been heated, with critics arguing that the schemes are a purely cosmetic measure to reduce unemployment statistics. Moreover, the schemes themselves have frequently had a bad press, being seen as exploitative. And there is considerable evidence that the providers of these schemes are concerned at the low rates of take-up and the high rates of drop out (Banks & Davies 1990). Perhaps most important though, is that despite the fact that unemployment is largely structural in origin, the government responses are almost entirely geared toward enhancing people's *employability* rather than attempting to enhance the availability of *employment*. The implication of focussing on employability is of course, that people are unemployed because of their own inadequacies. All these factors combine to produce an atmosphere surrounding government-sponsored interventions which is highly emotionally charged, and may make it difficult to conduct research. For example, psychologists attempting to carry out research in this area may find it difficult to secure co-operation from participants and might reasonably expect to meet with considerable hostility from both scheme providers and participants.

Whatever the reasons for the lack of research on possible responses or existing interventions, it seems that an opportunity has so far been missed. There have been repeated calls in the psychological literature for research into interventions (eg Buss and Redburn 1983; Fryer and Payne 1986; Warr 1984), but despite these exhortations, research on this topic has not been forthcoming.

The limited number of research studies currently available are, with a few notable exceptions, lamentably devoid of conceptual or theoretical perspective, quantitative methodology and psychological orientation. Although the existing studies provide some information about *either* the experience of participants *or* the psychological effects of participation, they rarely combine both of these elements. Perhaps even more important, is that those studies which do offer a psychological perspective rarely attempt to link data with theory. Studies of interventions have, it seems, fallen into two separate camps; those which offer a rich and detailed picture of the experience (usually qualitative), and those which provide information about the effects of participation on mental health (usually quantitative). In both cases, the emphasis is on description. In neither case is there any serious attempt at analysis or interpretation.

The present thesis attempts to make a start towards rectifying these weaknesses. Taking the primary UK government special measure for long-term unemployed adults, Community Programme, as an example, I shall attempt to show that through the use of a carefully constructed conceptual and theoretical framework, the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, and the deployment of theory and data in mutually reinforcing partnership, psychology can begin to make a contribution to the development of interventions. In order to achieve this I shall turn first to existing theoretical attempts to explain why it is that for most people unemployment causes psychological distress.

1.4 Theoretical Explanations of Unemployment Distress

Four main explanations of how or why the effects of unemployment occur have been proposed.

1.4.1 The Phase Models

In their review of 1930's research, Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld (1938), suggested that stages in the reaction to job loss could be distinguished.

"First there is shock, which is followed by an active hunt for a job, during which the individual is still optimistic and unresigned; he still maintains an unbroken attitude. Second, when all efforts fail the individual becomes pessimistic, anxious, and suffers active distress; this is the most crucial state of all. And third, the individual becomes fatalistic and adapts himself to his new state but with narrower scope. He now has a broken attitude". (p.88)

This sequential account, describing initial shock on losing a job, optimism about new life possibilities, pessimism as the prospects of finding a new job begin to recede, then fatalism and resignation to the idea of long-term unemployment has been adopted by many subsequent authors in a wide variety of modified forms (Harrison, 1976; Kaufman, 1982; Finley and Lee 1981; Hayes and Nutman, 1981).

These accounts are certainly familiar to anyone who has worked with or talked to unemployed people, and they have interesting parallels with accounts of another major life event involving loss; bereavement (Worden 1983). However, Kelvin and Jarrett (1985) and Fryer (1985) have provided devastating critiques of phase accounts which point to the lack of empirical support, the over-simplification and a number of other conceptual difficulties including divergence of opinion about the exact number of stages, their duration, order and time of onset.

Perhaps the most important weakness of phase accounts however, is that they are essentially descriptive rather than explanatory in nature. Even if clear empirical support was to be found for phase accounts, they would only provide a clear overview of *what* an unemployed person is likely to experience, rather than advancing our understanding as to *why* these effects occur. An attempt to provide this type of explanation is made by the most influential account of unemployment distress, the Deprivation Model.

1.4.2 The Deprivation Model

Jahoda's (1979, 1981, 1982, 1986) deprivation model is by far the most widely cited and influential explanatory framework so far proposed in this field. The account draws heavily on the work of the sociologist Slocum (1966) and is based on the notion that employment, apart from providing an income (its manifest function), also provides a number of latent functions which are regarded as critical for sustaining psychological well-being. The removal of these supports leads to the deterioration in psychological health which has been so well documented. The five latent functions of employment which Jahoda has detailed are:

1. The imposition of a time structure on the waking day.
2. Shared experiences and contacts with others outside the nuclear family.
3. The provision of goals and purposes beyond those of the individual.
4. The conferring of personal status and social identity.
5. The enforcement of activity.

Jahoda and Rush (1980) argue that any type of employment will offer these functions whether the job incumbent seeks them or not. Moreover, these functions are, it is claimed, good for people even if they dislike their jobs intensely. Other social institutions such as schools, can provide some of these supports, but Jahoda (1979) states that:

"I know of none, however, in our society which combines them all and, in addition, has as compelling a manifest function as making one's living". (p.313)

Though Jahoda's account has a great deal of intuitive appeal and is consistent with much case study material, direct empirical support for the model is surprisingly weak given its enormously influential position within the literature. Henwood and Miles (1987) report evidence from a number of studies designed to test Jahoda's account (Miles 1983; Miles, Henwood and Howard 1984). They found that people who were currently employed reported having significantly more social contact, status, activity, collective purpose, and time structure than people without jobs. In addition, for a sample of unemployed men, greater access to these categories of experience was associated with lower levels of distress.

These findings appear to lend some support to the deprivation model, but Fryer and Payne (1984), have identified a number of weaknesses, as do Henwood and Miles themselves. The operationalisation of the categories of experience is not entirely satisfactory, and a number of the findings are contradictory. In addition, as Taylor (1988) has noted, it may be that distressed individuals are less well equipped to gain access to these categories of experience, or as Henwood and Miles themselves caution, that people with particular psychological resources are both less prone to poor mental health and better able to gain access to these categories.

A number of conceptual and theoretical problems of the deprivation model have also been addressed. Fryer (1986) has argued that the model is resistant to empirical falsification because individuals who are outside of employment but psychologically healthy can be said to have found the crucial categories of

experience through other institutions. He argues that the model accords little weight to the role of poverty in the psychological experience of unemployment, and suggests that the deprivation account ignores the possibility that employment can be psychologically harmful. (The latter criticism is not entirely justified; Jahoda has frequently stated that employment can be psychologically harmful, although this view does not sit comfortably alongside her declared position that any form of employment will offer the latent functions whether the employee seeks them or not. It would be more accurate to criticise Jahoda's theory on the grounds of inconsistency). Finally, Fryer (1987) takes exception to the underlying assumption of the model, that humans are "...essentially passive and inert - goaded into action only by the necessity to earn a living"(p.369).

All these are important weaknesses of the deprivation model, but perhaps the most fundamental limitation of the model is that Jahoda fails to explain why time structure, shared experiences, external goals etc. are important categories of experience for humans. The implicit assumption seems to be that no further level of explanation is needed or possible because these are fundamental and essential human needs. But Jahoda rarely makes this assumption explicit, nor does she attempt to expand upon it or defend it.

1.4.3 The Vitamin Model

The third approach which considers the processes involved in producing the documented psychological effects of unemployment has been proposed by Warr (1987). The Vitamin Model of mental health represents a development and elaboration of Jahoda's framework, rather than a fundamentally different approach. Warr suggests that there are nine features of an individual's environment which are likely to influence psychological health whether a person is employed or unemployed. These features are shown below, with Jahoda's categories shown in parentheses:

WARR	(JAHODA)
1 Opportunity for control	
2 Opportunity for skill use	(Enforced Activity)
3 Externally generated goals	(Goals & Purposes)
4 Variety	
5 Environmental clarity	(Time Structure)
6 Availability of money	(Manifest Function)
7 Physical security	
8 Opportunity for interpersonal contact	(Shared Experiences)
9 Valued social position	(Status & Identity)

Several of these features are clearly related to the categories of experience suggested by Jahoda, although they do not correspond entirely. For example, Warr is concerned with the individual's ability to control the environment whereas Jahoda refers to the individual being controlled by the environment. Warr (1987) himself accepts the similarities drawn above for his eighth and ninth features, but suggests that Jahoda's, "Enforced activity", "Goals and Purposes" and "Time structure" are all subsumed within his third feature "externally generated goals".

In the same way that vitamins are necessary for physical health, Warr suggests that a certain minimum level of all these environmental features are necessary for mental health. The analogy even extends to the notion that there are some vitamins which can be toxic in excess. Thus, an excess of money or physical security is unlikely to harm psychological health, but too much control or variety may be detrimental. In this respect, Warr's model of the relationship between environmental features and mental health is nonlinear.

Empirical support in the unemployment literature for Warr's model is not extensive. There is evidence that the model is appropriate in job environments but most of these findings concern only one element of mental health, namely, affective well-being. Even then, the evidence relates to only four of the nine environmental characteristics (see Warr 1987, p.107).

Within the unemployment literature, the picture is even less encouraging. There is no empirical evidence to suggest that opportunity for control, opportunity for skill use or physical security are related to mental health. There is no direct support for a relationship between externally generated goals and health, although evidence suggests that unemployed individuals who have difficulty filling their time tend to have higher scores on measures of distress, depression, and negative self-esteem. (Feather and Bond, 1983; Hepworth, 1980). Some empirical support is available showing a relationship between the remaining five features and various aspects of mental health (e.g. Miles, Henwood and Howard, 1984 [Social Position] ; Warr, Banks and Ullah 1985 [Variety] ; Fryer and McKenna, 1987 [Environmental Clarity]; Finlay-Jones and Eckhardt, 1984 [Money]; Kilpatrick and Trew, 1985 [Interpersonal Contact]). However most of these findings are correlational, and causal relationships cannot therefore be assumed. Evidence in support of the proposed non-linear pattern of the relationship between the environmental features and mental health is almost non-existent, although Warr cites three studies which are "broadly supportive".

Clearly, Warr's model is more differentiated than Jahoda's. It takes into account the multidimensionality of mental health, incorporates individual differences, and introduces the notion that the relationship between mental health and features of the environment may be nonlinear. It provides a clear framework for further research, but support for the model may not be easy to

obtain. Longitudinal designs using nonlinear multivariate statistics would be required to identify the specific causal relationships postulated in the model.

1.4.4 The Agency Restriction Approach

Fryer (1988a) has questioned the adequacy of the psychological deprivation approach to unemployment distress on "...pragmatic, methodological, empirical and theoretical grounds". (p.227) He has argued that a deprivation model (and by implication the Vitamin Model) assumes that the individual only responds to the environment in a rather passive manner, and that they are only motivated by the need to earn a living or other environmental demands.

As an alternative, Fryer (1987, 1988a,b) has proposed an agency restriction model of unemployment which emphasizes the ability of humans to choose to initiate purposeful action, to make plans, to act on the environment and to bring about change in areas of their lives that they wish to alter. He writes:

"The underlying assumption of the Agency Restriction model (in contrast to that of Psychological Deprivation) is that people are active social agents who strive to assert themselves, initiate and influence events, are intrinsically motivated and live in a perceived world in which what they do depends on their view of, and plans for, the future as well as memories of the past. They try to make sense of what goes on and act in accordance with these interpretations in line with values, purposes, reasons and intentions in the light of anticipations of possible scenarios and outcomes". (p.57) (His parentheses).

Fryer suggests that the psychological health of the unemployed is usually impaired because unemployment restricts or frustrates these features of

agency. In essence it is argued that unemployment *imposes* limitations on individuals rather than *depriving* them of benefits.

Fryer places particular importance on the role of poverty in restricting action and choice, pointing out that in a market society, consumption is symbolic, and ability to purchase goods is an indicator of status. Dependence on state benefits not only limits an individual's spending power, but also carries with it a considerable degree of social stigma.

Another fundamental element of Fryer's model involves the temporal insecurity of unemployment. Because the unemployed individual cannot know how long unemployment is likely to last, they cannot plan for the future and subsequently implement these personal schemes or projects.

The origins of Fryer's approach lie in a widely cited qualitative study of eleven atypical unemployed individuals who had adopted a very proactive stance towards unemployment (Fryer and Payne, 1984). Far from being psychologically deprived and distressed, these individuals were apparently thriving even though they were without employment. All were involved in activities which they found interesting and rewarding. The sample was characterised by a high level of purposeful activity, the capacity to structure time, and strongly held political, religious or personal values.

Fryer and Payne make an important conceptual distinction between work (activity for a purpose beyond that of its own execution) and employment (a contractual exchange relationship between a person who wishes to buy work, and another who wishes to sell it). Thus, many activities are work, but do not involve employment. Housework, DIY, gardening or car maintenance for oneself would all fall into this category. They argue that their eleven respondents were involved in work, but were not involved in employment and

that this fact, when considered alongside their apparently high levels of well-being, creates difficulties for a deprivation account of unemployment (inasmuch as the individuals were deprived of employment, but were not apparently suffering negative psychological consequences).

In a subsequent study, Fryer and McKenna (1987) considered the psychological health of two groups of engineering workers neither of whom were employed at the time of the study. One group had been temporarily laid off for a specified period whilst the other group had been made redundant. The group which had been made redundant had distress scores comparable with other unemployed groups, but the group which had been temporarily laid off had psychological health scores which were as good or better than a matched group of employed workers. Fryer and McKenna explain this difference between the groups in terms of the knowledge of finiteness of the period of unemployment for the temporarily laid off workers, and the control and the ability to plan for the future that this afforded. Whilst the redundant group lapsed into inactivity and boredom, the laid off group used their time to plan and undertake self-chosen tasks around the home and leisure activities.

Fryer's approach is valuable in that it emphasizes the importance of the individual's personal resources in dealing with their situation rather than relying on an exclusively environmental explanation of unemployment distress. The agency account also accords a primary explanatory role to the reality of financial hardship for most people without jobs. This is certainly a progressive development given the evidence in the literature which documents poverty as a consistent and pervasive feature in the experience of unemployment and the contrasting subsidiary role accorded to financial hardship by other models.

However, several of the criticisms Fryer makes of other models apply equally to his own. Empirical evidence providing direct support is sparse and the

account could be criticised for being even more poorly conceptualised than Jahoda's or Warr's. The terms are vague and elusive - Fryer has offered no precise definition of even the central constructs of "proactivity" or "agency". Relational statements are few in number, and the absence of operationalisation or concrete predictions means that the model is even less falsifiable than the deprivation accounts. Indeed, the imprecision of the account make it difficult even to compare or contrast the model with alternative accounts.

Jahoda (1984), in a response to Fryer and Payne's (1984) empirical study and conceptual critique of the deprivation approach, points out that all of the eleven proactive individuals have found work in informal institutions which satisfy the five fundamental needs which she has proposed. Indeed, this leads to a wider issue, namely that many of the elements of Fryer's account can be re-phrased in the language of deprivation theory. For example, it would be difficult to argue that Fryer's "temporal insecurity" of unemployment and Jahoda's "lack of time structure" refer to entirely dissimilar concepts. This might lead us to question whether Fryer's account is a genuinely alternative approach or whether it incorporates the same ideas rephrased in different language and with different emphasis. This possibility is explored below.

Despite these weaknesses, Fryer's account is useful in that it exposes the limitations of the Deprivation model and Vitamin model and points to the importance of individual characteristics in explaining the experience of unemployment. It avoids the triviality associated with oversimplification of human behaviour which can turn the complex experience of unemployment into a "shopping list" or "recipe book" of latent variables/environmental features. It also avoids the glorification of employment as a fundamental and universal human need. Furthermore, the account has heuristic value in that it may (although this remains to be seen) stimulate or provoke different research

approaches or lead writers into unexplored areas which may prove to be enlightening and useful.

1.4.5 Overview

In evaluating the four models described above, it is interesting that the phase model has been much criticised by subsequent authors, since many of its weaknesses have been reproduced in the later accounts. The phase model is an imprecise, simplistic, overgeneralisation and empirical support for it is very weak. But arguably *all* of the models described above are open to criticism on all of these grounds. For example, what precisely does Warr mean by "environmental clarity", Jahoda by "goals which transcend those of the individual" and Fryer by "agency"? Are any of the models able to generate specific testable hypotheses? Where is the empirical evidence in support of the Deprivation, Vitamin, and Agency models? Are these models not huge oversimplifications of what is undoubtedly an extremely complex social phenomenon?

In response to these questions and the difficulties raised by them, it might be argued that any attempt to explain social/psychological phenomena in theoretical terms is likely to require compromise between accuracy, generalisability and parsimony. Thorngate's (1976) postulate of commensurate complexity, suggests that no theory of social behaviour can fully achieve these three goals simultaneously. Models which are highly inclusive and parsimonious will tend to be simplistic; those which are inclusive and accurate will tend to be extremely complex; and those which are accurate and parsimonious will tend to be restricted in their domain of application.

However, to say that all theories are likely to be limited is not to imply that all are of equal merit. On almost any of the criteria typically used to evaluate models or theories, (inclusiveness, empirical validity, falsifiability etc) the

phase model is found wanting, except possibly in terms of its simplicity and/or heuristic value. Perhaps its most serious weakness is that it is essentially descriptive rather than explanatory. (It offers an account of *what* happens rather than an account of *why* it happens). Bearing this in mind, and in the light of the comments made earlier concerning the overly descriptive nature of unemployment research and the need for research which moves towards an understanding of how and why distress occurs, the current thesis focusses on the models proposed by Jahoda, Warr and Fryer. Although these models might also draw critical comment in terms of their explanatory value, they undoubtedly provide a more sophisticated level of analysis than the phase models.

Turning to these accounts, it is important to clarify at the outset that I believe there to be a far greater level of agreement between these perspectives than has usually been acknowledged in the literature. Some similarities between the different models have already been identified; for example, all three authors suggest that humans have deep seated needs for a sense of time structure and involvement in purposeful activity. But the extent of agreement is far greater than this; they also concur that individuals need to feel a sense of control over their environments, to grow and develop, to feel that they have a recognised place in society and to interact with others. Moreover, they agree that the extent to which individuals are able to meet these needs is critical in determining mental health (although this raises a question as to whether mental health itself can actually be defined as anything beyond these needs - an issue discussed later). The importance of making a conceptual distinction between work and employment is recognised in all of the accounts, and all suggest that involvement in work (purposeful activity), inside or outside of employment, can bring some of the beneficial categories of experience described above. The central explanatory core of the three theories is therefore very similar.

But what of the differences between the theories? Clearly they are not identical. There are for example, differences in terms of conceptualisation of the critical categories of experience and in terms of the role accorded to financial hardship in determining distress. I would argue these represent differences in emphasis, style and approach rather than material differences of opinion over the substantive issue of how and why distress comes about.

As an illustration, consider the issue of "time structure" (Jahoda) versus "temporal uncertainty" (Fryer) raised earlier. Whilst Jahoda argues that unemployment *deprives* the individual of *time structure*, Fryer argues that unemployment *restricts* the individual's opportunity to plan ahead by imposing *temporal uncertainty*. Are these explanations fundamentally different? I suggest that they only differ in terms of emphasis, and degree of elaboration. At the heart of both explanations is the idea that most individuals need time structure/certainty and that without this structure they become distressed. Fryer's use of the phrase "temporal uncertainty" in this context is simply a stylistic device made necessary by the fact that he has used the word "restrict" as opposed to "deprive". Temporal uncertainty could be re-phrased as "lack of temporal certainty" without loss of meaning, and then, the difference between "lack of temporal certainty" and "lack of time structure" would become very difficult to specify.

What of the difference between the terms "restrict" and "deprive"? Is there a difference between restricting the availability of time structure and depriving someone of access to time structure? It seems that there is a slight difference. The term deprive (a) seems to imply complete denial of access and (b) implies a *need* (for time structure). But it would be wrong to infer from this semantic difference that Jahoda is suggesting that *no* unemployed person ever has access to time structure or that Fryer is suggesting that individuals do not need

any time structure. The difference is again purely one of emphasis. Fryer wishes to emphasise that it is difficult, but not impossible to find ways of structuring time outside of employment, whilst Jahoda is emphasising that individuals have a strong need for time structure and for many people, this need is met through involvement in paid employment. These arguments are not incompatible. Though Fryer makes great play on the fact that employment may not always be positive, Jahoda has not denied this: "What the deprivation hypothesis says is that when people do suffer psychologically in employment - as many do - they suffer from the low quality of experiences within the categories that the organisation of employment provides" (Jahoda 1984, p 297-298)

But, it might be objected, what of Fryer's emphasis on the importance of poverty? Surely this represents a major difference between the authors? In an attempt to illustrate this difference, Fryer (1988) points out that "availability of money" is placed only sixth on Warr's list of nine environmental features, and that Jahoda has argued that deprivation of the latent functions causes distress even when there is no financial hardship involved.

This is simply not convincing. Warr does not claim that the order of presentation of his "vitamins" reflects their relative importance and Jahoda's argument that the latent functions have an independent effect on mental health even in the absence of financial hardship, does not imply that she feels poverty to be unimportant, or less important than the latent functions. In fact, both Jahoda and Warr clearly recognise the importance of poverty, and acknowledge that poverty may affect the accessibility of vitamins/latent functions.

Warr explicitly states that "Studies of unemployed people consistently indicate that shortage of money is viewed as the greatest source of personal and family

problems. Poverty bears down not only upon basic needs for food and physical protection, but also prevents activity and reduces one's sense of personal control" (p 217). Jahoda (1982) is also clear about the importance of poverty: "...there is no controversy over the fact that the unemployed experience their condition as *restrictive poverty* and not just the loss of a regular occupation. The weight of the economic factor in influencing the overall psychological response to unemployment was demonstrated in Marienthal. There four types were distinguished: those unemployed whose morale was unbroken, the resigned, those in despair and the apathetic...These four types showed a strong correlation with the amount of benefit or emergency assistance available per consumption unit in a family" (p 21) (emphasis mine).

Clearly neither Warr nor Jahoda regard poverty as being an unimportant aspect of unemployment. The difference is one of emphasis. All three authors acknowledge that the loss of job involves for most people, both the loss of an income and the loss of a source of work (purposeful activity). And all three have acknowledged that both lack of income and lack of purposeful activity can lead to psychological distress. The only difference is that Fryer places greater emphasis on financial hardship, stressing that *in itself* it can restrict opportunities to engage in meaningful activities. This is certainly not a viewpoint which Jahoda has denied, and it is a perspective which Warr (as noted above) has explicitly supported.

Overall then, I suggest that the three models are remarkably similar. Though they are clearly not identical it is difficult to know what differences there would be in terms of the empirical predictions which could be generated by the three models. Indeed, it also seems likely that any empirical finding could be explained equally well by any of the three models (although of course it might be argued that this is a consequence of their vague formulations rather than of their similarity in terms of content).

There is however, one critical difference (of emphasis) which I wish to point out here. This is the extent to which individual factors on the one hand and environmental factors on the other, are regarded as affecting the experience of unemployment. Jahoda and Warr advocate explanations which are essentially environment-centred whilst Fryer's account emphasises the individual. Interestingly however, all three authors acknowledge (Warr and Fryer are perhaps most explicit) that in reality people and situations are likely to be mutually influential - an interactionist position. Given this viewpoint, it becomes apparent that *both* individuals *and* environments need to be taken into account in attempts to advance the understanding of unemployment distress. (I acknowledge that the distinction between persons/individuals and situations/environments is empirically, conceptually and methodologically problematic and this issue is discussed in Chapter 2).

1.4.6 Implications for Research Into Interventions

The implications of the theories for the development of interventions, and for research into their psychological effectiveness, may initially seem relatively straightforward. The theories maintain that unemployed individuals have in general been deprived of, or restricted in their attempts to secure, certain fundamental categories of experience which are essential to psychological well-being. Thus, we might hypothesise that the immediate psychological effectiveness of interventions will depend upon the extent to which they are able to either provide (or enable participants to secure for themselves): an adequate income; interpersonal contact; social status and identity; temporal structure; purposeful and varied activity; opportunities to exercise control over the environment; and goals to work towards. (Although notice that the provision of "social status and identity" may not depend entirely, or even primarily on the content of the intervention itself).

Along these lines, Warr (1987) has suggested that "good" unemployment has *more* opportunity for control; opportunity for skill use; externally generated goals; variety; environmental clarity; money; physical security; opportunity for interpersonal contact and social status, whilst "bad" unemployment has less of these features. Clearly the use of the terms "good" and "bad" may provoke a range of awkward questions such as: Good in what way? Good for whom? etc, which illustrate the value-laden nature of this type of analysis. I shall therefore avoid this "good"/ "bad" distinction, but recognise that simply avoiding these terms does not remove the underlying problem of value-ladenness.

But this is not by any means the only difficulty associated with the suggestion that interventions should have more of the features described above. On closer inspection a number of conceptual and empirical difficulties with this framework begin to emerge. First of all, it is noticeable that these categories are overlapping and interlinked in several ways. As we have already noted, the availability of money may influence the accessibility of other categories of experience. But also, the opportunity to engage in purposeful activity is likely to affect whether or not an individual can exercise control over their environment. Indeed, this link may work in both directions: the controllability of the environment will also affect the opportunity to engage in different activities. Similarly, status may partly depend on income; identity may depend on activity and goals, and so on. The independence of these categories is thus far from being clear.

In addition we might ask *how much* of each vitamin/category of experience is required? Are they *all* needed in some measure? Which are most important? Do individuals vary in their needs? Are some individuals better equipped to secure these for themselves than others? Unfortunately, none of the models provide answers to these questions. They are too vague and imprecise in their formulations to offer more than a broad and tentative framework for

understanding the mechanisms of unemployment related distress. It is therefore in this guiding role, and with these limitations in mind, that the theories are used in the present thesis.

One final comment on the implications of these theories for research into interventions is in order. This relates to an issue raised earlier in the discussion of empirical work on unemployment: the idea that different aspects of mental health (affective well-being, self-esteem etc) may be differentially affected by the experience of unemployment. Theories of unemployment-related distress unfortunately offer little to enlighten us in this matter. Warr's vitamin model incorporates a five component account of the structure of mental health and elsewhere, Jahoda (1958) has provided an account of the concept of mental health. But neither of these authors *fully* explain how these accounts of mental health relate to their theories of unemployment-related distress. In particular, there is no systematic attempt by either author to describe how the various aspects/components of mental health may be differentially affected by the presence or absence of different vitamins/latent functions. Warr (1987) makes some ad hoc suggestions: "Subjective competence is expected to decline as a result of unemployment, for example in terms of loss of skills which might be applied in future jobs" (p.196), but these appear as occasional ideas rather than as a well-defined framework. For the most part "mental health" and "psychological distress" are treated as undifferentiated constructs. In the next chapter, I shall consider whether this treatment of mental health is justifiable, and whether a more differentiated account of mental health might facilitate the understanding of the experience of unemployment and the impact of interventions.

CHAPTER 2: THE CONCEPT OF MENTAL HEALTH

2.1 Introduction

So far in this thesis the concept of mental health has been left undefined, and I shall turn now to discuss the meaning (or meanings) of this term. First however, it is worthwhile considering exactly why careful conceptualisation is so urgently required.

"Mental health" (or a related construct) has been treated as the main outcome variable in the vast majority of recent empirical studies on the psychological effects of unemployment. The primary thrust of almost all of the studies discussed in chapter 1 has been to determine the effects of joblessness on the mental health of those individuals who experience unemployment. It is therefore surprising, given the pivotal role accorded to mental health within the field, to discover that very few authors have attempted to define or even to outline what they mean by "mental health" in conceptual (rather than simply operational) terms. (For example see Stafford, Jackson and Banks 1980; Feather and O'Brien, 1986; Warr and Jackson, 1983). The overwhelming tendency, with few exceptions, has been to avoid the risk of entering a theoretical minefield by launching straight into operationalisation of variables without first considering what exactly is being measured. Measures of "depression", "anxiety", "distress" or "well-being" are deployed without prior examination of the constructs they are intended to measure.

In part, this reluctance to tackle the conceptualisation of mental health, whilst pressing ahead with data gathering reflects a wider trend within the field of unemployment research (and psychology in general) in which theory has been deployed in a very narrow way. As noted earlier, theoretical concepts have typically been used to derive specific hypotheses and to explain the results. Single concepts are taken from a general theoretical framework and are used as instant tools to justify a priori choices or to suggest post hoc explanations. In neither case is the focus on the theory itself.

In fact, failure to attend to the conceptualisation of mental health is not limited to the field of unemployment research. A similarly cavalier attitude to the use of "outcome" variables has been remarked upon within the fields of stress research and life events research by Depue and Munroe (1986).

Whatever the reasons for the failure to tackle the conceptualisation of mental health, it has been a costly strategy. At least three important consequences of this omission can be identified.

Firstly, lack of conceptualisation has been a major contributory factor in creating the terminological chaos which now plagues the field of unemployment research. "Mental health", "psychological well-being", "affective well-being", "psychological distress" and "subjective well-being" (to name but a few) are all terms which have been widely used in the unemployment literature. But because these terms have been inadequately conceptualised it is difficult to interpret the findings of individual authors, and is impossible to know whether different authors are referring to the same underlying construct.

Secondly, the undervaluation of theory has led to the deployment of increasingly undifferentiated and nonspecific "outcome" measures of mental health. Depue and Monroe (1986) have suggested that this lack of attention to the variable being predicted may in part be responsible for the inability of researchers to demonstrate any more than rather weak links between environmental factors such as employment status and disorder.

Thirdly, empirical studies conducted without attention to conceptual or theoretical groundwork have produced clear results but little in the way of greater understanding of the phenomenon in question. All too frequently, results-centered research work has demonstrated when and where effects or

relationships occur, but has been silent regarding what precisely they mean in terms of individual experience. In short, a lack of theory has meant that empirical findings lack depth or meaning.

By exploring the concept of mental health in some detail before moving to operationalisation of specific variables, I hope to establish at least a degree of terminological precision and conceptual clarity about the structure of mental health as it is to be used in this thesis. Once this has been undertaken, I shall return to elaborate on the three difficulties identified above.

2.2 A Thematic Review of Previous Conceptualisations of Mental Health

Despite the availability of an extensive literature, generated over decades by psychologists, psychiatrists and philosophers, there is still no widely accepted definition of the term "mental health". It is possible to identify a few limited areas of agreement between theorists, but for the most part, disagreement and discrepancy characterises discussion of even the most fundamental questions about the nature of mental health and illness: Is mental health a unitary construct, is it multidimensional, or is it merely a set of different concepts which are loosely related? Are mental health and illness discrete categories of experience or are they the extremes of a single continuum? Is mental health influenced by personality characteristics, features of the environment or genetic predisposition?

Questions of this kind have been constant sources of controversy and have led to a theoretical literature on mental health which is fragmented, often confusing and sometimes contradictory. The only point upon which almost all writers agree is that the concept of mental health is extremely complex and difficult to define.

Smith (1961) for example, observed that: " 'Mental health' and its complement 'mental illness' are terms that embarrass psychologists...Unable to define or conceptualise them to our satisfaction, we use them in spite of ourselves". This observation has been echoed by many subsequent writers and almost 30 years later it is still both relevant and accurate.

This chapter of the thesis examines existing theoretical formulations of mental health in an attempt to identify the underlying reasons for these difficulties and subsequently to map out a tentative conceptual framework for the empirical study. Given the breadth and complexity of the field, this is a daunting task. The approach I have adopted initially is to consider some of the themes which have recurred in different theoretical accounts which offer a reasonably general or global perspective of mental health. I hope to illustrate some of the difficulties which writers attempting to conceptualise mental health in this global way have encountered. At this early stage I have attempted to avoid accounts which refer to specific aspects of mental health as these will be dealt with later.

2.2.1 Mental Health as Happiness

Perhaps the simplest way of characterising mental health is to construe it as happiness. An individual's own evaluation of the extent to which they feel positively about their life would seem intuitively to be a reasonable starting point for thinking about mental health. Many theorists have viewed happiness as a hallmark of mental health and interest in the area dates back to the Ancient Greeks.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle stated that happiness (eudaimonia) was the ultimate goal sought by humans. He believed that eudaimonia could be achieved by living in accordance with the Doctrine of the Mean (or the

'Golden Mean') a moral philosophy which prescribed moderation in action and rejected extremes such as asceticism and profligacy.

Several later authors on happiness have been influenced by, or made direct reference to Aristotle's ideas (e.g. Tatarkiewicz, 1975; Argyle, 1987). However, there is some dispute over whether eudaimonia is in fact accurately translated as happiness. Ryff (1989) has suggested that it should be translated as the "realisation of one's true potential" whilst Veenhoven (1984) offers several interpretations including "the good life", "possession of supreme goods", and "living in accordance with man's true (innate) needs". Indeed, Veenhoven notes that even Aristotle's followers were not entirely clear about the meaning of eudaimonia.

Unfortunately, semantic difficulties such as these are not limited to the interpretation of the Greek texts on happiness. Difficulties in defining happiness run throughout the literature on the topic. Every writer on happiness seems to have given their own definition and the interpretation of happiness has changed over time. Christian philosophers considered happiness as being defined by external criteria such as holiness or virtue, whilst in the 18th century writers such as Baldwin, Locke and Bentham redefined it more subjectively as the sum of pleasures (Tatarkiewicz, 1975; Veenhoven, 1984), lists fifteen different definitions of happiness offered by modern social scientists including notions of pleasure, contentment, life satisfaction, striving, and fulfilment.

In an attempt to circumvent difficulties of this sort, recent authors have used more specific (or "scientific") terms such as "subjective well-being" (e.g. Diener, 1984). Unfortunately, even this term suffers from definitional difficulties. A few authors have failed to elaborate on the meaning of "well-being", but even if these accounts are disregarded, the term has still been used

in many different ways. Some authors have equated subjective well-being (SWB) and happiness, whilst others have referred to SWB as being only a component of happiness. To complicate matters further, still other authors have used SWB to mean something of which happiness is a component. Diener (1984) for example, describes SWB as including life satisfaction, positive affect and happiness, whilst Veenhoven (1984) views SWB as being an element of the more global concept happiness. Bradburn (1969) simply equates SWB and happiness.

Clearly there are difficulties in conceptualising mental health as happiness, insofar as happiness itself is difficult to define. But, even disregarding these difficulties happiness alone would not be an adequate criterion of mental health. There are situations in which we would expect people to be unhappy and would consider it healthy behaviour - for example at the death of a loved and close relative. In such circumstances the expression of joy or happiness might be considered a sign of severe mental illness, as might the expression of happiness at other "inappropriate" times ("mania") (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the APA, 1980). Grief is considered by bereavement counsellors and clinical psychologists to be a natural and healthy response to loss (Worden 1983). It is only when grieving is very intense or prolonged that it is considered to be a complicated or "abnormal" reaction to loss.

This example raises an important issue about duration and frequency of affective states. We would expect all people to be unhappy at times, but if they repeatedly experienced long periods of unhappiness it might be viewed as reflecting a low level of mental health. Some authors have characterised this as a distinction between happiness as a state and happiness as a trait (Veenhoven 1984). But this distinction itself, as we shall see later, is problematic. Indeed, even the Greeks recognised this difficulty in their deliberations over the difference between feeling good at the moment and the

longer term tasks of realising one's true potential (Waterman, 1984). Arguments of this kind have led theorists (e.g. Ryff, 1989) to suggest that happiness alone is too narrow a definition of mental health. Additional concepts are needed for a full description of mental health.

2.2.2 Mental Health as Absence of Illness

A second popular way of thinking about mental health has been to view it as simply the absence of illness. (It is important to distinguish between this view and the idea that mental health is the opposite of illness, a viewpoint discussed later). In common parlance anyone who is not "ill" is regarded as being "healthy", a perspective which has its roots in the discipline of medical science (eg Kendell, 1975). Throughout the history of medicine, practitioners and researchers have viewed the promotion of health in terms of the prevention and treatment of disease. More recently this perspective has started to change, albeit slowly (Taylor, 1990).

In the field of psychology too, far greater attention has been devoted to the causes and consequences of distress and illness than to positive mental health. Knowledge about mental illness far exceeds knowledge about mental health. Indeed, much of the literature which purports to be about "mental health", is in fact concerned with distress and illness. Nowhere is this more evident than in the literature on unemployment, where terms such as "psychological health", "mental health" and "psychological well-being" are used as synonyms for "psychological distress". (e.g. Warr, 1987; LaHelma, 1989; Schaufeli, 1988).

The conceptualisation of mental health as absence of illness has had wide currency amongst scientists and practitioners, but there are at least two major weaknesses inherent in this view of mental health. Firstly, the concept of mental illness is itself widely acknowledged to be problematic (eg Clare, 1976). Although there is general agreement that some individuals experience periods

of great distress and unhappiness, mental illness has been difficult to define. Clearly, if it is not possible to define accurately what is meant by mental illness, then determining whether or not it is absent is likely to be very difficult, if not impossible.

This issue has been the source of a long-standing and acrimonious debate in the mental health field, with the anti-psychiatry movement (e.g. Szaz, 1974; Laing, 1967; Foucault, 1973) making serious challenges upon the conceptualisation of "mental illness" as equivalent to physical disease, the adoption of a medical model, the role of psychiatrists, and the very existence of mental "illness".

These authors argue that so-called "mental illness" is merely socially deviant behaviour, a point which illustrates the value-laden nature of the terms mental health and mental illness. This introduces a fundamental difficulty faced by theorists writing on mental health: Behaviours which are considered mentally healthy in one society or one era may be considered a symptom of mental illness in another. Cannibalism, for example is acceptable in some societies but not in others. Even individuals within a society may vary in their views as to what constitutes mental illness. This may create particular difficulties when the view of the health professional as to whether an individual is ill or not is at odds with the individual's own view. Strupp and Hadley (1977) have commented that are three interested parties involved in judgements about mental health: the individual, the mental health professional and society at large. They argue that in order to make a comprehensive assessment of a person's mental health, all three viewpoints need to be taken into account. However, these authors offer no indication as to what judgement should prevail when there is no convergence of views.

A second difficulty with defining mental health as the absence of illness is that this definition is essentially a negative one. It is only saying what mental health is not rather than saying anything about what it is. As a consequence, the definition is silent with regard to the notion that anyone could be particularly mentally healthy or indeed could attempt to improve their level of mental health.

2.2.3 Mental Health as Normality

This perspective is usually phrased in the opposite way as some variant on the theme that: "mental illness is abnormality". This view of mental health suffers from many of the same difficulties as the "absence of illness" model. It raises the question of what we mean by "normal". Normality can refer to behaviour which is socially acceptable or conforms to shared values, in which case politically-motivated civil disobedience could be viewed as illness behaviour. Alternatively normality can refer to statistical frequency, in which case the extremes of a distribution are considered "abnormal". In this context, an objection might be that we do not refer to people as being "abnormally healthy". In both cases the problems of value judgement and subjectivity encroach onto the definition of mental health. Who decides what is normal (healthy) and what is abnormal (unhealthy)? At what point does eccentric behaviour become madness? When is atypical behaviour acceptable? The answers to these questions are likely to be hopelessly value laden and therefore normality alone cannot be seen as an acceptable scientific definition of mental health.

However, the idea that mental health/illness can be described in terms of a normally distributed continuum may have some heuristic value. This assumption underlies most psychological research on mental health, even if it is not always made explicit. This is in sharp contrast to the model of "caseness" often adopted by the medical profession, in which there are seen to be

qualitative differences between mental health and mental illness (see Roth and Kroll, 1986; Clare, 1976; Mirowsky and Ross, 1989).

2.2.4 Mental Health as Adaptation

Vaillant (1977) argued that mental health could best be understood in terms of adaptation. A person's level of mental health reflects the extent to which they are able to adapt or adjust to the demands of their environment. He suggested that good mental health only becomes apparent when a person faces adversity. This view echoes similar ideas proposed by Adler (Clifford, 1990) ("embeddedness"), Herzberg (1966) (adjustment to the environment) and Bradburn (1969) (coping with "difficulties in living") but implies a rather passive view of the individual.

Later theorists such as Bandura (1977) and White (1959) accorded a more active role to the individual, using terms such as "mastery", "self-efficacy" and "competence". This difference of emphasis reflects a tension which lies at the heart of the notion of adaptation. On the one hand there is adjustment to meet environmental demands, and on the other, there is influencing of the environment to meet one's own needs. Piaget (1952) described these two processes as "accommodation" and "assimilation" and in the field of stress research the relationship between the individual and the environment has been variously characterised as "reactive", "interactive", or "transactional" (e.g. Lazarus and Lurnier, 1978). These differences of emphasis reflect important assumptions about the nature of human beings as either active or passive, reacting to environmental demands or imposing their will on their surroundings. These issues are complex, but are fundamentally important in social scientific research and we shall return to them later in the thesis.

Adaptation features prominently in the psychodynamic account offered by Jung (1960), who conceived of mental health as the extent to which

individuals are able to achieve "individuation" - that is the extent to which they can relate effectively to both their inner world (of innate potential and aspirations) and their environment. Disturbance is characterised as over-identification with either.

Gestalt psychologists have also conceived of mental health in terms of adaptation, suggesting that in healthy human functioning there is a continuous creative adjustment between the individual and the environment. This involves " ..both responding to, and also acting upon, the environment in order to maintain balance and equilibrium with it. In disturbed functioning this process is interrupted and the person's ability to maintain herself in relation to life situations is impaired" (Parlett & Page, 1990, p. 178).

Accounts of this sort appear to have considerable elegance and sophistication as well as intuitive appeal. The extent of overlap between them is also impressive bearing in mind that the authors identify themselves with very different schools of thought within the discipline of psychology. The most significant difficulty with this type of exposition seems to be that the language used does not lend itself easily to empirical applications. For example, it is not easy to determine exactly what terms such as "equilibrium" and "balance" refer to, nor how these terms could be defined in a way which would enable us to test the veracity of the claims made.

2.2.5 Mental health as Intrapsychic Harmony

Perhaps the best known proponent of a theory which describes mental health in terms of intrapsychic harmony is Freud (1915), but this tradition is in fact much older. In *The Republic*, Plato dealt with the concept of well-being or mental health in his doctrine of the three parts of the soul. He suggested that a harmonious balance between Reason, Spirit and Appetite would lead to the ideal condition of 'dikaiosune'.

Freud's theory is far more detailed and elaborate than Plato's, but is remarkably similar in principle. (For the sake of brevity the account which follows is greatly simplified). The account rests on Freud's description of the tripartite structure of the mind. In this scheme the id represents the instinctual drives seeking immediate gratification, the ego deals with the real world outside the person, mediating between it and the id and the superego is the conscience of the individual with values and standards to maintain.

Because of the asocial nature of the id, it is almost continual conflict with the superego. The ego, caught in the middle and attempting at the same time to deal with the outside world must effect compromise between the two. When conflict is severe this can be virtually impossible. This is when the ego may defend against conflict by rendering it unconscious.

Freud believed that mental health or well-being depended on a harmonious relationship between the three parts of the mind and between the person and the real world in which they have to live. External demands can at times create severe conflict and the maintenance of health then depends on the ability to handle this conflict rationally and creatively. Illness is conceived as the inability to manage inner states of conflict and anguish without resorting to defence mechanisms such as repression.

A slightly different tone was adopted by later authors such as Allport (1961), who used the term "maturity" to describe the development of a unifying philosophy of life, and Erikson (1950) who argued that the development of a sense of identity was a crucial indicator of mental health. Ego-identity could be seen as a balance between "drives", "endowment" and "opportunity".

Yet another conceptualisation of mental health as internal harmony can be found in the work of Rogers (1961). Rogers' theory highlights a conflict between the individual's need for inner-directedness and their need for social approval when making decisions or choosing courses of action. Rogers suggested that healthy individuals have the capacity to trust their own thoughts and feelings (their "organismic self") whilst disturbed people turn to external authorities in an attempt to meet their overwhelming need for social approval or "positive regard" from others. Rogers used the word "congruence" to describe a state of consistency or harmony between the organismic self (the essentially trustworthy inner self) and the self-concept (the individual's conceptual construction of himself or herself). He suggested that the terms "integrated", "whole" and "genuine" could be considered synonymous with "congruent" (Nye, 1975). "Incongruence" on the other hand describes a state of discrepancy or disharmony between the organismic self and the self-concept.

Related to the notion of psychic harmony is the idea of self-acceptance. This has been an important theme in eastern philosophy for centuries. In the classic Chinese text the Tao te Ching, Lao Tzu (1973) writes that:

"There is no greater sin than desire,
No greater curse than discontent,
No greater misfortune than wanting something for oneself.
Therefore he who knows that enough is enough
will always have enough". (No.46)

Self-acceptance has also been a prominent theme in the ideas of existentialist thinkers. The notion of "authenticity" (e.g. Sartre, 1962) implies self-acceptance in the fullest sense; accepting responsibility for one's actions, attitudes, emotions and character. (Stevenson, 1974).

Perhaps the best known proponent of this view from psychological perspective was Maslow (1954). Maslow's analysis of mental health is part of a wider view of personality in which human needs can be seen as being ordered hierarchically. At the highest level are the needs for growth and "self-actualisation". One of the most important characteristics of healthy individuals is that they accept and are comfortable with themselves - their beliefs, values, strengths, weaknesses, successes and failures. This does not mean to suggest that they are smug or self-satisfied, but rather that they adopt the same accepting attitude to themselves as they would to the characteristics of any natural phenomenon.

The conceptualisations of mental health as intrapsychic harmony seem to have a good deal of intuitive appeal, logical consistency and rational coherence. However, they share a pragmatic limitation with the conceptualisations focussing on adaptation in that it seems difficult to know how they could be investigated empirically. (This is particularly true for those theories which incorporate the notion of unconscious mental states). Clearly this cannot be a reason for their rejection on rational grounds, but it means that their scientific status is likely to remain questionable until tighter conceptualisations are developed to enable empirical work to test their accuracy.

2.2.6 General Comments

The thematic review above is highly selective. It is intended to convey the breadth of thinking about mental health within the theoretical literature, but is restricted to those ideas which offer a (relatively) broad perspective on mental health. Accounts which refer to specific aspects of positive functioning such as "person-environment fit" (French, Rodgers & Cobb 1974) or "autonomy/control" (Rotter, 1966) have hitherto been largely excluded.

Several general points emerge from the limited review above. The most striking aspect is the enormous diversity of views. Occasionally themes recur and the accounts overlap, but for the most part different writers vary widely in their views as to what are the most critical issues. Several of the writers subscribe to more than one view. It seems that the only major point of convergence between these broad models is that they share a number of common limitations. Indeed the concept of mental health seems to suffer from almost all of the fundamental difficulties faced by contemporary applied psychology. Many of these difficulties reduce to frustrating metaphysical conundrums. Five of these which can be drawn from the review above are that:

(a) Mental health is necessarily a value laden construct. Writers giving accounts of "positive" or "negative" mental health are in essence making value judgements - statements about what ought to be the case, not about what actually is the case.

(b) Linked to this first point is the confusion about whether mental health should be described in "subjective" or "objective" terms. Some authors emphasise the individual's subjective experience (eg happiness), others emphasise external criteria (eg normality) and still others offer a view which accords them equal importance.

(c) Most authors implicitly or explicitly suggest that mental health is influenced by both individual and environmental factors. But few (if any) of the general accounts above clarify the relative importance of the two factors (although they occasionally suggest implicitly the way in which they might interact).

(d) Mental health can be described either as a temporary state (she is anxious) or a relatively enduring trait of the individual (she is prone to anxiety). Many of the authors fail to make it clear which perspective they are adopting.

(e) Mental health and illness can be viewed either as a continuum ranging from "complete well-being" to "total dysfunctioning", or as two discrete categories of experience. Medical practitioners have often adopted the latter perspective, whilst social scientists usually adopt the former view.

If, as I have suggested, these difficulties arise from underlying philosophical debates (determinism v. free will, materialism v. dualism, naturalism v. emotivism), resolutions to them are not likely to be found in the foreseeable future. What can be done is to rephrase the questions and/or make explicit the assumptions upon which an account of mental health is based. For example, in this context some of these difficulties can (at least to some degree) be circumvented by developing clear conceptualisations of narrower constructs and through the use of operational definitions. The loosely conceptualised constructs described above have limited scientific value because they are too global and ill-defined to be measured or tested. Mischel (1968) has made precisely this point during the course of his notorious and influential series of attacks on traditional conceptions of personality. He cites Freud's "id, ego and superego"; Jung's "anima and animus"; Adler's "striving for superiority"; Fromm's "need for transcendence"; Erikson's concept of "identity crisis" and Rogers' "drive for self-actualisation" as examples of inadequately conceptualised constructs.

But where does this leave the conceptualisation of mental health as a whole? The diversity of views and the difficulties inherent within the broad perspectives outlined above seem to lead inevitably to the conclusion that there can be no general definition of mental health. It is too vague and

nonspecific a term. It is not a concept in itself. It is a global rubric which refers to a number of different (but related) aspects of human functioning and experience. Only by considering the various aspects of mental health within a more differentiated and explicit framework can progress be made. It is important to clarify that in making this claim I am not suggesting that an integrated account of mental health cannot be developed. Rather, I am suggesting that any attempt to offer a unitary account, or to describe mental health as a single concept is very unlikely to succeed.

2.3 Specific Criterion-Based Accounts of Mental Health

Several authors have attempted to draw out the more specific and usable concepts from the Western theoretical literature in this area, referring to these concepts as "criteria", "components" or "dimensions" of mental health. These accounts tend to be descriptive rather than explanatory, (although of course to some degree structural descriptions can be seen as a form of explanation). It will become apparent that all of the accounts draw heavily on the first one and last two of the broader conceptualisations already described (happiness, adaptation and intrapsychic harmony) and in discussing these accounts I shall attempt to point out where this is the case.

Three of these criterion-based accounts are selected here for more detailed consideration: Jahoda (1958), Warr (1987) and Ryff (1989). All three of these accounts draw very extensively on Allport's (1961) notion of "functional autonomy" and his six criteria of maturity (Extension of sense of self; Warm relatedness to others; Self-acceptance; Realistic perception of reality; Self-objectification; Unifying philosophy of life).

The three more recent accounts were selected for detailed consideration because they offer slightly more eclectic perspectives, and provide tighter conceptualisations than the criteria suggested by Allport. In so doing, they

point the way towards empirical work. There are, of course, many drawbacks associated with adopting this type of categorical account and some of these are discussed later. First however, I shall provide brief outlines of these more differentiated structural accounts of mental health.

2.3.1 Jahoda's Account of Mental Health

Jahoda's (1958) widely-cited and influential work on the nature of mental health provided an elegant and lucid summary of previous theoretical contributions. In reviewing previous work Jahoda commented that knowledge about illness and suffering far exceeds knowledge about positive functioning and in an attempt to rectify this imbalance, her analysis focuses particularly on criteria of positive functioning.

Jahoda's account identifies six major categories of criteria for mental health.

These are:

Positive and realistic attitudes towards the self

In Jahoda's framework the mentally healthy person has a better understanding of self, a clearer sense of identity and accepts themselves as they are. They have self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect.

Growth, development and self-actualisation

The idea that humans strive to maximise their potential, put forward by many theorists, including Maslow (1961), Rogers (1961) Jung (1960), and Herzberg (1966). This aspect of mental health has a clear link to motivation and the desire to be more than one is at present.

Integration of personality

The ideas of intrapsychic harmony and congruence already described are at the core of this criterion of mental health. Jahoda refers to "the relatedness of

all processes and attributes in an individual and discusses the balance of psychic forces, a unified outlook on life and resistance to stress.

Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the need for individuals to be independent, to resist environmental influences and be self-determining. Herzberg (1966) and Angyal (1965) have commented that healthy people are self-directed and self-controlling in their decisions and actions.

Perception of reality

Jahoda suggests that healthy individuals perceive the world around them accurately. Their perceptions of the world are not excessively distorted by their needs, attitudes or emotions.

Environmental mastery

This criterion of mental health draws upon the broader notion of adaptation described above. It focusses on relative success in different spheres of life ("love, work and play"), on adequacy in interpersonal relations and on adaptation to the environment.

Jahoda's analysis of mental health is clear, persuasive and thorough. She draws together a number of different ideas in a single volume but resists the temptation to provide a unitary construct of mental health. In fact she makes it clear that this is not possible or desirable, (pp 65-70) declining to offer a definition and arguing that multiple criteria of mental health are necessary. The account appears to be quite comprehensive (it is difficult to imagine areas which Jahoda has omitted), but the consequence of this inclusiveness is that the categories are not always cohesive. For example, the category of attitudes towards the self incorporates ideas about sense of identity on the one hand and self-acceptance on the other. These could be viewed as quite separate

dimensions. Sense of identity seems to refer to *clarity* of self-concept whilst self-acceptance seems to refer to *valuing* oneself.

There is also considerable overlap between the categories. For example, the distinction between attitudes to self and integration of personality is far from being clear cut. Nonetheless the account offers a reasonably general and concise framework for understanding mental health.

2.3.2 Warr's Account of Mental Health

Warr (1987) offers a view of five "components" of mental health which he suggests "..would be accepted as important by most Western theorists" (pp24-25). These are:

Affective well-being

This component of mental health is very similar to the idea of happiness discussed earlier. However, drawing on the empirical work of authors such as Russell (1979) and Watson and Tellegen (1985), Warr distinguishes two orthogonal dimensions which he labels "pleasure" and "arousal". Thus, he suggests that a low level of pleasure and arousal is associated with sadness or depression and a high level of pleasure and arousal is associated with delight. Low levels of pleasure combined with high arousal refer to anxiety or tension and low levels of arousal combined with higher levels of pleasure refer to calm or relaxed states.

Competence

Warr's second feature of mental health concerns the extent to which an individual has adequate psychological resources to cope effectively with the environment. He refers to Jahoda's idea of environmental mastery, to Lazarus' (1975) work on coping, and to Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy.

Autonomy

This component is described in terms of the individual's ability to resist environmental influences and to actively control the environment. Warr comments that many writers have stressed the idea that it is interdependence rather than extreme independence which has been viewed as a sign of good mental health.

Aspiration

Warr comments that the mentally healthy person is someone who is motivated to set goals and strive to achieve them. Writers such as Herzberg (1966) have emphasised that positive mental health requires more than simply surviving and Maslow (1973) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) have echoed this theme.

Integrated Functioning

Of all the components in Warr's account, integrated functioning is the one which is least clearly defined. In a sense this is a "cover-all" category which refers to the ideas of balance, harmony and coherence, both within the person and in relation to their environment. It also seems to include the idea of relationships between the other four categories.

As with Jahoda's account, Warr's framework is clear, reasonably inclusive and parsimonious. The category of integrated functioning is the least cohesive, incorporating ideas of internal harmony, personality integration, self acceptance, balance of "work love and play" and relationships between the other categories. Clearly there are a number of quite separate constructs here, and Warr does not offer an adequate explanation for his decision to group them together.

Warr argues that three of the components described above, (competence, autonomy and aspiration) can be viewed both "objectively" and "subjectively".

For example, to assess "competence", one could take either the person's judgement of the extent to which they feel they are able deal with their environment, or the judgement of other people about how well that person is coping with the demands and constraints of their situation. This viewpoint introduces a number of difficulties and we shall return to it later.

2.3.3 Ryff's Account of Mental Health

Ryff's (1989) analysis of mental health takes the literature on happiness/subjective well-being as a point of departure. Ryff was concerned to demonstrate that measures of psychological well-being developed within this literature were not theory driven and as a consequence, several important aspects of positive functioning had been overlooked. In fact Ryff refers to her account as a formulation of psychological well-being rather than mental health, but it will become apparent in what follows that she regards the two as being synonymous. Ryff outlines six core dimensions:

Self-acceptance

According to Ryff, self-acceptance is the most recurrent criterion of positive functioning cited within the literatures on life span development and clinical psychology, as well as the more general literature on mental health.

Positive relations with others

The ability to develop warm, trusting and close relationships with others is emphasised by writers such as Rogers (1961), Allport (1961) and Erikson (1959).

Autonomy

Like Jahoda and Warr, Ryff includes the self-regulation of behaviour and independence as an important criterion of health. She uses Rogers' (1961)

phrase "internal locus of evaluation", Maslow's (1961) "resistance to enculturation" and Jung's (1960) "individuation" to illustrate the concept.

Environmental Mastery

Ryff also incorporates the ability of individuals to choose, create or control their environment as a characteristic of mental health. She points out that this idea appears in the literature on ageing (Neugarten, 1973) as well as the more general mental health literature.

Purpose in life

Life span developmental theorists such as Erikson (1959) have particularly emphasised the importance of having goals, intentions and a sense of direction for positive functioning. Ryff argues that these are important if life is to have purpose and meaning to the individual.

Personal growth

Healthy individuals have a feeling of continued development, see themselves as growing and expanding and are open to new experiences. They feel that they are realising their potential and see improvement in themselves and expanding self-knowledge over time.

Ryff argues that a major strength of her theoretical analysis is that she draws on three different literatures to develop her account. These are: the literature on mental health, the clinical literature and work in the field of lifespan development. This is indeed a strength of Ryff's work, but not one which distinguishes it from the work of Jahoda and Warr who have also drawn upon a broad base of theoretical work. One way in which Ryff's analysis does differ positively from that of the other two authors is that she provides clear operational definitions of her categories thereby paving the way for empirical work.

2.3.4 A Comparison and Contrasting of The Three Accounts

In order to facilitate comparison between the three accounts, the major categories identified by the different authors are present in Table 2.3.4 below.

Table 2.3.4: Three accounts of mental health

JAHODA	RYFF	WARR
Autonomy	Autonomy	Autonomy
Environmental mastery	Environmental Mastery	Competence
Growth/Dev/Self-act	Personal Growth	Aspiration
Attitudes to Self	Self Acceptance	Affective Well-being
Integ. of Personality	Purpose in Life	Integ. Functioning
Acc. Percep of Reality	Positive relations	

Initial inspection of the three accounts reveals several promising features. The number of ideas is reasonably limited, and perhaps most important, there seems to be a considerable degree of consensus between the three authors. Indeed, the first three categories above (autonomy, mastery/competence and growth/aspiration) are specified by all three authors, and although the labels vary, the descriptions are remarkably similar. However, we should recognise that this convergence of views is to some extent illusory. Both Warr and Ryff have been influenced by, and have drawn directly upon Jahoda's work. In addition, the three authors have considered the same pool of original sources. We could therefore reasonably expect a considerable level of agreement.

Nonetheless, the fact that all three authors have identified autonomy, mastery/competence and growth/aspiration as categories, and the extent of

agreement in the descriptions suggest that it would be unwise to ignore these three categories as potentially important dimensions of mental health.

There is also some agreement between Jahoda and Ryff in terms of a fourth feature; self acceptance/attitudes to self. Again, consideration of the full conceptualisations suggests that these can also be treated as being equivalent categories. Within Warr's model, self-acceptance is subsumed within the broader category of integrated functioning, (a category which also incorporates Jahoda's integration of personality and Ryff's purpose in life).

An interesting difference between Warr's account and that of the other two authors is that he includes affective well-being as a description. It seems surprising, given the wealth of literature on affective well-being, happiness and subjective well-being and the importance attached to these constructs within the field that neither Jahoda nor Ryff see fit to include this as a category in its own right. One possible explanation of this omission is that both these authors view happiness as a concomitant or an outcome of positive mental health rather than as an integral component. This seems to be Ryff's point when commenting that in previous conceptualisations of positive functioning, "Central emphasis has been given to short-term affective well-being (ie happiness), at the expense of more enduring life challenges such as having a sense of purpose and direction, achieving satisfying relationships with others, and gaining a sense of self-realization" (Ryff, 1989 p. 1077). In a sense this relationship is also suggested by Warr; he comments that the other features (competence, autonomy, aspiration) may influence an individual's level of affective well-being.

One dimension in Ryff's framework which is not treated as a single category by the other authors is purpose in life. Jahoda and Warr incorporate it as an element of growth/aspiration and whether this category is genuinely distinct

from personal growth is a debatable point. In her empirical study (discussed in more detail below) Ryff reports a correlation between personal growth and purpose in life of .72, which suggests that they may be measuring the same underlying construct.

A second distinguishing feature of Ryff's framework is the inclusion of positive relationships with others as a category. Again this is not regarded as a category in its own right by either of the other two authors. Jahoda treats it as part of environmental mastery, whilst Warr treats it as an element of autonomy. Although interpersonal relationships are identified as an important aspect of mental health within the clinical literature, it does seem reasonable to suppose that they are important across several different domains of human functioning (eg competence, autonomy, growth) rather than as a category in their own right.

The unique feature of Jahoda's model is that it includes accurate perception of reality as a category. The inclusion of this category could be seen as a way of circumventing the problem of subjectivity versus objectivity raised above. For example, the implication of an individual seeing themselves as having autonomy and accurately perceiving reality is (presumably) that they actually (i.e. "objectively") are behaving autonomously. However, there are both rational and empirical difficulties with this position. Rationally, defining what is meant by "an accurate perception of reality" is problematic, but even if this problem can be avoided through the use of operational definitions, (which is in itself an arguable point), there is some empirical evidence to suggest that a degree of self-serving bias in perceiving reality (ie inaccurate perception) is beneficial for mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Warr's approach to the subjective/objective dilemma is to suggest that all of his components except affective well-being can be regarded both objectively

and subjectively. For example, he describes objective competence as "...what a person can actually do" and subjective competence as "...his or her sense of competence" (p.29).

This resolution of the subjective/objective issue is not without difficulties either. The example Warr chooses as an illustration is a fairly straightforward one which relies on a distinction between behavioural aspects of competence and cognitive/emotional aspects of competence. Taking a different example, the distinction between "objective" and "subjective" assessments starts to break down. For example, in rational terms what would it mean to say that one had "objectively assessed" an individual's independence of thought (an aspect of autonomy)? How would we go about it? What if subjective and objective assessments differ? These are clearly awkward questions which illustrate the potential limitations of viewing assessments of mental health as either "subjective" or "objective".

In defence of this conceptualisation Warr cites empirical evidence (e.g. Frese, 1985) which demonstrates convergence between objective and subjective assessments of mental health and elsewhere, Frese and Zapf (1988) have utilised a similar distinction between "objective" and "subjective" conceptualisations.

Despite these limitations, there is considerable agreement between the authors and their accounts are reasonably parsimonious and comprehensive. The categories within each account are fairly cohesive and do not appear to contain a great deal of overlap. However, two final comments are in order. Firstly, all three accounts offer little indication of how the different components or dimensions interrelate (if at all). For example, it seems reasonable to suppose that competence and a sense of autonomy are linked in some way. Secondly, within each of the categories there is some conflation of

behavioural, cognitive and emotional factors. These two points raise key issues for further theoretical work in the area of mental health. In the account which follows, and subsequently in this thesis, an initial attempt is made to address both issues.

I suggested earlier that there are a number of general limitations associated with the adoption of a categorical account of this sort. The strengths of categorical models seem to be that they are clear, and relatively easy to grasp. They also point the way towards operationalisation. But we should be aware that this type of formulation represents an enormous simplification of what is undoubtedly a complex issue. Not only is mental health itself more complex than is suggested by a description which uses such neat categories, but also there is no reason to suppose that the experience of all individuals can be encompassed in such sweeping generalisations. Moreover, the use of categories seem to run counter to the ideas of gestaltists (eg Perls, 1969); existentialists (eg May, 1967) and humanistic psychologists (eg Rogers, 1967) that mental health is a holistic phenomenon. It is paradoxical that in striving for greater clarity, these authors have to some degree sacrificed complexity and meaningfulness. Ultimately, this paradox would seem to be inevitable. A balance must be struck between the opposing requirements for, on the one hand, clarity and precision, and on the other, complexity and meaningfulness. It is in this spirit that the accounts given above are taken. The function of theory in the present study is to provide a framework for an empirical investigation. In this context therefore, clarity and precision have been given precedence over complexity and meaningfulness.

2.4 Conceptualisation of Mental Health in The Present Study

Mental health is regarded in this thesis as a global rubric which refers to number of different (but related) aspects of human functioning and experience. It is not therefore a unitary construct, although it may be possible

to develop an integrated account of mental health incorporating a number of different dimensions. Consequently, I will offer no general definition of mental health, but instead will propose a multidimensional account. Nevertheless, this account is guided by a general assumption that the term mental health is usually used to refer to:

1. Subjective feelings of happiness/well-being combined with
2. Effective performance and development in different domains of human functioning, the most important of which are the interpersonal domain and task domain.

I have chosen to view mental health (or at least the dimensions of mental health) on a continuum running from "complete well-being" to "total dysfunctioning", and within this range I have chosen to focus on what has been referred to as "suboptimum health" (Rogers, 1960); that is, the area between complete well-being and diagnosable psychiatric illness. This is similar to Jahoda's (1958) "positive mental health", but this label is preferred for its less "directional" connotations. There are a number of difficulties with this view which have already been raised. Viewing mental health as a continuum contradicts the medical model which suggests a categorical distinction between mental health and mental illness. This is a dispute which is far from being resolved but it is perhaps worthwhile noting that the use of a categorical distinction by medical practitioners is usually defended on pragmatic rather than theoretical or empirical grounds. In other words the medical profession have argued that a categorical distinction is useful for the purposes of discourse about diagnosis and treatment rather than claiming that it is veridical (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989).

It is recognised that the account will be value-laden and therefore it should be acknowledged that it incorporates white, western, middle class (and probably male) values . It emphasises the extent to which individuals are able to maximise their potential through cognitive, emotional and behavioural adjustment to their socioeconomic, cultural and political circumstances and the extent to which they are content with their own thoughts, feelings and actions.

Mental health is considered to be closely related to a number of other topics which have traditionally been regarded as different fields of study within psychology. Amongst these the most important are personality, motivation and "stress". This issue is discussed in more depth later.

Henceforth in the thesis, the terms "mental health" and "psychological health" are used as superordinate terms which describe a wide domain of human functioning and experience. They are assumed to refer to the same rubric and are used interchangeably.

Terms such as "affective well-being" "control/autonomy", "mastery/competence", "growth/aspiration" are regarded as relatively cohesive and distinct dimensions of mental health which may in themselves incorporate a number of sub-categories. (Operational definitions of specific variables will be given later).

The term "psychological distress" is used very specifically, to refer to relatively low levels of affective well-being. I shall avoid entirely the use of the terms "psychological well-being" and "mental well-being".

From the preceding analysis of theoretical literature on mental health and the distillations of it discussed above a tentative theoretical framework with five

dimensions will be proposed. These are intended to provide a reasonably general and parsimonious integration of the concepts which have widest currency and which will act as a working heuristic for the empirical study which follows. It incorporates the common features of the three reviews above and some additional features which are drawn from the earlier review of broader concepts. The account is limited in many ways and some of these are discussed later. Not all five dimensions are incorporated within the present empirical study, but they are presented here in order to provide a reasonably complete account.

Why were five dimensions chosen? It should be openly acknowledged that the choice of five categories is an arbitrary one. There is no special significance attached to having five rather than four, six or any other number of categories. As will become apparent, it is arguable as to whether some of the categories could be collapsed into a single category or indeed expanded to form two or more new categories.

The first dimension in the present account (affective well-being), is considered to be a fundamental component of mental health. The review of general accounts of mental health given earlier illustrates that happiness and subjective well-being have been central themes in the study of positive human functioning from the time of Ancient Greeks to the present day. All schools of psychological thought from behaviourism (Skinner 1971) to psychoanalysis (Freud 1915) have considered it worthwhile to attempt to understand the causes and consequences of happiness.

The next three dimensions (Control/autonomy; Competence/mastery; Growth/aspiration) are identified in all three of the reviews above as important aspects of mental health. An examination of other reviews of mental health, (eg Lazarus, 1971) subjective well-being,(eg Diener, 1984), happiness

(Veenhoven, 1984), clinical psychology/psychotherapy (eg Dryden, 1990) and original sources (eg Maslow, 1970; Freud, 1915; Jung, 1960; Adler, 1927; Rogers, 1961; Bradburn 1969; Vaillant, 1977; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), confirms that these are major themes which are repeatedly emphasised in conceptualisations of mental health.

The fifth dimension (Integration/harmony) is treated as a category by both Warr and Jahoda, and long-standing recognition of its importance has been detailed within the review above of general accounts of mental health, under the heading 'Intrapsychic harmony'. It is difficult to know how this dimension could be operationalised, but this is not considered to be a valid reason for excluding it.

Thus, the five dimensions are:

Affective well-being

Affective well-being is concerned with subjective experience. It refers to global judgements of happiness and life satisfaction. Phrased alternatively, it is concerned with the extent to which an individual feels positively about their life as a whole. It is therefore influenced by the cognitive/emotional aspects of all the other dimensions. The term is used interchangeably with "subjective well-being", but the word "affective" is preferred here to convey the sense of both mood (longer-term, diffuse feeling states) and emotion (short-term, focussed feeling states).

Competence/mastery

Competence/mastery refers to effective performance in different spheres of life, including problem solving, decision making, interpersonal relations and so on. In cognitive terms it incorporates global beliefs about self-efficacy and

confidence in one's ability to achieve, to deal effectively with the environment and to cope with experienced problems or difficulties.

Control/autonomy

In behavioural terms control/autonomy refers to the extent to which a person is self-determining and maintains independence in thought and action. They influence their environment rather than being influenced by it. The cognitive/emotional aspects of this dimension reflect the extent to which the individual feels able to control situations and events in their immediate environment.

Growth/aspiration

Behaviourally, growth or aspiration is reflected in the development of the individual's knowledge, skills and abilities. The individual establishes goals and strives to achieve them. In cognitive/emotional terms, growth refers to a sense of purpose, of development, direction, advancement and self-actualisation. The individual feels that they are learning and moving towards fulfilment and they are committed to this ongoing process.

Integration/harmony

The final dimension is again a cognitive/emotional one. It refers to inner relatedness, self-acceptance, intrapsychic balance and sense of identity. The converse of harmony is disintegration of personality and loss of identity.

Of these five dimensions, the first three (affective well-being, competence and control) are selected for particular attention within the quantitative empirical study which follows. All five dimensions are considered within the qualitative study. The reasons for choosing the first three dimensions for investigation within the quantitative study are discussed later in the development of an heuristic framework for the analyses. However, it is worth noting at this stage

that the conceptualisation of control used in the present study is slightly more complex than the account given above would suggest.

2.4.1 Limitations of The Account

The account of mental health given above is intended to offer a differentiated framework which draws upon existing theoretical formulations and provides a reasonably accurate, comprehensive and simple foundation for the empirical study which follows. Particular attention has been paid to the potential limitations of previous accounts, but despite this it is recognised that the present conceptualisation has several inherent weaknesses.

The first point is that the account is undoubtedly an oversimplification of reality. This issue has already been discussed in relation to the models proposed by Jahoda, Warr and Ryff, and the present account is also limited in this respect. However, whilst it may be possible to offer a more complex analysis, the present account does have the advantage of providing a relatively clear, understandable and parsimonious framework which incorporates the aspects of mental health which have widest currency within the Western literature. The adoption of a more complex account would entail the risks of creating obscurity and imprecision.

The second point has also been raised earlier. The account given here is value-laden. As I have argued above, this problem is inevitable in any discussion or account of mental health, but it nevertheless important to recognise this limitation.

A third point concerns the internal cohesiveness of the categories. All of the categories contain a number of constructs which arguably constitute dimensions in their own right. For example, the dimension control/autonomy incorporates ideas about self-determination, independence and control of the

environment. Each of these constructs could be viewed as being sufficiently distinct as to merit consideration as separate categories. However, in breaking down the dimensions even further, there is a risk of creating excessive overlap between the (newly created) categories. Ultimately this leaves us with the difficult task of striking a compromise between inadequate cohesiveness and excessive overlap. Careful consideration of the constructs in question and empirical evidence provides guidance in this matter, but the essence of the problem remains as one of judgement.

A fourth limitation of the account above is that there is still some conflation of behavioural, cognitive and emotional criteria within dimensions. Undoubtedly, the distinction between cognitions, emotions and behaviours is difficult to maintain and there may be incongruence between an individual's thoughts/feelings on the one hand and their behaviours on the other. Indeed, this is precisely what psychotherapists mean when they refer to "cognitive distortions", "conflict", or "retroreflection". It is hoped that careful operationalisation will limit the extent of this problem, but it is seen as being to some extent inevitable.

A fifth limitation is that there is still no indication of how the different components interrelate. For example, we might expect that affective well-being is influenced by the individual's sense of competence and control. (In order to deal effectively with their environment the individual requires some degree of control, and in turn mastery brings with it a sense of control) Similarly, it may be that growth/aspiration is related to competence/mastery. This issue is addressed in the development of a heuristic framework for empirical analyses which is presented in the next chapter.

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the present, more differentiated account will represent something of an improvement on the typical (within the

unemployment literature) tendency to focus solely on "psychological distress" as an "outcome" measure.

2.5 Empirical Evidence About The Structure of Mental Health

So far, we have considered primarily theoretical contributions to the understanding of mental health. It might be expected, given the breadth and diversity of this literature, that it would have stimulated extensive empirical work designed to test and explore competing theories. This however is not the case. In fact there is paucity of empirical work on the nature of mental health.

Mirroring the imbalance in the theoretical field, research effort has been directed towards the understanding of distress, illness and psychiatric disturbance rather than on the nature of positive well-being or sub-optimum health. As a result, the structure of mental illness is far more clearly defined than the structure of mental health. For evidence of this we need look no further than the third version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1980). For all the failings, limitations and controversy surrounding this document, (see Mirowsky & Ross, 1989) there is nothing comparable in terms of sophistication or complexity in the field of positive mental health. Indeed, the dearth of empirical research in this area is all the more surprising bearing in mind the number of studies in the fields of stress, life events, job characteristics and personality in which mental health has been used as an outcome variable. Despite the lack of evidence on which to draw, I turn now to discuss the research which is available.

Early efforts to define the contours of positive functioning were made by researchers such as Grinker (1962), Korchin & Ruff (1964), Smith (1966), Maslow (1970), and Barron (1963). These workers typically chose to investigate the personality characteristics of particularly healthy groups such as astronauts or Peace Corps volunteers. However, these studies were by today's

standards technically and methodologically unsophisticated and as a consequence, the findings frequently reflected more about the values and standards of the researchers than it did about the personalities of the interviewees. In reviewing these studies of the healthy personality, Lazarus (1975) described them as "...a very primitive beginning on a problem of enormous scope" (p33).

However, one of these studies has since been widely cited and has had a major impact on subsequent thinking about mental health. Maslow's (1970) views concerning growth and self-actualisation have already been referred to at several points in this discussion of mental health. For Maslow, positive mental health was synonymous with the fulfilment of self-actualisation needs. In an attempt to specify more clearly the characteristics that defined self-actualisation, Maslow made an in-depth study of 60 historical and public figures including Roosevelt, Jefferson, Spinoza and Einstein. A close examination of Maslow's work reveals that these were not, as has frequently been suggested, all self-actualisers, but were considered to be partial or potential self-actualisers.

From this study, Maslow argued that self-actualisation or mental health incorporated the characteristics of: efficient perception of reality; self-acceptance; spontaneity; problem centered focus; detachment; autonomy; freshness of appreciation; capacity for profound spiritual or mystic experience; identification with humankind; capacity for intimate or close relationships; democratic values; clarity about the distinction between ends and means; philosophical sense of humour; creativity; resistance to cultural norms.

Several subsequent writers have commented that this list offers a caricature of the virtuous human being rather than a scientific description of mental health. In response, Maslow suggested that self-actualisers also had a number of

weaknesses, arguing that they could be "...boring, stubborn and irritating. They are by no means free from...superficial vanity, pride, partiality to their own productions, family, friends and children. Temper outbursts are not rare" (Maslow 1970 p175).

Although Maslow's theoretical contribution has been highly influential, his empirical work has widely been recognised as being fraught with methodological ambiguity and imprecision (Ryckman, 1989). Perhaps the most serious flaw in Maslow's work concerns sampling. In selecting the people he studied himself, it seems more than possible that Maslow's definition of self-actualisation was simply a reflection of his own value system.

Maslow acknowledged that his research did not meet conventional scientific standards of reliability or validity but argued that his "evidence" was valuable in heuristic terms. However, even the use of reliable psychometric instruments such as the Personal Orientation Inventory (Shostrom, 1963) to measure self-actualisation has not produced strong evidence in support of Maslow's theory (eg Mathes, 1978).

Turning away from this early research, more recent studies have employed factor analytic techniques in an attempt to identify empirically distinct dimensions of mental health, as measured by self-report questionnaires. Much of this work focusses on one of the dimensions described earlier, namely affective well-being.

Bradburn's (1969) classic work on the structure of well-being provided the initial distinction between positive and negative affect, measured using a self-report questionnaire. The major findings of Bradburn's study were that: (a) the correlation between positive and negative affect items in his questionnaire was very low; (b) the correlation of items within positive and negative affect

categories was much higher; (c) the two dimensions of affect correlated differently with various external variables. For example, worry and anxiety correlated with negative affect but not with positive affect. Social participation and sociability correlated with positive affect but not with negative affect.

Since the publication of this ground breaking study several researchers have corroborated Bradburn's model of bifurcation in affective experience (eg Andrews and Withey, 1976; Moriwaki, 1974). However some findings point to the existence of a third dimension, covering evaluations of self efficacy or competence in dealing with the environment. For example, Bryant & Veroff (1982) write "..perceived competence in handling one's life is a dimension related to, but distinctly separate from, positive and negative evaluations" (p 653), a finding which is in keeping with the theoretical proposal of the dimension mastery/competence discussed above.

More recently still, Bryant and Veroff (1984) have reported evidence suggesting that a fourth dimension can be distinguished which relates to the category autonomy/control proposed by theoretical writers. They describe this as "feelings of competence in deriving positive experience" (p. 117).

Both Ryff (1989) and Warr (1990) have reported research in which they develop self-report measures of the dimensions of mental health proposed in their theoretical accounts. In Ryff's research several dimensions (scales) are heavily intercorrelated. In particular, the dimensions of purpose in life, environmental mastery, and self acceptance correlate with each other at .66 or above. Arguing that the scales are nevertheless measuring distinct dimensions of mental health, Ryff comments that all items within scales correlate more highly with their own scale than with any other scale and that in addition the interrelated scales show divergent validity in differential patterns of relationships with other, pre-existing measures of mental health.

Warr reports data on measures designed to tap three of his proposed dimensions, namely competence, aspiration and affective well-being. Again there are intercorrelations between scales (they are all intended to be facets of mental health) but in Warr's study these intercorrelations are much lower, with no correlation between two scales exceeding .49. A further point about Warr's study is that he subdivides affective well-being into two different facets labelled contentment and enthusiasm. These correlate at .73 but exhibit different associations with other factors.

In summarising the scant empirical evidence available on the structure of mental health, it appears to provide a little support for the ideas that affective well-being is a significant dimension of mental health, and that positive and negative affect are distinct sub-dimensions of this construct. There is some limited evidence to suggest that mastery/competence can be considered a distinct and cohesive dimension, and very limited evidence to support the ideas that growth/aspiration or control/autonomy are separable from other dimensions of mental health.

However, the overall picture is far from being clear. These conclusions are based on a very limited number of studies and there is little in the way of replication or contrary evidence. Two of the studies reported above were conducted by the proponents of the theoretical models themselves. This leaves the current state of the field open to accusations of confirmation bias (Greenwald, Pratkanis, Lieppe & Baumgardner, 1986). In order to counter such suggestions much more empirical work conducted by other authors is needed in this field. What is missing almost entirely from the literature is any indication of how the different components relate to one another. For the present, the account proposed above as a framework for this empirical study is

the best available, but it is only supported by empirical evidence which is very flimsy.

2.6 Factors Influencing Mental Health

Applied psychologists, sociologists and psychiatrists have spent many thousands of research hours investigating different influences on mental health. There is a burgeoning literature on the immediate impact of major life events such as bereavement, divorce, marriage, job change, and (an area of major concern for this thesis) job loss (eg Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). Other researchers, rather than looking at the impact of specific events, have considered ongoing influences on mental health such as social relationships (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, 1976), leisure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), income (Andrews and Withey, 1976), physical health (eg Bradley, 1988), job quality (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) or the lasting implications of the life events mentioned above (widowhood, married life, unemployment) (Parkes, 1986; Cochrane, 1988; Warr, 1987). Finally, researchers have considered individual level variables such as demographic characteristics (Diener, 1984) or psychological characteristics such as personality (Costa and Macrae, 1980; 1984).

Although a detailed examination of this literature is way beyond the scope of this thesis, several of the topics above are of particular relevance in the present context. I shall turn to consider these shortly, but first, a very brief overview of the literature on life events is presented as some of the main arguments within this literature bear upon the research in other areas.

Many researchers in this field have treated life events as exogenous shocks which have a significant impact on well-being (eg Abbey & Andrews, 1985; Block & Zautra 1981). Surprisingly however, empirical research has typically been able to demonstrate only weak relationships between life events and

mental health (Thoits, 1982). In one widely-cited study, Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulman (1978) found that neither a major favorable event (winning a state lottery) nor a major adverse event (becoming a quadriplegic or paraplegic) had major impacts on subjective well-being.

Given the severe nature of most of the life events studied, the inability of researchers to demonstrate more than a weak link with mental health has been the cause of extensive debate about the causal direction, strength and nature of the relationships. Some writers have pointed to methodological failings of many studies (Headey and Wearing, 1989) whilst others have identified inadequate conceptualisation, operationalisation or statistical analysis as being at the root of the problem (Depue & Munroe, 1986; Kasl, 1983). Yet another group point to the moderating influence of factors such as social support (eg Gore, 1978) adaptation (Brickman et al, 1978) or the substantial effects of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1980). In fact, it seems likely that all of these factors have some part to play in explaining the difficulties encountered by the researchers in this field. As we shall see many of these issues crop up repeatedly when researchers have considered other influences on mental health such as demographic characteristics, job characteristics, income and personality.

2.6.1 Demographic Characteristics

Evidence concerning the relationship between demographic characteristics and mental health is generally limited to studies of depression, happiness or subjective well-being. It is also highly inconsistent. For example, with respect to age, studies conducted in the 1960s (Wilson, 1967; Bradburn, 1969) suggested that younger people tended to experience higher levels of psychological health, but more recently a number of researchers have found virtually no age effects (eg Cameron, 1975; Sauer, 1977). A third set of findings suggests that the relationship between age and mental health is

curvilinear, with middle aged people tending to enjoy better mental health than younger or older people (eg Ryff, 1989). Unfortunately, other authors have suggested that the relationship is curvilinear, but that middle aged people experience worse mental health than younger or older people (eg Handyside, 1961).

One explanation for the discrepancies in the literature is that age is a "proxy" variable which covaries with other factors such as income. In multivariate analyses therefore, age effects may be "swallowed up" by the effects of these other factors. Whether age independently influences mental health and the possible nature of the relationship between the two, are questions which are still open to debate. Another explanation is that reported differences could reflect historical changes in beliefs values and attitudes. According to this view, the reported effects of age would in fact be reflecting generational differences rather than developmental influences.

The confusing nature of findings regarding age led Adams (1971) to comment that ".,the inconsistency of findings in regards to age indicates that it is at best a very gross index of group characteristics" (p.67).

The literature on the relationship between gender and mental health shows a much more consistent pattern in which women report higher levels of distress, anxiety and depression than men (eg Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; Kessler & McRae, 1981; Jick & Mintz, 1985). Explanations of the lower levels of mental health experienced by women often focus on the effects of sociocultural factors (such as gender role expectations) in creating overload and/or conflict (eg Rosenfield, 1989). It is interesting that despite these differences in reported negative mental health, another consistent finding is that there are no differences between men and women in reported levels of happiness and subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Veenhoven, 1984). Given

the research findings demonstrating the independence of positive and negative affect discussed earlier, this combination of findings is perhaps less paradoxical than it might otherwise appear. However, it does raise interesting questions about why women experience higher levels of distress but similar levels of positive well-being when compared with men. Hitherto, this question has not been addressed empirically, but one possible explanation is that negative affect is influenced primarily by exogenous factors (demands, constraints, ambiguity) whilst positive affect is more closely related to personality and feelings of competence. An alternative explanation might be that women are more prepared to "admit" to distress than men.

Research findings on the relationship between race and mental health are highly inconsistent. Some researchers report no differences in depression or psychological distress between groups of black and whites, (eg Carr & Krause, 1978; Aneshensel, Clark and Frerichs, 1983), whilst other researchers report that there are significant differences between racial groups but that these differences are attenuated when socioeconomic status is controlled (eg Neff, 1985, Comstock & Helsing, 1976). The latter finding has led to the suggestion that racial differences are only "spuriously" related to depression as a consequence of socioeconomic status. However, more recent studies suggest that race and socioeconomic status have an interactive effect on mental health in which race is important for mental health even when socioeconomic status is held constant (Ulbrich, Warheit & Zimmerman, 1989; Kessler and Neighbours, 1986). These different arguments illustrate the difficulty of disentangling the effects of individual versus environmental influences on mental health, a difficulty which applies equally to research on the relationships between gender, age, marital status, parenthood and mental health. The use of multivariate, longitudinal designs helps to reduce these difficulties, but as evidenced by the perpetual "buffering" versus "main effects"

controversy in the stress literature (eg Thoits, 1982) they are likely to remain a thorn in the side of empirical workers for some time to come.

2.6.2 Job Characteristics

Several researchers in this field have made straightforward comparisons of the mental health of different occupational groups. Such epidemiological studies have demonstrated a consistent pattern of relationships between mental health and occupational status, in which professional and managerial workers are found to exhibit the highest levels of mental health and unskilled workers the lowest levels (eg Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). This finding has sometimes been interpreted as reflecting the intrinsic level of interest and stimulation provided by the jobs themselves, but since occupational status is closely related to income, education and social prestige, it may be that differences in these factors account for the observed variations in mental health. In order to determine whether the intrinsic features of the jobs themselves are responsible for the gross differences, more detailed empirical work has been conducted.

This research has often focussed on "job-related aspects of mental health", such as job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, but it is still relevant to the present discussion of overall mental health for two reasons. Firstly, there is considerable evidence that job satisfaction is strongly correlated with both life satisfaction and general psychological health (Kornhauser, 1965; Rice, 1984; Broadbent, 1985; Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison & Pinneau, 1975). (This "carry-over" effect is not surprising bearing in mind that employment is a central activity in the lives of most workers). Secondly, some of this research shows that job features have a direct influence on context-free (ie general) mental health. In the light of this finding, it is important to include this research here because there is no reason to assume that the mechanisms which

produce mental health in employment are any different from those which produce mental health outside the workplace.

There is an enormous literature in this area, much of it influenced by the ideas of Herzberg (1966) and Hackman and Oldham (1975). The central proposition of Herzberg's two-factor theory was that the determinants of job satisfaction are qualitatively different from the determinants of dissatisfaction. The determinants of job satisfaction, which Herzberg labelled "motivators" were factors intrinsic to the work: achievement, advancement, recognition, responsibility and the work itself. The determinants of dissatisfaction Herzberg labelled "hygiene factors" these were: company policy, administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships and working conditions. These extrinsic factors were seen as basic prerequisites for health, but not advantageous beyond a certain level. Motivators on the other hand were seen as being essential for growth and development. (This dichotomy between hygiene factors and motivators suggests an interesting parallel with Maslow's (1973) distinction between "deficit" motives and "growth" motives).

However, Herzberg's model is not well supported empirically. Several studies show that intrinsic job features such as feelings about achievement, recognition and advancement can be determinants of dissatisfaction as well as satisfaction (eg Wall & Stephenson 1970). Nonetheless, Herzberg's work illustrated the value of considering specific features of jobs as determinants of satisfaction, an approach which was taken up by Hackman and Oldham (1975).

In their Job Characteristics Model, these authors propose five "core dimensions" of jobs which are considered to be determinants of job satisfaction and performance. these are: Skill variety (the extent to which the job requires the incumbent to perform a wide range of tasks and operations); Task identity (the extent to which the job involves completing a clear and identifiable piece

of work); Task significance (the degree to which the performance of the job has a significant impact on the lives of others), Autonomy (the degree to which the job allows freedom of choice, independence and discretion); and Feedback (the extent to which information about performance is available). In a meta-analysis Loher et al (1985) found the following correlations between these job features and job satisfaction; task identity, .32; task significance, .38; skill variety, .41; autonomy, .46; feedback, .41.

Clearly, if job satisfaction is closely tied to general mental health we would expect to find relationships between these same job characteristics and more general mental health and this is indeed the case. For example higher levels of job autonomy have been found to be associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety (eg Billings & Moos, 1982) and higher levels of self-esteem and perceived competence (eg Gardell 1971). In a meta-analysis of studies on job characteristics, Spector (1986) found a corrected average correlation between autonomy (the job characteristic) and emotional distress of $-.37$. Higher levels of feedback have also been shown longitudinally to be associated with lower levels of depression (Brousseau, 1978) and task identity has been found to be correlated with affective well-being (Wall & Clegg, 1981).

However, one problem with all of these studies that has repeatedly been identified in the literature concerns the direction of causality. Most studies are cross-sectional and it is therefore difficult to determine whether observed correlations reflect: (a) the influence of job characteristics on mental health, (as most writers have suggested), or (b) the influence of mental health on the reporting of job characteristics, or (c) mutual influence between the two, or (d) the influence of a third (unmeasured) factor on both, or (e) the influence of job characteristics on a third factor (perhaps job satisfaction) which in turn influences mental health, or (f) the influence of mental health on a third factor which in turn influences reporting of job characteristics. (Of course the

introduction of a fourth or fifth variable would entail even more complicated causal models).

In order to separate these possible explanations, longitudinal studies, using cross-lagged correlational statistical analyses are required, but these are very rare within the literature.

A second difficulty which has been frequently pointed out relates to common method variance (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Since most researchers have collected their information about job characteristics through self-report questionnaires, it may be that the transient mood of the job incumbent, social desirability effects or acquiescent responding can be invoked to explain observed correlations (Spector, 1987).

So far we have only considered direct, linear relationships between job characteristics and mental health. Some researchers have turned their attention to the investigation of more complex relationships. Karasek (1979) was particularly interested in two job characteristics which he referred to as "decision latitude" (the individual's potential control over tasks and conduct) and "job demands". Karasek argued that these two factors each had a direct influence on mental health and that in addition, they combined interactively to create particularly high levels of distress. Jobs in which demands were perceived to be high and decision latitude was low were viewed as being most detrimental to psychological health.

Karasek's work was highly influential and stimulated a great deal of research on role overload, role ambiguity and perceived control (see Ganster & Fusilier, 1989 for a review). Much of this work confirms that decision latitude and job demands directly influence various aspects of mental health, but the evidence with regard to the interaction effect is less compelling. Several

researchers have failed to replicate Karasek's original findings, and Ganster & Fusilier's (1989) review concluded that the interactive model's "empirical validity is yet to be established" (p.264).

Two further points about the research are of interest. Firstly job demands and decision latitude appear to relate differentially to various aspects of mental health. Broadbent (1985) reports that several studies have found job demands to be related to anxiety (but not depression), whilst decision latitude has been found to predict depression (but not anxiety). (This finding offers some support for the idea that depression and anxiety are distinct dimensions of affective well-being).

Secondly, Karasek suggested that his data pointed to a non-linear relationship between job features and well-being. The results implied that low levels of decision latitude were associated with distress, but above a certain level greater decision latitude offered no additional benefit. This non-linear model has rarely been tested by subsequent workers, but recently Warr (1990) has reported findings which support this notion.

Whatever the precise nature of the relationships between these two job characteristics and well-being, it is clear that many researchers have felt them to be critical to the understanding of health at work, and that they seem likely to remain as important fixtures in the literature for some time to come.

Other complex relationships between job features and mental health involve personality variables. For example, it has been widely found that the relationship between job complexity and job satisfaction is stronger for those individuals with greater "higher order needs strength" (eg Vecchio & Keon, 1981). Similarly, those individuals with higher achievement motivation prefer more challenging jobs (Steers, 1975).

2.6.3 Income

So far, I have only made passing reference to the potential impact of income on mental health. In fact, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that shows a relationship between income and mental health. Indeed, this relationship persists even when other factors such as education are controlled (eg Bradburn, 1969; Campbell, Converse & Rodgers, 1976; Larson, 1978). However, although there is abundant evidence to support the existence of this link, the effect size is small, with income usually accounting for only about 2-4% of the variance in mental health (Campbell et al. 1976).

One explanation for the small effect sizes is that satisfaction with income plays an important role in the relationship, and that satisfaction is judged through social comparison with proximal others. Since most people live, work and socialise with others who receive similar incomes, disparities are relatively small and therefore dissatisfaction is not as great as one might expect. This view would be supported by the finding that the income/mental health relationship is much stronger within countries than it is between countries (e.g. Easterlin, 1974). It is also supported by the consistent finding that satisfaction with pay depends upon comparisons with co-workers rather than absolute level (e.g. Runciman, 1966).

An alternative explanation for the small effect sizes is that income only has an effect on mental health at lower income levels. This suggestion is consistent with data in Campbell's (1981) study which showed that the relationship in the USA was weaker in 1978 than in 1957 when poverty was more widespread. It is also supported by the consistent finding that low socioeconomic status is related to the higher incidence of depression (eg Brown & Harris, 1978). If the explanation that income has its most important effect on well-being at extreme levels of poverty is correct, then it clearly has enormous significance for the

experience which constitutes a major concern of this thesis and which is often associated with severe financial difficulties, unemployment.

2.6.4 Personality

The best known proponents of the view that mental health depends primarily on personality are Costa and McCrae (1980, 1984). They have shown that two of the "big five" personality dimensions, extraversion and neuroticism, account for large proportions of variance in well-being and indeed suggest that personality predicts mental health some 20 years later. A particularly interesting aspect of their findings is that extraversion and neuroticism are differentially associated with positive and negative affect. Extraversion appears to be closely related to positive affect whilst neuroticism is closely related to negative affect.

In fact this finding is hardly surprising when one considers the component traits of the two personality dimensions. Extraversion refers to the traits of sociability, liveliness, activity, assertiveness, sensation-seeking and being carefree. Neuroticism refers to the traits of anxiousness, depression, feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, and tension (Eysenck 1985). Clearly, these descriptions strongly resemble descriptions of positive and negative affect and this raises a question as to whether the finding is simply a methodological artefact or (worse still) a conceptual tautology. (ie, that Costa & McCrae were simply measuring two different constructs using similar instruments or measuring the same construct twice using different instruments). This point is pursued later, but Heady and Wearing (1989) have criticised Costa and McCrae's view on slightly different grounds.

These authors have attacked Costa and McCrae's position on the basis that it advocates a "pure" personality model of well-being, and therefore that if extraversion and neuroticism are highly stable and are powerful influences on

well-being, it follows that well-being should be highly stable, a suggestion which is not empirically sustainable.

This critique is off target for two reasons. Firstly, Costa and McCrae do not propose a "pure" personality model. They argue that mental health depends primarily, but not exclusively on personality. Secondly, and following from this, it is clear that if extraversion and neuroticism are highly stable and account for a large proportion (but not all) of the variance in mental health, we would expect mental health to be moderately stable (not highly stable). Heady and Wearing themselves state that this is indeed the case.

A second personality characteristic found in cross-sectional comparisons to be related to mental health is self-esteem (Diener, 1984). (Diener treats self-esteem as a personality characteristic as does Brockner (1988). Other authors (eg Schaufeli, 1987) have treated it as an aspect of mental health itself). However, the demonstrated relationship between mental health and self-esteem has frequently been only weak and some researchers have suggested that self-esteem in fact fluctuates, falling during periods of lower well-being and increasing in periods of greater psychological health (eg Laxer, 1964). This raises two important questions. Firstly, is the relationship between mental health and self-esteem, unidirectional or is it that self-esteem and mental health are mutually influencing variables? Secondly, can self-esteem be regarded as a stable personality characteristic or is it simply another measure of mental health? The balance of longitudinal evidence suggests that self-esteem is relatively stable, but may be affected to some degree by major life events (eg Eden, 1982; Brockner, 1988).

A third variable which has been found to be closely related to mental health is personal control. This refers to the extent to which an individual has a generalised belief that they are able to control or have influence over the

environment (Rotter, 1966). There is considerable evidence that the belief that the environment is controllable can have an influence on mental health (see Steptoe & Appels, 1989). Studies consistently show that feelings of controllability are associated with higher levels of mental health, but once again, the direction of causality has been a constant source of controversy within the literature.

As with self-esteem, it is far from clear that control is a stable variable, unaffected by environmental factors. In his series of studies on job features, Karasek (1979), for example treats control as a feature of the environment, referring to it as "job decision latitude". Treated in this way, we would expect it to vary over time and from situation to situation. However, Karasek employed self-rating measures of control and therefore it is unclear as to what extent control in this sense can be seen as a feature of the environment. To make matters even more complicated, other authors have used control neither as an individual difference predictor, variable nor as an environmental predictor, but as an outcome variable (eg Patton & Noller, 1984). This use of the variable would be consistent with the view noted earlier that autonomy/control is an aspect of mental health. Although there is considerable controversy over how control should be conceptualised, almost all authors agree that it is a fundamental aspect human experience which is very closely related to mental health.

One personality variable which has been recently linked to mental health in the field of stress research is that of negative affectivity (Watson & Pennebaker, 1989). Negative affectivity (henceforth NA) has been conceptualised by Watson and Clark (1984) as "the disposition to experience aversive emotional states" (p 465). The authors administered a number of pre-existing personality scales including measures of neuroticism, trait anxiety, and social desirability and found them to be highly intercorrelated. They suggested

that the scales were in fact measures of the same stable and pervasive trait which they labelled NA.

According to the authors, high NA individuals are more likely to experience significant levels of distress and dissatisfaction at all times and in any given situation. They are more introspective, dwell on their failures and shortcomings and also tend to focus on the negative side of others and the world in general. As a consequence, they have a less favourable self-view and are less satisfied with themselves and their lives.

As with the descriptions of neuroticism and extraversion given above, this description comes perilously close to dismantling the distinction between personality and mental health altogether. The relationship between negative affectivity and negative affect is (as one would expect, given the names) extremely close. However, Watson and Clark nevertheless maintain a conceptual distinction between disposition and mood:

"We are not arguing that high-NA individuals report a consistently high level of negative affect. Rather such individuals are, in any given situation, *more likely* to experience a significant level of distress" (p 466).

The authors also point out that NA is unrelated to the experience of joy, excitement or enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the distinction between more stable aspects of mental health and certain personality traits seems to be a very fine one. We shall return to this theme later in the thesis. In the meantime discussions over whether NA should be considered a "methodological nuisance" (Brief et al, 1988) akin to method variance or an important theoretical construct to be reckoned with, continue apace.

This very brief overview of research has only considered direct effects of personality variables on mental health. The role of such variables as moderators or mediators of the effects of other influences on mental health (eg Kobasa's (1982) "hardiness") will be discussed in the next chapter when I shall return to the research in the field of unemployment.

An important point arising from the discussion above concerns the distinction between personality constructs and dimensions of mental health. In the discussion of both neuroticism and negative affectivity the similarity between these constructs and descriptions of dimensions of mental health were noted. This seems to suggest that the distinction between personality and mental health is at best hazy, and at worst non-existent. For the time being it is sufficient to note that there is clearly considerable overlap between concepts which have traditionally been regarded as more stable aspects of mental health, and concepts which have traditionally been regarded as less stable aspects of personality. The importance of this point in the present context will become apparent later when a guiding framework for the empirical study is presented later in this chapter.

2.7 Conclusions

The issues raised in this chapter clearly have implications which extend far beyond the literature in the field of unemployment research. For this reason, I shall first address the general implications of the points raised for *all* research which is concerned with the investigation of different psychosocial and environmental influences on mental health, and then move on to the more specific implications for unemployment research.

2.7.1 General Conclusions

The arguments outlined above make it clear that it is extremely difficult to specify exactly what is meant by "mental health". However, although it is highly

problematic to define what mental health actually *is*, one thing that it certainly is *not* is a simple, unitary, undifferentiated construct. This type of conceptualisation may be empirically convenient, but it is not theoretically justifiable: mental health is a general rubric, not a unitary construct. A more complex and sophisticated analysis is required, which (minimally) takes into account the multifaceted nature of mental health. The notion of mental health, (like the notion of physical health) incorporates a number of diverse concepts which are themselves interlinked and which are related in complex ways to a myriad of exogenous and endogenous influencing factors.

The implications of this perspective for empirical practice in applied psychological studies of mental health (eg life events, psychotherapy, stress) are clear: No matter how sophisticated the measurement of socioenvironmental "predictor" variables in such research, the findings of these studies will be of limited value if the measurement of mental health itself is inadequate. Research which utilises generalised and nonspecific indices of mental health vastly oversimplifies reality. For example, one implication of a multidimensional conceptualisation is that individuals may be mentally healthy in some respects, but mentally unhealthy in others. Generalised, nonspecific indices of mental health are too crude to detect this type of intrapersonal specificity of experience. Unitary operationalisations of mental health will also mask differences between individuals because a heterogeneous array of different dimensions of mental health are combined within the same measure. For example, one effect of using a single measure to tap a variety of different dimensions may be a failure to discriminate between on the one hand, individuals who score at, or near the mean on all dimensions and on the other, those who score at opposite extremes on different dimensions, (since these extreme scores will tend to cancel each other out). It is therefore essential that operationalisations of mental health should incorporate separate measures of different, theoretically derived dimensions of psychological functioning. (Even

then it seems likely that such measures will be (at best) rather crude approximations of the underlying complexity.)

2.7.2 Specific Implications for Unemployment Research

The general conclusions drawn above apply with equal force to research in the field of unemployment. An oversimplistic conceptualisation of mental health has been a hallmark of the research in this area, bringing with it specific, and serious consequences. Three general difficulties were identified at the beginning of this chapter: terminological confusion is rife with the consequence that the results of different empirical studies are difficult to compare; nonspecific measures of mental health are widely deployed which may partly explain the difficulty in accounting for more than weak associations between employment status and mental health; and the results of empirical studies lack depth or meaning.

With the benefit of a clearer understanding of the complexity and multidimensionality of mental health, these general difficulties can now be elaborated upon through the identification of some more specific problems and limitations.

First, and perhaps most importantly, the consistent finding throughout this area: that unemployment is associated with higher levels of "psychological distress" becomes difficult to interpret. For example, does this reflect a general and pervasive effect which operates across all dimensions of mental health? Do individuals experience lower levels of affective well-being, competence, control, aspiration, and integrated functioning? Or is only one (or some) of these (perhaps affective well-being) affected? At present we simply do not know the answers to these questions.

A second issue concerns the interpretation of the generally accepted proposition that unemployment has different effects for different individuals. Initially, this notion seems relatively straightforward and uncontentious. But in what ways do the experiences of individuals vary? The idea that mental health is multidimensional raises the possibility that these variations are not simply *quantitative* differences in the degree of distress, but that they may also represent *qualitative* differences in the type of distress. For example, do some unemployed individuals suffer in terms of lowered levels of perceived control whilst others suffer in terms of reduced affective well-being?

A third issue relates to the lack of sophistication of current explanations of the mental health effects of unemployment. At present the dominant theoretical accounts attempt to explain these effects in terms of environmental features ("vitamins" or "latent functions"). But because mental health has been conceptualised in such a shallow and unidimensional way it is difficult to know how the different "vitamins" or "latent functions" might relate to mental health. All it is possible to say is that various vitamins/latent functions lead to higher or lower levels of mental health. Current thinking in the field about these relationships is along the simplistic lines that "more is better". In other words, greater availability of, or access to, the vitamins/latent functions is associated with "higher levels" of mental health. But this type of analysis is both shallow and restricted. If it is accepted that mental health is a multidimensional construct, then a host of new questions and possibilities arise. For example, does a lack of activity lead to reduced competence, control or affective well-being? Or does it affect all three?

These three examples illustrate how a lack of attention to the conceptualisation of mental health in both theoretical and empirical research has created problems and imposed limitations on attempts to understand the experience of unemployment. The prescription for these afflictions is, as stated

above, more careful conceptualisation of mental health. Within this, there is a need for explicit recognition of the multidimensionality of mental health, which should in turn be reflected in separate operationalisations of different dimensions of mental health.

But this prescription alone is still insufficient to resolve the problems surrounding the treatment of mental health in the unemployment literature. The arguments put forward in this chapter make it clear that not only is mental health itself highly complex, but that the determinants of mental health are multifarious and that these operate in far more complex ways than has usually been acknowledged in empirical studies of unemployment. Indeed, it seems that it is often difficult to separate what mental health is from those factors which influence it. For example, one factor which was identified as being particularly closely related to, and difficult to separate from, mental health was personality. There is therefore a need for unemployment researchers to recognise more explicitly the complex nature of the relationships between the situational and individual determinants of mental health (of which employment status is only one) and to recognise the closeness of the relationship between personality and mental health. In empirical terms this recognition should take the form of multivariate studies which permit consideration of the relationships between these different factors. Clearly, it is not possible to consider all possible relationships between all influencing factors and all dimensions of mental health simultaneously. In order to explore these relationships it is necessary not only to select for investigation those influencing factors and dimensions of mental health which seem to be most relevant or important on theoretical and empirical grounds, but also to specify in advance the expected pattern of relationships between them. The next chapter is devoted to this task. I shall attempt to outline a tentative heuristic framework which will guide the empirical analyses in the present thesis.

CHAPTER 3: A GUIDING FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this chapter is to construct a theoretically-grounded model or conceptual framework which will serve as a heuristic aid to guide the empirical analyses in this thesis. This framework attempts to integrate a number of demographic, dispositional, behavioural and mental health variables which have been proposed in the unemployment literature as important factors in determining variations in the affective experience of unemployed people. Once this framework has been outlined, I shall, at the end of the chapter, provide a formal statement of the first aim of the thesis.

Before moving to the development of the framework itself, it is important to clarify at the outset that it is *not* intended to serve as an all-encompassing *theory* of the psychological effects of unemployment. Rather, it is (broadly speaking) a *model* which attempts to integrate a number of different ideas which have been put forward to explain variations in the psychological experience of unemployment. Insofar as it is a model rather than a theory, it is both narrower in its scope and more tentative in its claims than, for example, the theories proposed by Jahoda (1979) Warr (1987) and Fryer (1988) to explain the psychological effects of unemployment. Simon and Newell (1956) suggest that *models* may be distinguished from theories in the following ways: (a) They are useful rather than true - models are intended as heuristic aids rather than as complete descriptions; (b) they are less data sensitive; disconfirming evidence is damaging to a theory, but less so for a model; (c) they are more susceptible to type I errors, i.e. they are more liable to make false positive claims. Valentine (1982) has commented that in psychology, the term "model" has come to be used to refer to a particular sub-group of theories, those which employ *structural* explanations. These, she suggests, aim at describing the mechanisms or processes operating within the sphere of the phenomenon of interest.

I make these comments at this early stage to emphasise that the framework to be developed will be proposed in a tentative spirit, as a working tool with which to explore a limited set of putative relationships between different variables, rather than as a definitive, veridical and general account of the psychological effects of unemployment.

3.2 The Need for A Conceptual Framework

Why then, is a theoretically-grounded conceptual framework required? In the preceding chapters of this thesis, there have been three points at which I have argued that there is a desperate need for greater theoretical input and/or conceptual clarity in unemployment research. Firstly, I suggested that the empirical research literature on unemployment, and particularly the quantitative research literature, was theoretically impoverished. Although some theoretical accounts have been proposed to explain the psychological effects of unemployment, these have rarely been used to drive or guide empirical work.

Now, it might be argued that this reluctance to conduct theoretically-driven empirical work simply reflects a perception amongst researchers in the field that the existing theories are inadequate as a basis for empirical studies. But such a defence would be unconvincing: if this were the case, we might expect researchers to have advanced their own theories/models and used these as a basis for their empirical work. This however, has not happened in most instances. And indeed, even where there is some reason to suspect that there is some theoretical underpinning to the study, this theoretical foundation has rarely been made explicit. As a consequence, empirical work (particularly quantitative research) has been largely descriptive. Little attempt has been made to conduct work which is designed to explore the processes and mechanisms through which the psychological effects occur.

Secondly, I argued that within this area, investigation of individual variation in the experience of unemployment had progressed in a fragmented, unintegrated and disordered fashion, with different researchers pursuing different avenues of interest, often testing for the existence of simple bivariate relationships between a single dispositional variable and a single mental health outcome. The dearth of theoretically grounded, multivariate studies means that currently we have little idea about how the different factors which have been suggested as being responsible for variation in the experience of unemployment (a) overlap and (b) vary systematically with each other.

Thirdly, I suggested that the conceptualisation of mental health within the unemployment literature was often either entirely lacking, or wildly oversimplistic. The conceptualisation of mental health as a simple unidimensional construct such as "distress" runs counter to almost all ideas of mental health which can be identified within the theoretical literature on the topic. This oversimplification has severely impeded investigation of both individual variation in the experience of unemployment and consideration of the mechanisms through which unemployment affects mental health.

In order to rectify these weaknesses, there is a need for research which:

(a) Draws closer links between theoretical and empirical work, either through the direct empirical testing of available theories, or by using elements or derivatives of these existing theories to guide empirical research.

(b) Adopts a more careful approach to conceptualisation of the variables under consideration (with particular emphasis on the conceptualisation of mental health).

and

(c) Utilises a coherent framework within which to consider the effects of different variables contemporaneously.

The present chapter represents an attempt to move in a small way towards these objectives. I shall outline a tentative conceptual framework which, it is hoped, will facilitate the exploration not only of individual variation in the experience of unemployment, but also the understanding of the processes and mechanisms which determine the affective experience of people participating on intervention programmes and in employment. In order to develop this framework I shall first review previous models/frameworks of a similar type, then specify and discuss the variables to be incorporated, and finally propose a model to integrate these variables.

3.3 Previous Models for The Examination of Individual Responses to Unemployment

The present study is not the first to propose the use of an explicitly stated conceptual framework for the examination of variations in the experience of unemployment. A small number of previous authors have adopted a broadly similar approach and these contributions provide a useful point of comparison for the present task of model construction. In particular, these studies may provide an indication of potential difficulties and/or may point the way towards specific structures, variables or concepts which seem to be helpful. Although the preceding chapters in this thesis have already identified certain issues which seem to deserve theoretical (and empirical) attention (eg individual differences, personality, proactivity, the relationships between variables, mental health), it is worth examining previous contributions at this point to determine whether they confirm or contradict the arguments advanced thus far in this thesis.

These previous studies are similar to each other (and to the present study) insofar as they utilise models which can be depicted in terms of boxes containing a number of different variables and connected by arrows representing causal relationships, to describe the different influences on affective outcomes. However, it is important to bear in mind that these models are not entirely comparable. They were developed in order to achieve different objectives and therefore can be expected to vary somewhat in terms of both structure and content. The objectives of the different studies varied from attempts to provide a general taxonomic overview of the area, to attempts to develop a very specific guiding heuristic for empirical work. In what follows however, I shall evaluate the utility of these previous models with the latter aim in mind since this is the objective in the current context. The models to be considered are presented in papers by: Fineman (1979), Payne and Hartley (1987), DeFrank & Ivancevich (1986), and Stafford, Jackson & Banks (1980). I shall give a brief account of each before comparing them and discussing their implications for the present task.

Fineman's (1979) model, drawn from the literature in the field of stress research, proposes that stress during unemployment arises from the individual's failure to master self-threatening problems. Stress is viewed as a psychological state of experienced high anxiety, induced by the perception of environmental demands as a threat and the inability of the individual to deal with these threats through behavioural coping strategies. The perception of the demands as a threat, and the coping strategies used are both seen as being influenced by personality. Three categories of behavioural approaches to dealing with threat (coping strategies) are discussed: Inaction, avoidance and confrontation. Of these three, the only one which is viewed as an effective long-term strategy (in that it leads to mastery and learning) is confrontation. Fineman uses the model as a framework to analyse qualitative and quantitative data derived from a study of 25 unemployed managers. He claims

that the model can be used to explain variations in experienced "stress", but this claim is (as we shall see below) somewhat debatable.

Payne and Hartley (1987) also used a model developed in the field of stress research to explain the affective experience of unemployment. In some ways the model is similar to Fineman's, but the model is much more specific and is tested in a quantitative empirical study. Payne and Hartley suggest that the perceived stressfulness of the environment is a function of the relative balance between the problems facing the unemployed and the degree of support and perceived opportunities available to the individual. Like Fineman, they argue that personality influences both the perceptions of the environment and current affect, but unlike Fineman (who only incorporated a measure of trait anxiety in his empirical study) they incorporated three measures of personality.

Two of these have already been discussed at some length in this thesis, namely perceived control and employment commitment. The third was intended to measure coping tactics. Payne and Hartley also incorporated another block of variables which were assumed to influence both perceptions of the environment and current affect. These conditioning variables included social class, financial position and physical health. A final aspect of the model which is important in the present context was that the authors included a number of different measures of current affect, such as anxiety, depression, strain and pleasure.

In their empirical study, the authors found that when the conditioning variables (financial worries, income change, health etc) were controlled for, there was no evidence that support or opportunities influenced anxiety or depression, but that perceived problems influenced both anxiety and depression. The study thus demonstrated the importance of taking financial circumstances and physical health into account in predicting current affect.

Two further findings which are particularly relevant in the present context are that (a) externality (control) was found to be a significant predictor of depression, even when perceptions of the environment were controlled for and (b) employment commitment, (contrary to previous findings) did *not* significantly add to the prediction of depression.

The third model to be considered here is that proposed by DeFrank and Ivancevich (1986). The focus of this model is much broader than that of either Fineman's or Payne and Hartley's, attempting as it does, to explain physical, social, behavioural and economic as well as psychological effects of job loss. Consequently, although the *structure* of this model is very straightforward, (it is linear) its *content* is far more detailed and extensive than that of the previous two. There are, for example more than 50 variables included in the model. The authors start with the organisational and individual risk factors for job loss, including company history, market factors, and the age, education, sex, race etc. of the individual concerned.

A combination of these factors is said to determine the potential for job loss. The immediate impact of job loss is described in terms of loss of money, change in status and change in temporal structure. Four sets of moderating factors; personal, social, economic, and job-related (including for example, personality, social support, economic climate and job involvement respectively) are seen as determinants of the individual's perceptions of job loss, and these in turn influence the individual's coping attempts. The success or otherwise of these coping attempts determines the outcomes of unemployment for the individual on the dimensions mentioned above (physical, social, behavioural economic and psychological). The authors do not report any empirical work based on this model.

The final model to be considered here is that proposed by Stafford, Jackson and Banks (1980) as a framework for the analysis of empirical data from a study of 647 young people. The authors were interested in the factors which predicted unemployment and psychological well-being. The framework takes the form of a block recursive model with four blocks. The model is linear, and the variables in each block are assumed to *influence* the variables in each of the subsequent blocks, but they are not assumed to *be influenced by* the variables in subsequent blocks. In the first block are the demographic variables sex, social class, and ethnic group. In the second block are the variables father's employment status; qualifications; and work involvement. The third block represents the respondent's employment status; either employed,(including those participating on government schemes), and unemployed. The fourth block contains a single measure of mental health, the General Health Questionnaire. The empirical evidence partially supported the model. Young people with an unemployed father, fewer qualifications, low work motivation and West Indian ethnic background were more at risk of being unemployed. Those who were unemployed, from lower social classes, and female experienced lower levels of mental health. Work involvement moderated the relationship between employment status and mental health.

I shall now turn to compare these models and subsequently to discuss the implications of their similarities, differences, potential strengths and weaknesses for the present task. I shall start by considering DeFrank and Ivancevich's model since this is by far the most general and broad ranging of the four. I then contrast this with the model proposed by Stafford, Jackson and Banks since this is at the opposite extreme insofar as it is highly specific and restricted in its focus. I then turn to consider the models proposed by Fineman and by Payne and Hartley.

As noted earlier, of the four models, DeFrank and Ivancevich's is by far the most inclusive, incorporating an enormous number of variables. It is certainly admirable that the authors have recognised the wide range of factors which are at work in determining the overall experience of unemployment. However, it is difficult to imagine how this model could be effectively applied either for scientific or practical purposes. It is so broad in its scope and yet so simplistic in its structure that it contributes little to the understanding of unemployment, would have limited heuristic value for practitioners, and could not serve as a stimulus for empirical research. In essence, the problem with this model is that it is so vague and flexible that it offers little guidance about the selection of research questions, could generate no testable hypotheses in its present form, and could be used to "explain" almost *any* research finding. The underlying reason for this seems to be that the elements of the model are defined very broadly, but the structure of the model is extremely simple. Each of the boxes in the model contains a huge number of variables and yet each box is connected to the preceding and following box by a single arrow.

Thus the model could be interpreted as providing either (a) very few, poorly defined relational statements or (b) several thousands of specific relational statements. Even within the boxes there are considerable weaknesses in the conceptualisation of, and distinctions drawn between variables. For example, within the box entitled "effects" there are six sub-boxes each containing several variables. Two of these are entitled "psychological" (incorporating boredom, self-esteem, life satisfaction) and "emotional" (incorporating anxiety, frustration, depression etc) respectively. It is difficult to know on what grounds the authors make this distinction, between "psychological" and "emotional" factors) and they offer none. In the light of these comments it can hardly be seen as surprising that the authors themselves conducted no empirical work.

As already suggested, in some respects the model offered by Stafford, Jackson and Banks (1980) contrasts sharply to that proposed by DeFrank and Ivancevich. The model is very specific, the structure is clearly defined and it incorporates only eight variables. The specificity of the model is at the same time both its greatest strength and its most important limitation. It is a strength in that the relationships between variables are clearly defined and are therefore testable (within the constraints imposed by the design of the study and the assumptions made by the authors). It is a weakness in that the model only incorporates a small number of the factors which might be expected to influence psychological health and this introduces a limitation in terms of the generalisability of the model (for example, there is no mention of personality or dispositional variables). The testability of the model is enhanced by the fact that the authors clearly commit themselves on the assumed primary direction of causality between variables, but once again, this also introduces what is arguably an important limitation, since several of the relationships could be mutually causative. (eg employment status and work involvement). A final problem with this model is that mental health is conceptualised (and operationalised) as a nonspecific, unitary dimension. In the light of the discussion in the preceding chapter of this thesis, this conceptualisation cannot be justified on theoretical grounds. In general then, the main strengths of the model are its clear structure and the definition of variables (except mental health). The main weaknesses of the model are its limited scope and the simplistic conceptualisation of mental health.

Turning to Fineman's model, we lurch once again towards generality, vagueness and flexibility. Like DeFrank and Ivancevich's model, Fineman's is very broad in its scope, and nonspecific in its conceptualisation (the different influences on mental health are described in very general terms). However, unlike DeFrank and Ivancevich, Fineman does provide a model which offers some genuine attempt to explain the processes and mechanisms involved in

the experience of unemployment, and the ways in which the different factors which determine this experience are interrelated. One particularly positive feature of this model which distinguishes it from both DeFrank and Ivancevich's and Stafford, Jackson and Banks' is that it allows for mutually causative relationships between variables; by incorporating feedback loops in the model. It seems probable that this slightly more sophisticated approach increases the empirical validity of the model, but this veridicality is bought at the expense of testability and potential for hypothesis generation. Indeed, this problem is exacerbated by the complexity of the structure of the model (there are 23 variables connected by 25 arrows). Nonetheless, Fineman's work is significant in the present context in that it emphasises the importance of recognising individual differences in: (a) perceptions of the environment, (b) personality and (c) behavioural responses in attempts to explain the psychological effects of unemployment. It is the relationships between particular aspects of these broad categories that constitute a central concern of this thesis.

One final feature of Fineman's model which can only be seen as a serious weakness, is his use of the concept of "stress" as an outcome variable. Even a cursory glance at the literature in the field of stress research reveals that this concept is riddled with empirical, methodological and conceptual difficulties (Briner 1991) Indeed, it could be argued that the concept of "stress" is even more problematic than the concept of mental health. There is little agreement within the stress literature about how to define stress, whether it is located in the person or the environment, and how to measure it.

Payne and Hartley's model combines some of the best features of the previous models, but it still contains several limitations. The elements of the model are for the most part clearly conceptualised (and operationalised) and the structure of the model (and particularly the relationships between variables) is

reasonably well explicated. The model avoids the contrasting risks associated with excessive complexity (untestability/lack of clarity) or excessive simplicity (ungeneralisability/inaccuracy). One limitation of the model lies in the proposed nature of the relationships between variables. Like Fineman, Payne and Hartley acknowledge that several of the causal relationships are in reality likely to be reciprocal (they use double headed arrows to illustrate this). As noted with respect to Fineman's model, this can be seen as both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength in terms of its likely veridicality, but a weakness in that it makes the model difficult to test. Indeed, the authors recognise this weakness, and in their empirical study, they assume a single *primary* direction of causality and do not test for mutual influence between variables. A second limitation of the model relates to the categorisation of the different variables into blocks. In particular, some of the variables which appear in the block entitled "conditioning variables" could arguably be viewed as outcome variables (eg financial worries, reported health) or as coping tactics (eg financial behaviours). Nonetheless, the research demonstrates the value of using an explicit framework for the guidance of empirical analyses of self-report data on the psychological experience of unemployment. This enables a structured consideration of the interrelationships between different dispositional, moderating and mediating variables and their relationships with mental health variables.

Several general points can be drawn from this discussion of the four models. Firstly, it is clear that there is a need in constructing such a model to strike a compromise between including too many and too few variables. Of course, the number of variables included will depend partly on the purpose the model is intended to serve. A model which is intended to provide a taxonomic overview of the experience of unemployment will need to recognise the extensive range of factors which can influence the mental health of unemployed people, but this is likely to make the model difficult to apply as a tool to guide empirical

work. A model which is intended to serve as an guiding heuristic for empirical work will need to incorporate a restricted range of variables, but this may limit the explanatory domain or generalisability of the model.

Secondly, it is clear that models which incorporate a large number of variables but specify only a few relational statements (arrows in pictorial form) run the risk of serious oversimplification in their representation of reality. On the other hand, models which incorporate only a few variables but specify many relational statements run the risk of unnecessary complexity. There is clearly therefore a need to find a reasonable balance between the number of variables included and the number of relational statements suggested.

A third point is partly related to the previous two points and concerns the practice of grouping variables within boxes. The underlying rationale for this practice is rarely made explicit, but it would seem to be a device which is designed to maximise clarity and ease of understanding whilst maintaining accuracy and parsimony. The justification for grouping variables in this way seems to be that: (a) variables within a box are similar in some way, and (b) that they relate in broadly similar ways to the variables in other boxes. Although this seems reasonable in principle, there is a need to consider carefully the assumptions being made when actually constructing the model in practice. One potential risk associated with incautious grouping of variables is that the boxes become too large, containing too many variables which are not genuinely similar and which do not relate to the variables in connected boxes in the same way. Another possible consequence is that the model may give the appearance of possessing greater coherence than is actually the case.

Fourthly, loose and/or broad conceptualisation of variables will produce a model which is so vague and flexible that it becomes both difficult to understand and/or almost meaningless. This type of model can be used to

explain almost any eventuality or experience, and in this sense it is not clear whether it explains anything at all.

Fifthly, it is clear that specification of the nature of proposed causal relationships between variables is inevitably fraught with difficulty. Where unidirectional causal relationships are postulated, the empirical validity of the model is likely to be undermined, (it is widely accepted that most relationships between socioenvironmental variables and individual personality/mental health are likely to be reciprocal) whereas if bidirectional relationships are proposed, considerable methodological complications are likely to ensue. (Note that this problem is reduced, but not eliminated by the use of longitudinal designs; see Jackson 1982 for a discussion of this issue).

Sixthly, bearing in mind the comments made in the previous chapter with respect to mental health, it is clearly unsatisfactory to deploy nonspecific, undifferentiated outcome measures of mental health, stress etc. However sophisticated the model is in terms of its specification of "predictor" variables, its value will be limited if insufficient attention is paid to the conceptualisation of outcome variables.

What are the implications of this discussion of previous models for the present task of model building? I shall outline these in two broad categories. First I shall briefly discuss some general issues concerning structure, the number of variables to be included, and the conceptualisation of variables. I shall then turn to some more specific points relating to the themes to be developed and variables to be included.

Firstly, one of the clearest general issues to emerge from the discussion of the models above is that the inclusion of a large number of variables makes the model unwieldy and difficult to deploy as a tool for guiding empirical work. As

one of the main functions of the current model is to serve as a guiding heuristic for empirical analysis, I shall restrict the scope of the model to the consideration of a limited range of variables which have been identified as being important in the theoretical literature on this topic. The range of variables specified by, for example, DeFrank and Ivancevich is far too great for the current purpose of guiding empirical analysis.

Secondly, it is clear that very broad or loose conceptualisation of variables will also hamper empirical work. For example, one important effect of loose conceptualisation is to make operationalisation difficult. The variables to be included in the model therefore need to be conceptualised sufficiently narrowly so as to facilitate operationalisation (as in the models proposed by Stafford, Jackson and Banks and by Payne and Hartley).

Thirdly, (and again relating to the intended application of the framework as a tool to assist empirical work), the causal relationships between these variables need to be defined in a way which enhances empirical utility rather than simply veridicality. In practice this means that I shall make assumptions about the *primary* direction of causal influence whilst recognising that such assumptions may be useful rather than true. (All four of the models above make such assumptions in practice, although Fineman, and Payne & Hartley incorporate the notion of mutual causality in their diagrammatic representations).

Fourthly, I shall avoid the adoption of a simplistic, undifferentiated and unitary conceptualisation of mental health (following Payne and Hartley and DeFrank and Ivancevich, but in contrast to Fineman and Stafford, Jackson and Banks).

Turning to more *specific* issues, with respect to the content of the models, a fundamental question we might wish to ask is which variables are important or unimportant? Which should be included or excluded? Although it would be useful to be able to answer these questions definitively, this is not possible for several reasons. Not only is there a plethora of potentially important variables from which to choose, but the selections made by these authors will partly be determined by their different objectives in developing the models and by their personal interpretations of the existing literature in the field. Moreover, it is not always easy to discern from the studies which of the variables or themes the authors considered to be most important. And it may be difficult to decide whether the importance or irrelevance of variables should be judged in terms of their claimed theoretical significance or in terms of the empirical evidence from the study. In short there is no single definitive criterion available on which to judge "importance", and even if there were, it is by no means certain that it could be easily applied.

For all these reasons, the models discussed here cannot provide straightforward and definitive answers to questions about the relative importance or otherwise of different variables. These issues will be covered in more detail in the next section (where I shall return to the wider literature on unemployment and discuss the selection of variables to be included in the present framework). Nonetheless, some of the themes raised by the models discussed above do bear comparison with certain issues already raised as being theoretically important and central to the concerns of this thesis. It would seem therefore to be worthwhile to consider how these authors have dealt with some of these themes before moving on to the development of the present model itself.

Perhaps the most basic theme common to all four of the models described above is the widely accepted but frequently overlooked idea that "the

unemployed" are not a homogeneous group of individuals. Demographic differences in age, gender, social class, race, and family situation are recognised (to varying degrees) within all of the models as potential influences on the experience of unemployment. DeFrank and Ivancevich cover these differences more extensively than the other authors, although it is within the model proposed by Stafford, Jackson and Banks that they are perhaps accorded the most central role. Although these demographic features are of interest in their own right, it is worth remembering that they may sometimes be more helpfully regarded as indicators of many other, psychological characteristics or processes, standing as "proxy" measures of the latter. Thus, whilst on the one hand they may be seen as rather crude indices of individual differences, on the other it might be argued that since they stand for a vast range of variables, not all of which can be measured, it is important to control for them in empirical analyses.

A second theme which is discernable within three of the models (it is not considered within the model adopted by Stafford, Jackson and Banks), is that even *within* groups of unemployed people which are relatively homogeneous in demographic terms, there will be wide variation in the experience of unemployment. This variation might be viewed as a function of more "psychological" differences which are associated with, for example, differing perceptions of the environment rather than simply as a function of "objective" environmental circumstances. The models explicitly recognise that these perceptions may be influenced by personality traits, a point which accords with the earlier discussions of the role of personality in determining affective experience in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis. Payne and Hartley in particular incorporate the dispositional characteristics of externality (control) and employment commitment, two variables which have been discussed at some length in earlier chapters, whilst Fineman focusses on trait anxiety, fear of failure, self-concept and self-esteem. DeFrank and Ivancevich also consider a

personality constellation considered earlier, namely "hardiness" as well as "type A" (job focussed, hostile, time urgent and hard-driving) disposition.

However, it is still another feature of these models which is perhaps of greatest significance for the present study. This is the contention (discernable most clearly within the models of Fineman, and DeFrank and Ivancevich) that personality is likely to influence coping strategies. This idea is consistent with the arguments put forward by Fryer (1988) within the theoretical unemployment literature concerning "proactivity". Fryer suggests that proactive individuals will be able to develop coping strategies which will enable them to deal more effectively with the demands and problems of unemployment. As will become apparent, this notion is one of the central themes within the model to be developed below.

Another feature which is worth drawing attention to here, is DeFrank and Ivancevich's distinction between different types of coping attempts. Following the work of Lazarus and his colleagues in the stress literature (eg Lazarus and Folkman 1984) they distinguish between problem focussed (behavioural) coping and emotion focussed (cognitive) coping. The former refers to attempts to act upon the environment to bring about changes which will ameliorate the problem causing distress. The latter refers to efforts directed at controlling or regulating the cognitive or emotional response to the situation. (Payne and Hartley also make this distinction, but in their empirical analysis the two scales measuring the different types of coping are combined). This distinction will also be used to inform the development of the heuristic framework in the present study.

Finally, all four models assume current affect (including mental health) to be (broadly speaking) an *outcome*. I shall follow this trend, whilst at the same time recognising that current affect may itself influence both perceptions of

the environment and the coping strategies which individuals adopt. This circularity in the pattern of causal influence is recognised in the non-recursive models proposed by both Fineman, and Payne and Hartley, but is specifically excluded in the linear models of Stafford, Jackson and Banks and DeFrank and Ivancevich. However, as I have already pointed out, for the purposes of empirical analyses, Payne and Hartley assume a single primary direction of causal influence which treats current affect as an outcome.

3.4 The Variables to be Included in The Present Framework

I now turn to a discussion of the variables to be incorporated within the heuristic framework for the present study. As I have already argued, there are many variables which could be selected for investigation and there can be no unequivocal criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of particular variables within such a model. Nonetheless, there is clearly a need for some general guiding principles which can help in deciding which classes of variables to include. In the present case the framework was developed specifically to facilitate the investigation of the relationships between a number of variables which have been proposed in the unemployment literature as important factors in determining *variations* in the affective experience of unemployed people. Thus, some of the variables within the framework were ones which have already received attention within this literature (but which hitherto have *typically*, though not always, been investigated in an ad hoc manner rather than within a coherent conceptual framework).

But this was not the only objective in developing the heuristic framework. A second aim falls within the same broad area, (of individual differences in the experience of unemployment) but is more specific, and linked to the theoretical rather than the empirical literature on unemployment. The underlying theoretical drive for the framework was the notion initially introduced to the unemployment literature by Fryer and Payne (1984) and

subsequently developed by Fryer (eg 1988a, 1988b) of "proactivity" or "agency". Although this idea not a new one within psychology (similar notions can be found in the work of DeCharms 1968; White 1959; and Allport 1961 amongst others), its theoretical significance within the unemployment literature lies in its shift of emphasis away from environmental circumstances, and towards individual characteristics (and particularly personality) as determinants of the experience of unemployment. At the heart of this notion is the suggestion that certain individuals are likely to be dispositionally better equipped to cope with the problems, difficulties and constraints presented by unemployment. Thus, some of the variables included were ones which had not yet been extensively investigated within the unemployment literature, but which might reasonably be considered to be potential elements of the wider construct of "proactivity".

A third objective in developing a guiding framework was to extend the domain of interest beyond the type of simple descriptive analysis which has characterised much of the literature in this area to date. In other words, the intention was to attempt to shed some light on the processes and mechanisms through which unemployment impacts upon the mental health of individuals who are not currently in employment.

Finally, (and linked to the issue of considering the idea of proactivity in unemployment). I hope to draw (for the reasons outlined earlier) somewhat closer links between theoretical and empirical approaches to understanding the psychological experience of unemployment than have existed in the past. Whilst these ideas guided the choice of variables in general terms, as will become apparent, there are more specific reasons underlying the selection of particular variables. These will be elaborated upon as each variable is discussed in turn.

Before discussing the variables in depth, I shall provide a brief overview of them all. In total there were ten variables. Two of these were demographic variables, (age and gender); four were dispositional characteristics, (employment commitment, work commitment, growth needs strength, and self motivation); two were mediating variables (activity and perceived control) and finally two were mental health "outcome" variables (affective well-being and perceived competence).

Age

Although research findings concerning the relationship between age and mental health amongst the general population are confusing, age has consistently been found to be an important factor in moderating the experience of unemployment. There is extensive evidence that age is curvilinearly associated with psychological health amongst unemployed samples, with middle aged people experiencing lower levels of health than either younger or older groups. (eg Daniel, 1974). As discussed in Chapter 1, this finding is usually interpreted in terms of the greater financial commitments and responsibilities of the middle aged group, but some researchers (eg Warr & Jackson, 1984) have found that age is still related to mental health even when the effects of income change have been partialled out. Such findings seem to suggest that additional explanations are needed to account for the age differences in reported levels of mental health. For example it may be that coping strategies, personal values and expectations vary with age (Diener, 1984) and that it is these differences which account for the association between age and mental health within unemployed samples.

Gender

In the general mental health literature women consistently report higher levels of distress than men and these differences are greatest for comparisons

between married people (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). One explanation of this difference focusses on the effects of employment and traditional gender roles within the family. The traditional male role of breadwinner is seen as a greater source of both valued activity and feelings of mastery than the traditional female role of housewife. This explanation is consistent with the findings that the gender differences are reduced when women are employed (eg Kessler & McCrae, 1982) and that as women's employment has increased, gender differences in reported mental health have reduced (McLanahan & Glass, 1985).

However, the findings from the unemployment literature create a confused picture. Registered unemployed men and women experience similar levels of distress (i.e higher than employed groups) but there are no differences between the distress scores of employed and nonemployed groups of women with children (Warr & Parry, 1982). One possible explanation of this finding is that parenting can offer some of the psychological benefits usually associated with employment, such as time structuring, a "legitimate" social role, enforced activity and goals beyond those of the individual (Jahoda, 1979). But this explanation ignores the fact that parenting does *not* provide one of the main benefits of employment, namely an income. Since the availability of money itself might be expected to affect mental health, the "alternative social role" explanation for this finding would seem to be at best incomplete.

Clearly the moderating influence of gender on well-being is highly complex and empirical evidence is difficult to interpret. In order to clarify the relationships between gender and mental health, gender needs to be considered in multivariate analyses alongside possible mediating variables. Rosenfield (1989), for example, has suggested that traditional gender roles are associated with lower levels of perceived control amongst women, although the implications of this suggestion for the experience of unemployed women

are unclear. Leana and Feldman (1991) in a study of unemployed men and women found no significant differences between males and females in terms of mental health, but did find that men and women coped with job loss in different ways. Men relied more on problem-focused activities such as job search, whilst women relied more on symptom-focused activities such as seeking social support.

Employment Commitment

As discussed in Chapter 1, employment commitment as a psychological risk factor has attracted much more detailed attention than any other in the unemployment literature. This dispositional variable has consistently been found to be associated with mental health amongst unemployed groups (eg Jackson, Stafford, Banks & Warr, 1983). Unemployed individuals who are strongly committed to being in paid employment tend to experience lower levels of psychological health than those who are less committed to employment. In itself this empirical finding is not very surprising: From a critical perspective it might be regarded as a scientifically phrased statement of the obvious. (The more an individual wants something, the more distressed they will be if they are unable to secure it).

However, one aspect of this research which does have potentially interesting implications is the suggestion that employment commitment is an individual characteristic which is relatively stable across situations and over time (see Chapter 3). Moreover, these levels of commitment appear in general to be very high. Most operationalisations of employment commitment produce highly positively skewed distributions (Fryer 1988). In other words, the large majority of individuals seem to be strongly locked into a commitment to having a paid job and they maintain this commitment even during periods of unemployment.

Thus any suggestion that employment commitment might fluctuate with a self-serving bias (increasing when individuals are employed and decreasing when they are unemployed) would seem to be precluded. This is interesting because in some senses it might be considered much more psychologically adaptive for individuals to defensively re-adjust (reduce) their commitment to employment during unemployment. (Although of course *total* disengagement might interfere with job search motivation). Indeed this type of defensive cognitive strategy is precisely what Festinger (1957) means when he refers to "dissonance reduction" and Lazarus and his colleagues (eg Lazarus & Launier 1978) have termed "emotion-focussed coping".

This then raises the question of why such cognitive defence strategies are not widespread among unemployed samples and why, on the contrary, that in general individuals maintain a strong commitment to employment even though this may be harmful to psychological health. There seem to at least two possible types of explanation for this. The first of these relates to the social and cultural significance attached to the employment role in contemporary Western society. As many authors have pointed out, (eg. Fagin and Little, 1984; Hartley, 1980; Hayes & Nutman, 1981; Jahoda, 1979; Naylor & Senior, 1988) the belief that employment is socially and morally desirable is deeply rooted within the collective consciousness of Western societies. Hayes and Nutman (1981) for example write: "The protestant ethic lives on in secularised form, insofar as the prevalent cultural norms attribute status and dignity to the worker, who is seen as a fully-fledged and contributing member of society, and denies the same things to the non-worker" (p.4). Clearly, this prevailing societal norm is likely to exert considerable social pressure on the individual to be personally committed to employment, even if this is in some ways maladaptive or harmful to psychological health. As Hartley (1980) has pointed out, being employed is a moral imperative for the majority of adults and there are few alternative roles which escape censure.

However, this is not the only possible explanation for sustained commitment to employment on the part of unemployed individuals. A second explanation focusses less on social/moral pressure and more on the potential benefits of employment for individuals themselves. (Of course, it is important to acknowledge that the two are not unconnected - social approval itself might be viewed as a personal benefit which stems from the high value society places on employment). Broadly speaking, these benefits may be regarded as falling into two categories; the financial benefit of earning a wage, and the non-financial satisfactions (achievement, advancement, recognition responsibility) or benefits (time structure, opportunities for social interaction etc) linked to involvement in work activity itself.

Although these different aspects of employment have been discussed at some length within the theoretical unemployment literature, (eg Jahoda 1979) their possible role as antecedents and/or components of employment commitment has not been investigated in any depth by empirical workers. Indeed, rather than following up the finding that unemployed individuals retain their high levels of commitment to employment by asking why this is the case, (ie what lies behind this strong commitment; why individuals are so strongly locked into having a job) empirical workers have treated this finding as though it required no further explication. Moreover, this omission has been compounded by the fact that researchers have treated the substantive finding that employment commitment is associated with lower levels of mental health as an explanation in itself. Consequently, not only does employment commitment, though widely deployed as a variable within empirical studies, continue to be a relatively unelaborated, shallow, and theoretically sterile concept, but also, the central finding (that employment commitment is associated with mental health) becomes difficult to interpret in any meaningful way.

In the present study I shall attempt, somewhat cautiously, to tackle some aspects of these difficulties by exploring the construct of employment commitment through an empirical consideration of its role in relation to a number of other variables, some of which are expected to overlap conceptually with employment commitment. It is hoped that this will assist in explicating the reasons behind the apparently pervasive influence of employment commitment on mental health amongst unemployed groups. In particular I shall attempt to compare and contrast the role of employment commitment with the role of another, closely related putative variable; work commitment. This idea is explored further below.

Work Commitment

Hartley (1980) is one of several psychologists and sociologists who have pointed out that the terms "employment" and "work", though commonly used interchangeably in everyday language, are not in fact synonymous. Employment typically refers to a contractual exchange relationship in which money changes hands in return for tasks undertaken. Work on the other hand usually refers to an activity for a purpose beyond that of its own execution (Parker, 1983). Thus the term work may cover variety of activities which might be performed either within or outside of employment. Despite repeated calls for social scientists to take heed of this conceptual distinction, many researchers continue to use the two terms interchangeably (eg Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989).

This issue has been recognised as being of particular significance in the theoretical unemployment literature because the common language usage of "work" to mean "employment" may carry with it the implication that individuals who are unemployed cannot be working. Failure to make this conceptual distinction may therefore lead to inadvertent reinforcement of stereotypes of the unemployed as lazy or "workshy" through the implicit suggestion that

unemployed people are not (or cannot) be involved in activity which would be regarded as useful or productive. Moreover, if engagement in purposeful activity (ie. work) of some form is regarded as essential to the maintenance of mental health, (see Chapter 2) then equating "work" with "employment" would lead to the conclusion that it is impossible for non-employed individuals to be mentally healthy. Such a suggestion cannot of course be sustained in the face of empirical evidence from the unemployment literature demonstrating that between 40% and 60% of unemployed people experience no debilitating psychological effects from job loss (Fineman 1983). It would also lead to the absurd conclusion that individuals such as, for example, full-time students and homemakers could not be mentally healthy.

However, despite the widespread acceptance of this distinction between work and employment within the theoretical unemployment literature, empirical workers have continued to conflate the two. The most blatant manifestation of this conflation is a continuing and blinkered focus on employment commitment as a dispositional moderator of unemployment related distress. In one sense this is of course understandable; employment is what unemployed individuals are lacking, and employment in any case incorporates work activity. But it is interesting and surprising, given the theoretical emphasis which has been placed on non-financial aspects of employment in the dominant Deprivation (Jahoda, 1979) and Vitamin models (Warr, 1987) of unemployment distress, that the single most studied dispositional characteristic in unemployment research continues to be employment commitment. This narrow perspective is perhaps even more surprising given the widespread acknowledgement that for many people (and particularly those at the bottom end of the labour market who are most at risk of becoming unemployed) there is a sharp distinction between the financial and non-financial attractiveness of employment; between the intrinsic satisfaction of the work itself and the extrinsic reward of a pay packet.

In the present study it was therefore hypothesised that a conceptual and empirical distinction could be made between work commitment and employment commitment. The former construct is intended to refer to a commitment to working hard (ie commitment to engaging in purposeful activity) irrespective of whether it is in a job or not. In this sense it may be seen as being similar to the notion of the protestant work ethic, (Blood, 1969) although there is not assumed to be any moral or religious dimension to the present construct.

There is some limited evidence that "proactive" individuals holding these sorts of values are better able to cope with the lack of opportunity for growth and development in the unemployed environment and therefore experience comparatively higher levels of mental health. For example, Starrin and Larson (1987) in a study of unemployed Swedish women, report that the individuals who coped best with unemployment were not committed to wage labour, but were committed to other personally meaningful activities. They describe this group as "refocusers" and comment: "Since the refocusers are not committed to wage labour and since they replace the loss of work with other meaningful activities, unemployment does not hit them hard" (p.168).

In their qualitative study of eleven "proactive" individuals who were coping particularly well with unemployment, Fryer & Payne (1984) claimed that their interviewees were relatively opposed to employment yet positively inclined towards work. They described work as "the vigorous execution of purposeful, unpaid activity" (p 285). In other words, they were claiming that their proactive sample had (in operational terms) low levels of employment commitment and high levels of work commitment.

The results of Fryer and Payne's study need to be interpreted cautiously because their sample was small and was selected precisely because the individuals were coping effectively with unemployment. It therefore remains to be seen whether these results are generalisable to a wider population. For example, it may be that a strong commitment to work activity acts as a protective factor for only a lucky few unemployed individuals who are able to realise that commitment in behavioural terms. Moreover, it may for example be that case that, it is only protective at very high levels of commitment. However, Evans (1986) in a study with a larger and more representative sample also found that unemployed people who were committed to, and engaged in a "main" purposeful activity were particularly well protected from the detrimental effects of unemployment. This finding, however, is itself difficult to interpret. For example, one interpretation which would not be helpful in the present context might be that the commitment to the activity followed from the positive experience of its beneficial effects rather than preceding it.

But the idea that being committed to purposeful activity is beneficial for mental health is not of course restricted to the literature on unemployment. Goal theories of psychological health (eg Allport, 1961; Pervin, 1989), assert that happiness results from committing oneself to, and working towards, desired goals. Indeed, Scitovsky (1976) has suggested that working towards goals is more satisfying than is the actual attainment of those goals.

Palys and Little (1983) demonstrated that individuals committed to "personal projects" (an interrelated sequence of actions intended to achieve some personal goal) reported greater life satisfaction so long as the projects were relatively short-term and moderately difficult.

Weissman and Ricks (1966) found that people who were committed to goals and purposes tended to be happier than those with relatively fewer goals and purposes. More recently, Emmons (1986) has advocated a "personal strivings" approach to personality and subjective well-being. Personal strivings are viewed as the types of goals individuals try to achieve through their everyday behaviour. He found the degree of commitment and effort individuals expressed concerning their strivings were related to positive affect. Higher levels of positive affect were associated with greater commitment and greater degree of striving. Of course Emmons' subjects were involved in a variety of different activities, but what is interesting about the study is that the individuals attitudes and values regarding these strivings were predictive of well-being, irrespective of the nature of the strivings.

In the present context, a problem with much of this research is that it focusses on people who are employed. It is therefore difficult to know whether, within the impoverished environment of unemployment, a commitment to work activity would have similar beneficial effects on mental health. We might indeed find that individuals who are highly committed to purposeful activity, are able to find projects and tasks which they find involving and engaging, in which case we might expect them to experience higher levels of mental health than individuals who are not so committed. On the other hand, if these values and attitudes are routinely frustrated through lack of opportunity, resources, support or finance, it might be expected that they would experience worse levels of mental health. At present however, the balance of the scant empirical evidence available seems to suggest that even though the unemployed environment is in many ways psychologically disabling, it is still beneficial to be committed to work activity (Schaufeli 1987).

Self-Motivation

A frequently espoused theoretical position in the field of unemployment research is that unemployed people experience low levels of mental health partly because the unemployed environment offers little in the way of "traction", enforced activity or externally generated goals and purposes (eg Jahoda, 1982). The essence of this argument is that individuals in employment feel "pulled along" by external demands, the targets or objectives they have to meet and the roles to which they are assigned. In contrast, in the unemployed environment there is assumed to be little in the way of demands, objectives or other extrinsic motivators to encourage activity. As a consequence, (it is argued) unemployed people often feel purposeless and directionless, which in turn leads to further demotivation, listlessness and a lack of psychologically rewarding activity.

However, as Fryer (1988) has pointed out, this theoretical position, with its emphasis on external motivators, tends to imply a view of humans as essentially inert and passive, goaded into action only by external demands. In contrast, Fryer has preferred to regard humans as more proactive agents who are internally driven, self-directed shapers of their environments. In terms of the history of psychological thought, Fryer's position can be seen as being both retrospective and progressive. In some senses it is reminiscent of the views of William James (1904) concerning human will and volition, or the ideas of intrinsic motivation in Lewin's (1935) field theory, and Allport's (1961) "propriate striving". On the other hand it can be compared with recently popular ideas concerning goal concepts in personality and motivation (eg Pervin, 1989; Frese, Stewart & Hannover, 1987).

A central theme within all of these perspectives is the notion that individuals are self-motivated, proactive agents; they set their own goals, make their own plans and choices, and they initiate tasks and projects for themselves. This

view contrasts sharply with the notion that people are reactive victims of circumstance, whose thoughts, feelings and actions are determined by external influences.

It is the latter, more deterministic, perspective that has traditionally underpinned (albeit tacitly) empirical work in the field of unemployment research. But in recent years, following the publication of a small exploratory study of eleven proactive individuals coping well with unemployment (Fryer & Payne 1984) and the related theoretical arguments advanced by Fryer (1988), there have increasingly been calls for empirical workers to recognise and explore the idea that individuals are active agents who select personal goals which provide purpose and direction to their lives. (eg Schaufeli 1987). Unfortunately, these ideas have been far more frequently praised than implemented. Discussions of proactivity and agency typically appear in the conclusion sections of empirical papers as recommendations for further research rather than forming an integral part of the empirical work itself. The present study attempts to move some small way towards rectifying this situation by incorporating some elements of this more agentic perspective within the theoretical and empirical work of the thesis.

It is important to make clear at this stage that this represents only a very tentative, exploratory move towards unravelling an issue of considerable complexity. One aspect of this complexity, for example, is that the two perspectives outlined above are not necessarily mutually exclusive alternatives. In practice, most writers in the field of unemployment recognise (at least in principle) that human experience is influenced by a conjunction of situational and individual factors. And, as we have already seen in Chapter 2, the extent to which behaviour is situationally or individually determined and the extent to which such behaviours can be distinguished conceptually or empirically are contentious issues within psychological science as a whole (see Sappington

1990 for an excellent discussion of this issue and its relationship to the freewill versus determinism debate).

Notwithstanding such potential conceptual hazards, the idea I wish to develop here takes as a starting point the notion that behaviour can be self-selected and self-directed, that individuals are proactive, future-oriented planners and goal-setters who have purposes, objectives and intentions. However, this is not to suggest that all individuals are equivalent in the extent to which they are self-motivated planners and goal setters. Indeed, quite to the contrary, at the core of the notion of self-motivation being proposed here, is the idea that there are dispositional differences in the extent to which individuals generate their own "traction" or momentum by setting their own goals, planning ahead, and initiating personal projects.

DeCharms (1968) has made precisely this point in his work on personal causation. He distinguishes between people who see themselves as "origins" and those who act as if they were "pawns". Origins see themselves as causal agents who are intrinsically motivated and strive to influence the environment. Pawns on the other hand, believe that they are constantly being pushed around by outside forces. Origins are intrinsically motivated because they feel a sense of ownership of their actions. Thus everything that they do is important because it is a manifestation of their own sense of self that deserves effort and concentration even if others do not think so. Pawns are extrinsically motivated and feel rewarded only when they get a valuable recompense for their actions from the outside, because they do not identify with what they do for its own sake. Despite his use of such strongly counterposed and evocative terms, DeCharms does not intend to suggest that individuals can only be either an origin or a pawn. He is not proposing a discrete or categorical distinction between the two. Rather he is arguing that the terms are simply shorthand to

describe the extremes of a continuum. An individual may feel and act more like an origin or more like a pawn.

One way of understanding how such differences might operate is through the idea of "intrinsic motivation" (Deci, 1975). Deci defines intrinsically motivated activities as ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. He argues that people engage in such activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. He comments that some people spend large amounts of time engaging in such activities either as leisure pursuits or as challenging forms of employment which require great commitment, resourcefulness and creativity. He notes that: "The rewards for these activities are mediated within the individual. He engages in the activities not because they lead him to an external reward (like money, praise, food etc.) but rather because they bring about certain kinds of internal states which he finds rewarding." (p.24) Deci goes on to explain that the "internal states" to which he refers are feelings of competence and self-determination which he regards as being fundamental human needs. (Note how this view concurs with several of the ideas about mental health proposed in Chapter 2).

White (1959) also links the notion of self-motivation to the concept of competence in his discussion of "effectance motivation". In a critique of drive-reduction theories, White proposed the concept of competence as a theme which could help to draw together different ideas about the nature of certain categories of behaviour which could not be explained simply by reference to biological drives. White saw competence as referring to a person's ability or capacity to deal effectively with his or her surroundings. Effectance motivation is the name given by White to the basic motivational aspect of competence. Behaviour resulting from effectance motivation is "directed, selective and persistent, and it is continued...because it satisfies an intrinsic need to deal

with the environment" (p. 317). Effectance motivation is thus assumed to cause behaviour which leads to a sense of competence, mastery or efficacy.

The ideas put forward by Deci and White have been explored further by Csikszentmihalyi (1988) in his work on the concept of "flow". According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow can be characterised as the pleasurable subjective experience of intense involvement or absorption in an activity where the person's skill and the challenge of the task are roughly equal. This is relevant in the present context in that flow experiences are intrinsically rewarding - they require no external goals or rewards and indeed such goals or rewards may interfere with the flow experience. Accordingly Csikszentmihalyi refers to them as being autotelic, that is, they are rewarding in and of themselves. Of particular interest in the present context is Csikszentmihalyi's suggestion that there are large individual differences in the ability to achieve the flow state. He acknowledges that some of these differences may be attributable to situational factors, such as, for example, having more or less challenging jobs. But, he notes that: "even in very comparable situations, individual persons show great differences from each other in how much of their lives they are able to enjoy...There are large individual differences in the ability to experience flow" (p. 370). Csikszentmihalyi refers to this as the concept of the autotelic personality.

A similar idea can be found in the work of Frese, Stewart and Hannover (1987) who see "goal orientation" and "planfulness" as personality constructs: "there are large individual differences in planning and goal setting. Some individuals take all of their goals very seriously, do everything they set out to do, do not do anything that does not lead them toward their goals and start immediately to act when they have decided what they want to accomplish. others are not so goal oriented" (p.1182). These authors report data from several longitudinal surveys of US undergraduates which show that individual

differences in planning and goal setting are relatively stable over periods of up to 8 months.

All these ideas, though slightly different in their precise formulations, have at their core the notion that individuals differ in the extent to which they are self-motivated. Bearing in mind the comments made above concerning the lack of "traction", or externally generated goals in the jobless environment, the significance of such individual differences for researchers interested in the psychological experience of unemployment begins to become clearer. Because the unemployed environment provides so little in the way of externally generated goals, individuals who are more highly self-motivated might be seen as being dispositionally better equipped to cope with job loss. In the absence of external goals and targets, self-motivated individuals are more likely to continue engaging in activities which in turn bring feelings of competence, a sense of purpose, direction and control.

These suggestions about the role of self-motivation and the specific conceptualisation being proposed here, clearly overlap with the concept of proactivity as it has been used in the unemployment literature.

Fryer and Payne (1984) comment: "Proactive behaviour is self-selected, goal behaviour. The very high level of activity in our sample is not only directed towards valued change but is *very much self-instigated and self-directed*" (p. 285 italics mine). And Schaufeli (1988) writes "..proactive behaviour is self-selected, goal directed behaviour" (p.251). But it is not only within the unemployment literature that proactivity has been characterised in this way. Within the management science literature for example, Zaleznick (1966) describes proactivity as a term which implies the opposite of individual reactivity or guarding of the status quo, and Boyatzis (1982) describes proactivity in similar vein: "Proactivity represents a disposition toward taking

action to accomplish something. This usually means that proactive people instigate an activity for some purpose" (p 71).

Of course, it would be nonsensical to suggest that behaviour can be *entirely* self-motivated or proactive. As Bandura (1989a) has made clear in his work on social cognition and personal agency, human actions are not entirely autonomous. He writes: "Human motivation relies on discrepancy production as well as discrepancy reduction. It requires both proactive control and reactive or feedback control". But despite this acknowledgement, Bandura seems ultimately to emphasise the proactive nature of human behaviour: "People *initially* motivate themselves through proactive control by setting themselves challenging standards that create a state of disequilibrium..."(pp 1179-1180 emphasis mine). Elsewhere, in similar vein, he writes "Self-generated activities lie at the very heart of causal processes. They not only give meaning and valence to most external influences, but they function as important proximal determinants of motivation and action" (Bandura 1989b p. 411).

By adopting the notion that individuals vary in the extent to which they are self-motivated, the suggestion here is that individuals who typically rely heavily on externally generated goals would have greater difficulty in finding meaningful and rewarding activities and would therefore suffer more in terms of psychological health on becoming unemployed than those who are typically internally motivated, set their own agendas, plan and organise their own time. There is not a great deal of quantitative empirical work on this within the unemployment literature, but some evidence comes from a study conducted by Feather and Bond (1983) with a sample of Australian university graduates. These authors found that amongst those who were unemployed, the ability to initiate activity, plan, organise and fill time in the absence of externally generated goals, served as a protective factor against depression. They

commented that further studies were needed to explore these effects in greater depth and noted that: "These studies will have theoretical implications, especially in regard to how time structure and purpose in the use of time are related to basic motivational concerns and to personality functioning" (p. 251).

Growth Needs Strength

If, as suggested above, it is accepted that individuals can be regarded as internally driven, self-directed shapers of their environment, who make their own plans and set their own goals, then this raises a whole series of further questions. For example, what is the nature of these goals, how are they structured, and how do they relate to individual values, personality, behaviour and mental health? Such questions have received increasing attention in recent years as the idea that behaviour is purposive and goal directed has enjoyed renewed popularity across many fields within psychology (see for example Frese and Sabini, 1985; Pervin, 1989). Clearly, many of these issues are fundamental to psychological and philosophical thought; they are complex, broad-ranging, and have produced a voluminous literature. Indeed, some of these concerns, such as the focus of goals, have already been touched upon in previous sections on work commitment, employment commitment, and self-motivation.

Here however, I shall focus on a related but slightly different issue, that of goal directedness or proactivity as a manifestation or reflection of more fundamental values and needs concerning personal growth and development. This has been considered in terms of the concept of growth needs within the theoretical work of humanistic psychologists such as Maslow (1954), Alderfer (1969) and Rogers (1961) on personality and motivation.

According to Maslow's (1954) theory of motivation, humans have two basic sets of needs that are phylogenetic. These are deficit (or basic) needs and

growth (or meta) needs. The deficit needs include physiological needs, safety needs and needs for love and acceptance. The growth needs include the needs for esteem (both from others and from oneself) and self-actualisation (the needs for personal growth, fulfillment, development, understanding and insight - see Chapter 2). These needs are assumed to be ordered hierarchically, so that as the deficit needs are satisfied, the growth, or higher order needs become more salient.

Maslow's work has stimulated a great deal of empirical research designed to test his theory (eg Locke and Henne, 1986; Pinder, 1977). However, whilst there is there is substantial agreement between researchers on the interpretation of the empirical evidence, the consensus of opinion is not encouraging: The results of these studies are not in general supportive of the theory. In particular, the idea that these needs are ordered hierarchically has received almost no support at all. In addition, there have been (as discussed in Chapter 2) a number of cogent criticisms of the conceptual and theoretical basis of Maslow's theory (eg Ryckman, 1989).

In response to the accumulating body of nonsupporting evidence, Alderfer (1969) proposed a simpler reformulation of Maslow's theory which has become known as ERG theory. Alderfer suggested that there are three basic needs: *existence* (physiological and safety needs), *relatedness* (need for meaningful social relationships) and *growth* (need for developing one's potential) (ie. ERG). These are of course, merely abstractions of Maslow's five categories (physiological needs; safety needs; needs for love and acceptance; needs for esteem and needs for self-actualisation). However, in addition to simplifying Maslow's model, Alderfer's model is less rigid in that it proposes that several needs may exist contemporaneously. Thus it relaxes the restriction about the order in which the different needs are activated. However, the research evidence with respect to Alderfer's theory is also quite clear; like

Maslow's theory, ERG theory suffers from numerous conceptual ambiguities and generally nonsupportive empirical evidence (eg Campbell & Pritchard, 1976; Pfeffer, 1982).

It is interesting that despite the lack of empirical support for these theories and the conceptual and theoretical difficulties associated with them, the specific proposition contained within them - that needs for growth, development and self-actualisation are important motivational constructs - has continued to be extremely popular and influential (Ryckman, 1989). For example, in the general literature on psychological health, the concept of self-actualisation constitutes a central theme within the humanistic/phenomenological approach of Carl Rogers (1961). He describes self-actualisation as: "..the urge which is evident in all organic and human life - to expand, extend, become autonomous, develop, mature" (Rogers 1961 p. 35). And, as we have seen in Chapter 2, the concept of personal growth and development forms a part of the derivative accounts of mental health proposed by Jahoda (1958), and Ryff (1989). More specifically within the field of occupational/organisational psychology, the notion of self-actualisation or needs for personal growth and development can be discerned in the theoretical contributions of writers such as Herzberg (1966), Kornhauser (1965), Argyris (1964), Likert (1961) and McGregor (1960). However, it is the treatment of the concept of personal growth as a motivational construct within the job characteristics/job enrichment literature (eg Hackman and Lawler, 1971; Hackman and Oldham, 1976) that is most relevant in the present context.

Within this literature, growth needs have been conceptualised as a dispositional characteristic reflecting needs for personal challenge, accomplishment, learning and development. This variable has usually been referred to as *growth needs strength* (Hackman and Oldham 1976), but other

terms such as *higher order needs strength* (Warr, Cook and Wall 1979) and *self-actualisation needs strength* (Sims & Szilagyi, 1976) have also been used. Here I shall use the former of these terms (ie. growth needs strength) rather than the terms "higher order", or "self-actualisation" since: (a) Maslow's suggestion that these needs are hierarchically ordered has received little empirical support and (b) within the theories proposed by both Maslow and Alderfer, the concept of personal growth is broader and more inclusive than the concept of self-actualisation (incorporating esteem needs as well as those for self-actualisation).

The significance of growth needs strength within this literature stems from its role as a moderator variable within the job characteristics model of Hackman and Oldham (1976). It is hypothesised within this model that employee growth need strength will moderate the relationship between job characteristics and job performance/satisfaction. It is suggested that although individuals in general tend to be more satisfied with jobs that provide task variety, skill utilisation, autonomy etc, this relationship is stronger for individuals with greater growth needs strength (eg Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Given the definition of growth needs strength discussed above, this argument would seem to contain more than a hint of circularity, (especially when it is borne in mind that in the majority of studies both growth needs strength and job satisfaction are measured by means of self-report questionnaires). Essentially it would seem that the claim being made is that the more an individual reports a need or desire for growth opportunities, the greater the satisfaction they will report if they receive those opportunities (and the greater the dissatisfaction they will report if they do not receive them). Even if this argument is not actually circular, it would be difficult to argue that it is particularly insightful.

Although the deployment of growth needs strength as a moderator variable in the job characteristics literature has arguably been ill-considered, this is not to

suggest that the concept itself is worthless. Indeed, I hope to demonstrate in the present study that the concept of growth needs strength, as a relatively stable dispositional characteristic is extremely valuable. It is an expanded form of this conceptualisation which I shall adopt in what follows.

In the present thesis, growth needs strength is regarded as a dispositional characteristic which refers to the importance that an individual attaches to personal growth and development irrespective of whether this is in employment or outside the workplace. High levels of growth needs strength may be reflected in an individual's desire to maximise their potential and achieve personal fulfillment by developing and extending their range of skills and abilities and by expanding their knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world around them.

To the author's knowledge growth needs strength has not been used in the unemployment literature to date, and although its inclusion in the present study is somewhat speculative, it is not entirely without foundation.

Several authors within the unemployment literature (and incidentally, within the literature on stressful life events) have suggested that dispositional characteristics of this sort may serve as protective factors for the psychological health of individuals who become unemployed.

Within the unemployment literature the notion of proactivity as described by Fryer and Payne (1984) can be seen as having considerable conceptual overlap with growth needs strength. They suggest that individuals who cope well with unemployment tend to attach great value to activities which are likely to enhance their own growth and development. Indeed, they refer to Maslow's work in their discussion of the concept of proactivity: "..individuals will create their own social institutions or seek existing ones which satisfy their

social and psychological growth needs (Maslow 1954)" (Fryer and Payne 1984) p. 291. Elsewhere within the unemployment literature, Haworth and Evans (1987) have also recognised the potential importance of such personal characteristics as buffers against the mental health effects of unemployment in their discussions of the role of "meaningful activity" amongst unemployed groups.

More generally, within the literature on stressful life events, Kobasa's concept of hardiness incorporates a component which she terms "challenge", defined as a belief that change (rather than stability) is normal in life and that changes represent interesting opportunities for growth and development rather than threats to security (Kobasa, Maddi & Kahn 1982). The authors argue that hardiness facilitates the sort of perceptual, evaluative and coping behaviour that is most likely to lead to successful resolution of stressful events and situations. More specifically, with respect to the disposition of challenge, they comment that: "In coping behaviours, challenge will lead to attempts to transform oneself and thereby grow rather than conserve and protect what one can of the former existence. By fostering openness and flexibility, challenge should also allow the integration and effective appraisal of even exceedingly incongruent events" (Kobasa et al. 1982).

Growth needs strength was therefore included in the present study with the tentative prediction that needs for growth and development would operate as a protective factor against the potential psychological effects of unemployment.

Activity

One of the core claims of the Deprivation model of unemployment-related "distress" (Jahoda, 1982) is that low levels of mental health result at least partly from lack of activity. This theme is also implied within the Vitamin

model proposed by Warr (1987) and within Fryer's (1988b) Agency restriction model. Jahoda (1979) for example, writes "Work..presents the opportunity for actions whose consequences are visible, for the daily exercise of competence and skill". The loss of this opportunity she argues, is one of five critical factors in determining the negative psychological consequences of job loss. Warr (1987) comments that "..many unemployed people have difficulty in filling their days, with long periods spent without activity, merely sitting around, sleeping or watching television" (p. 214). He argues that this inactivity is closely linked to reductions in perceived competence and aspiration. Personal activity also lies at the heart of Fryer's (1988) agency restriction explanation of the consequences of job loss. Fryer argues that the poverty associated with unemployment is likely to lead to reduced levels of activity, thereby undermining the attempts of individuals to influence and exercise control over the world around them.

Clearly then, levels of personal activity constitute an important theme within the theoretical unemployment literature. Indeed this theme extends beyond the field of unemployment research into, for example, the discussions surrounding the etiology of depression (see Beck, 1983; Seligman, 1975). And there is extensive cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence from the general literature on mental health that higher levels of personal activity are associated with greater well-being (eg Beiser, 1974; Ray, 1979).

Empirically, both qualitative and quantitative sources of evidence reveal that unemployment is associated with lower levels of activity (eg Fagin & Little, 1984; Feather & Bond, 1983). Surveys suggest that unemployed people spend up to 10% of their waking time "doing nothing/sitting around" or "lying in bed" (Social Trends, 1984). There is clear evidence that levels of activity are lower amongst unemployed groups than amongst employed groups, but what of differences *within* groups of unemployed people? Are higher levels of activity

within groups of unemployed people associated with higher levels of mental health? The evidence from those researchers who have pursued this question is consistent. Higher levels of activity are indeed associated with higher levels of mental health (see Kilpatrick and Trew, 1985; Feather and Bond, 1983; Reynolds and Gilbert, 1991; Hepworth, 1980).

But there is a problem in interpreting the results of these cross-sectional studies. It is unclear whether inactivity is a *cause* or a *consequence* of low mental health. Brenner and Bartell (1983) have attempted to unravel the aetiological sequencing of events in this relationship by using the LISREL methodology to reanalyse Hepworth's (1980) data. Their findings indicate that a reciprocal relationship operates, but that the evidence for the influence of activity levels on mental health is stronger than the evidence for the reverse relationship. This finding is consistent with the qualitative evidence from Evans' (1986) study of activity levels amongst unemployed young adults (see chapter 1) which also suggested that higher levels of activity *lead to* higher levels of mental health. Indeed, Evans (1986) found that young adults with very high levels of activity reported similar levels of well-being to a matched employed sample.

Overall therefore it seems that (a) general levels of activity are influenced by employment status, with unemployed groups generally experiencing lower levels of activity than employed groups; (b) individual differences in activity levels can be invoked to explain differences in psychological health amongst unemployed samples, with higher levels of activity being associated with higher levels of mental health. What is uncertain however, is exactly why certain unemployed individuals are able to sustain higher activity levels than others. A socioenvironmental explanation might focus on the greater resources, (financial or otherwise) of certain individuals, whilst a more psychological explanation might focus on personality or dispositional differences between

individuals. Surprisingly, given the emphasis within the field on environmental explanations for the psychological effects of unemployment, it is the latter (psychological) explanation which has stimulated most interest. Several commentators have speculated that certain individuals may be dispositionally better equipped to cope with the reduced scope for involvement in activity that is associated with unemployment insofar as they are able to generate their own activities and interests which are stimulating, rewarding or fulfilling. Indeed, this is precisely the idea implied in the discussions of self-motivation, work commitment and growth needs strength outlined above. Fryer and Payne (1984) have provided qualitative data which suggest that this may be the case, but as yet this question has not been investigated using quantitative methodology.

Perceived Control

The term "control" has appeared in the preceding chapters of this thesis in reference to: a dimension of mental health (control/autonomy); a personality characteristic (personal control); and a job characteristic (decision latitude, autonomy). Thus, although control has been considered by many authors to be fundamental to positive human functioning, (eg Allport's core concept of Functional Autonomy) there is considerable confusion over whether it should be conceptualised as an individual trait, an individual state, or as a feature of the environment. This lack of conceptual clarity may have important consequences for empirical workers. One risk of poor conceptualisation is that spurious correlations may be found between purportedly different variables. For example, in studies where the controllability of the environment (purportedly a job characteristic) is measured using self-report questionnaires, it is hardly surprising if this variable is found to correlate with individual perceptions of control (purportedly an individual state). One way of avoiding this empirical problem is to use objective measures of environmental characteristics, but this still leaves the conceptual problem of distinguishing

between control as a state and control as a trait. If control is viewed as a state, then arguably it should be regarded as an aspect of mental health, but if it is seen as a stable trait then it may be seen as a dispositional influence on mental health.

This is a dilemma which is not easy to resolve, but Allen and Potkay (1981) have argued on theoretical grounds that the distinction between traits and states is an arbitrary one and that greater recognition of this fact would facilitate research progress. In a reply, Zuckerman (1983) refuted this argument, suggesting that a valid trait-state distinction could be made empirically. He specified criteria for differentiating between traits and states (eg trait measures should have higher test-retest reliabilities than state measures). Allen and Potkay (1983) commented that Zuckerman's resolution rested upon the specific constructs which he had selected for examination, such as anxiety, and that such a resolution might not be universally applicable. These arguments both seem to have some merit, and there is little to choose between the two.

In this thesis I shall therefore attempt to combine these two perspectives by regarding states and traits as lying on a continuum with relatively more stable constructs (traits) at one end and relatively less stable constructs (states) at the other. Control is conceptualised neither a trait (a dispositional characteristic) nor as state (an aspect of mental health), but as a mediating variable which lies between the two. It therefore can be influenced by environmental factors (such as employment status) and dispositions, and in turn it may affect mental health (for example, a reduction in perceived control may in turn affect an individual's sense of competence or mastery).

Given the preceding discussion of the concept of control, it is not surprising that its inclusion as a variable in studies of unemployed people has produced

confusion rather than greater understanding. Some authors, using control as an outcome variable have found it to vary with employment status (O'Brien & Kabanoff, 1979) whilst others using control in a similar way have found it to be stable through such transitions (Tiggeman & Winefield, 1985). Kobasa's (1979) treatment of control as a dispositional characteristic is consistent with the latter finding whereas Patton and Noller's (1984) use of it as a labile mental health variable accords with the former finding.

The intention in the present study is to attempt to offer a resolution to this apparent paradox by utilising the conceptualisation of control discussed above, and by incorporating it within a model alongside a number of other variables which might be expected to covary with perceived control. The precise nature of the expected relationships between perceived control and the other variables in the model are outlined later in this chapter.

Affective well-being

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, affective well-being has been by far the most commonly used "outcome" variable in psychological studies of unemployment. Different researchers have pursued different avenues of interest within the field, but above all, they have been interested in the affective consequences of unemployment for the individual. However, as we have seen, conceptual obscurity and terminological imprecision have frequently accompanied the use of affective well-being in empirical practice. In particular, affective well-being has often been regarded as being conceptually or terminologically identical to mental health. As I hope to have demonstrated in Chapter 2, this usage runs counter to the ideas of almost all writers offering theoretical accounts of mental health.

Therefore, although the present study follows the general trend of using affective well-being as an outcome variable, in what follows care will be taken

to avoid the claim or assumption *that affective well-being is conceptually or terminologically identical to mental health*. Affective well-being is here regarded as one dimension (albeit an important one) of mental health. In this respect therefore, the present study follows the theoretical claims, rather than the empirical practice of the majority of authors in the field. It would be wrong however, to claim that this is the first such study to consider more than one dimension of mental health - others have done so (see for example Haworth and Evans, 1987; Payne and Hartley, 1987; Winefield and Tiggeman, 1985), although it would be true to say that these authors are in a minority within the field.

Although the preceding comments suggest a rather more restricted use of affective well-being than has typically been the case in previous studies of unemployment, it will nevertheless constitute an important focus of interest within the present study.

Affective well-being alone is insufficient as a criterion of mental health, but an individual's subjective evaluation of the quality of their own affective experience is seen here as being a very important component of mental health. Moreover, affective well-being is closely related to other dimensions of mental health. For example, it seems reasonable to suppose that a sense of control and mastery which facilitates growth and development will lead to feelings of happiness and satisfaction.

Perceived Competence

The second dimension of mental health considered in this study is perceived competence. Competence is here taken to refer to subjective feelings of mastery, beliefs about self-efficacy and confidence that one is able to deal effectively with the environment. In the present study it is held conceptually apart from self-esteem which is taken to refer to feelings of self-acceptance or

self-value (see Chapter 2). Whilst there is considerable empirical evidence relating to the impact (or lack of impact) of unemployment on self-esteem (see Chapter 1) there is a paucity of evidence about the effect of unemployment on perceived competence. However, the view of Hazan and Shaver (1990) that "For adults, work (i.e. employment)..is a major source of actual and perceived competence" (p.271) (My explanatory parentheses) might lead us to expect that job loss may have important consequences for perceived competence. And indeed, within the theoretical unemployment literature, Fryer, Warr and Jahoda have all either indirectly implied or directly suggested that perceived competence may be negatively affected by unemployment. Fryer (1988), for example, notes that unemployed individuals are confronted with "..threatening novel problems" (p.227) and that they lack the appropriate skills or resources to deal with these problems. He argues that in these circumstances there is a high probability of failure and that this is likely to have effects not only on the individual's well-being and self-esteem, *but also on their feelings of "perceived efficacy"* (p.228). Warr (1987) directly states that "Subjective competence is expected to decline as a result of unemployment, for example in terms of loss of skills which might be applied in future jobs" (p. 196). Jahoda (1979) is less explicit about a potential link between unemployment and competence, but in discussing the significance of enforced activity as a "latent function" of employment she refers to the fundamental human need for a sense of mastery or competence. In so doing she strongly hints at the possibility of a link between employment status and competence: "Work finally presents the opportunity for actions whose consequences are visible, for the daily exercise of competences and skill. ...so strong is the need to experience the consequences of one's own deliberate actions, that even those whose jobs are classified as unskilled have been shown to invest considerable ingenuity in varying their performance to demonstrate to themselves what they can do" (p.313).

As I have stated, there is little in the way of empirical evidence to demonstrate a link between unemployment and competence, but Layton (1986) in a longitudinal study of school-leavers found that those moving into unemployment reported reductions in self-confidence, and Feather and O'Brien (1986) found a similar change in perceived competence amongst school leavers. Using a behaviourally anchored measure, Fryer and Warr (1984) found that unemployed men felt that they were taking longer to do things and that their skills were getting rusty. In the light of these findings and the theoretical accounts of Fryer, Warr and Jahoda, perceived competence was included in the present study with the expectation that unemployment would be associated with lower levels of perceived competence.

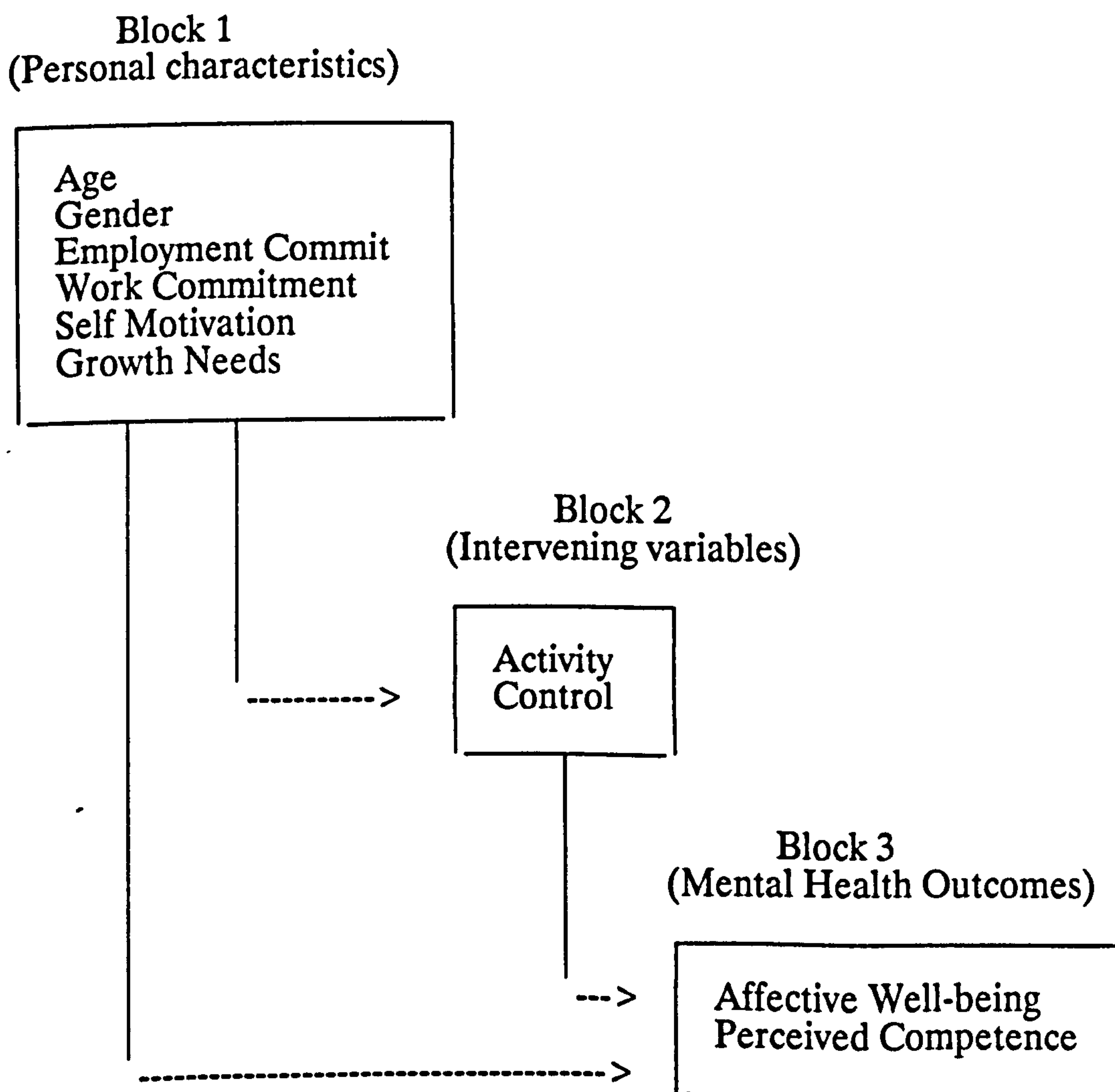
3.5 The Proposed Structure of The Framework

The framework to be used as a guiding heuristic in the present study (as with the models offered by Payne and Hartley (1987) and Stafford, Jackson and Banks (1980), discussed earlier), represents an attempt to integrate, for the purpose of empirical investigation, a number of different demographic, dispositional, behavioural and mental health variables which have been identified in the unemployment literature as being important factors in determining the experience of unemployed people. The framework is presented in Figure 1.

The basic premise on which the model is founded is that the unemployed are not a homogeneous group of individuals. It is assumed that their experience of unemployment will vary widely according to age, gender, personality, preferred behavioural styles etc., and that these factors will themselves interrelate in different ways. It has been argued earlier in the thesis that little is currently known about how these factors vary systematically with one another and that in order to investigate such relationships a conceptual framework is required to enable consideration of how the different variables

operate *contemporaneously*. However, even though I have restricted the model to include only ten variables (out of several hundred which might have been included), there is nevertheless still enormous potential for the creation of a chaotic and confused picture. From a pool of ten variables it would be possible to specify literally hundreds of permutations of relationships between them. Therefore, in an attempt to reduce the potential for confusion, I have followed the practice adopted by previous authors and assumed a primary direction of causal influence between variables.

Figure 1: A guiding framework for the investigation of individual differences in mental health during unemployment.



The suggestion is that the demographic characteristics and dispositions (ie age, gender, employment commitment, work commitment, self motivation and growth need strength) in Block 1 of the model moderate the impact of unemployment. Individuals with, for example, high levels of employment

commitment and low levels of work commitment, self motivation, and growth needs strength are expected to experience particularly adverse effects of unemployment. These personal characteristics are assumed to be relatively stable attributes of the individual and therefore are not expected to be influenced by employment status itself nor by the variables in blocks 2 and 3.

On the other hand the variables in block 2 (variables with a mediating function in the present framework) are explanatory variables which specify *how* effects occur. Thus activity and control are assumed to be influenced by unemployment (and the block 1 variables) and in turn to affect mental health. Higher levels of activity and control are expected to be associated with greater well-being and feelings of greater competence.

The mental health variables in Block 3 are assumed to be influenced both by the personal characteristics in Block 1 and the mediating variables in block 2. Although to some degree current levels of mental health are likely to influence levels of activity and control it is assumed that the primary causal direction is in the direction stated above (ie Block 2 to Block 3).

3.5.1 Some Expected Relationships

Previous empirical and theoretical work on the experience of unemployment and the nature of mental health suggests a number of different relationships between the different elements of the framework which are to be expected. Several of these have already been mentioned above, and it seems worthwhile to make these explicit before proceeding. It is expected that perceived control will be closely related to both affective well-being and perceived competence. A greater sense of control has been found by many authors to be associated with higher levels of well-being (Kobasa 1982) and similarly many writers have argued that a greater sense of control facilitates mastery and feelings of competence (Bandura 1977).

Higher levels of activity are also expected to be closely associated with higher levels of affective well-being, as suggested by Jahoda's (1979) deprivation theory. The findings of Feather and Bond (1982) and Evans (1986) both indicate that unemployed people who feel that their time is occupied experience greater well-being, and in Hepworth's (1980) study of unemployed men, the best single predictor of well-being was whether or not a person felt that their time was occupied.

Greater employment commitment is expected to be associated with higher levels of distress amongst unemployed samples, (Fryer and Payne, 1986) and in particular, it is suggested that this relationship is mediated by feelings of uncontrollability. Thus, higher employment commitment for unemployed people is associated with feelings of lack of control, which in turn is associated with greater distress.

On the other hand, greater commitment to work activity, self-motivation and growth needs strength are expected to be associated with higher levels of activity and in turn, to higher levels of affective well-being. These hypotheses are as yet untested in the unemployment literature and the reasons for including these dispositional variables are explained above. They are intended to provide a very limited and tentative exploration of ideas put forward by Fryer (1988b) in his Agency theory of the effects of unemployment, and to follow up qualitative empirical work conducted by Fryer and Payne (1984).

3.6 Strengths and Limitations of the Framework

Clearly, the framework outlined above is open to a number of different criticisms. These can be seen as falling into two (reasonably) distinct areas; criticisms of the structure of the framework and criticisms focussing on the content.

With respect to content, perhaps the primary limitation of the framework is its simplicity. Clearly, a host of different factors are involved in determining the experience of unemployment and these factors are related in complex ways, affecting each individual differently. The framework above selects out a number of factors for investigation which in the present author's view have either been established empirically as being important or might reasonably be deduced as being important from the existing theoretical literature in the area. In some ways this could be seen as a strength of the approach, but many other variables could and should have been included. Amongst these are: income, social support, length of unemployment, marital status, perceived demands, neuroticism, physical health, and negative affectivity. In addition, useful information could have been gained by incorporating employment status into the framework and by incorporating additional dimensions of mental health such as self-acceptance. Clearly, the inclusion of all these variables would have greatly increased the complexities of subsequent analyses, but would have added to the understanding of variations in the experience of unemployment.

A second area of weakness for the framework lies in the simplicity of the structure. Since the model is not recursive, it is assumed that mental health has little or no influence on the intervening variables in Block 2 (activity and control) or on the personal characteristics in Block 1. In reality, of course there is a likely to be a mutually causative relationship between the different variables (ie. it would be appropriate to incorporate feedback loops within the framework). However, in defence of the notion that the *primary* causal direction is from Block 1 to Block 2 to Block 3, it is worth noting: a) that on a rational basis, age and gender themselves cannot be influenced by the other variables in the model (though the variables for which they stand as a proxy might be); b) that (as discussed earlier) the other variables in Block 1 have usually been treated in both the empirical and theoretical literatures as

personality characteristics or dispositions which are relatively stable over time and across situations - a view which would be consistent with the interpretation that they are antecedents (rather than consequences) of behaviour and mental health ; c) that within the theoretical and empirical unemployment literature activity has been viewed as a precursor (rather than a consequence) of higher levels of mental health.

Overall therefore, the framework as outlined above does seem to provide a reasonable working basis for empirical investigation which can be modified or developed further in the light of the findings of the thesis.

3.7 The First Aim of The Study

In the first three chapters of this thesis, one major theme has been concerned with empirical research into individual variation in the experience of unemployment. It was argued that research in this area has frequently lacked an integrated conceptual perspective. Researchers have tended to pursue different avenues of interest, often testing for simple bivariate relationships between a single dispositional, demographic or behavioural variable (such as "employment commitment") and mental health. Consequently there is currently little empirical indication as to whether the different variables discussed in the literature are overlapping or whether they are interrelated. Moreover, the term "proactivity" which has been used widely in the literature has received very little empirical attention, and the term "mental health" has often been used freely and loosely, without careful consideration of its theoretical basis or meaning.

It was suggested that a coherent framework is required within which to explore the role of these different variables and to this end a tentative structural framework was defined incorporating a number of individual difference variables which to date have usually only been considered separately within

the unemployment literature. The dispositional variables in the framework included several characteristics which, it was suggested, could provide a tentative starting point for the empirical exploration of the construct of "proactivity". The first aim of the present study may therefore be formally stated as follows;

AIM 1: To consider individual differences in the mental health of unemployed adults.

CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY PROGRAMME

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the second aim of this thesis: to explore the psychological experience of participation on Community Programme (CP), a major UK government intervention scheme for long-term unemployed adults. The chapter starts with an explanation of the rationale for the choice of CP as a focus for the empirical research in the thesis (Section 4.2). There are two key aspects to this rationale. The first is that, bearing in mind the limited extent and quality of research on unemployment interventions to date (see Chapter 1), CP is of interest *in its own right* as a major intervention. The second aspect is that CP, as an "intermediate role", halfway between employment and unemployment, provides a *potentially useful vehicle* for the investigation of the psychological experience of employment and unemployment.

The chapter then continues with a brief description of the scheme itself and the research which has been conducted on it (Section 4.3). After a critique of this research, there follows a discussion of how the scheme might be investigated in the present study (Section 4.4). This section incorporates an exploration of methodological approaches within the field of evaluation research as well as a discussion of certain features of the scheme which are of potential psychological significance. The chapter concludes with a formal statement of the second research aim of the thesis (Section 4.5).

4.2 Rationale for The Choice of CP as A Focus for The Current Empirical Research

4.2.1 CP as A Major Unemployment Intervention

In this section I shall argue that, starting from the perspective of the psychological unemployment research literature, there is a pressing need for research on interventions in general, and that CP, as a major existing intervention provides an excellent opportunity to make inroads into this area.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis it was argued that a great deal is known about the negative psychological consequences of unemployment, but that there is a paucity of research on interventions which might ameliorate or prevent psychological distress. Indeed, in reviewing the handful of studies which have been undertaken it was suggested that they tended to be lamentably devoid of conceptual or theoretical perspective, quantitative methodology and psychological/scientific orientation. Although the existing studies provide some information about either the experience of participants or the psychological effects of participation, they rarely combine both of these elements. Perhaps even more important in the present context is that those studies which do offer a psychological perspective rarely attempt to link data with existing theory in the area. Studies of interventions have apparently fallen into two separate camps; those which offer a rich and detailed picture of the experience (usually qualitative), and those which provide information about the effects of participation on mental health (usually quantitative). In both cases the emphasis is on description. In neither case is there any serious attempt at analysis or interpretation. In short, both the quantity and quality of available research on interventions have been called into question by writers in this field. Several authors have called for more psychological research on interventions (eg Winefield, 1981; Warr, 1984; Fryer and Payne, 1986; Cassell, Fitter, Fryer and Smith, 1988), but as yet little has been forthcoming. From a scientific perspective then, unemployment interventions are of interest inasmuch as they currently represent a significant omission from, or weakness within, the psychological unemployment research literature.

But perhaps the most compelling arguments for consideration of interventions are social and ethical ones. It seems surprising that, having established so conclusively that unemployment leads to harmful effects psychologists have not turned their efforts towards the consideration of social policy responses to the problem. Kelly (1955) argued that one important purpose of conducting

applied research is to lead to new approaches to the solution of people's problems. Of course, in order to achieve this objective, it is necessary first to establish the nature and extent of the problem itself. But once this has been established (repeatedly), a reluctance to consider possible responses seems, from a philanthropic standpoint, to be inexcusable.

After ten years of research in which psychologists have used unemployed people as "respondents", "informants", "interviewees" and "participants" in their scientific studies of unemployment, it seems reasonable to expect some return in terms of suggestions, advice or guidance concerning attempts to ameliorate the position of those same unemployed people. Indeed, if this practical contribution is not forthcoming from psychologists it will serve to confirm the suspicions of those unemployed people who were reluctant to co-operate with researchers on the grounds that research is of little practical benefit. As one young unemployed man put it:

"What can this survey do for us? It can't do nothing for me...I don't want you to ask me questions, I want you to do something about it" (Ullah 1987, p.115).

As interest in the area of unemployment dwindles steadily, psychology is in severe danger of being seen to have benefitted from the miseries of others whilst providing little in return. This would be a legacy which psychology (or at least those psychologists involved in unemployment research) could well do without.

Research into the wide variety of existing intervention schemes and programmes might help to inform public debate and policy decisions by identifying which features of schemes or programmes are effective or ineffective in ameliorating distress. By identifying the positive and negative features of existing schemes, it might at least be possible to make suggestions

about what could be changed in order to improve them, and how future programmes might be designed to better meet the needs of those who participate in them. (This theme will be taken up again later in this chapter when evaluation research, and the key features of CP are discussed).

But even if the debilitating effects of unemployment were insufficient cause to stimulate research into responses or interventions on philanthropic grounds, it might be expected that the vast financial expenditure involved in operating such programmes would provoke evaluative research of some kind. In 1984/5 the UK government spent over £1,473 million on its four largest programmes. It seems at least possible that research into the effectiveness of these schemes might help in determining whether this money was well spent, or whether it could have been better spent in other ways.

Thus, it seems that there are a number of scientific and social reasons as to why research on interventions should be undertaken and is in fact desperately needed. CP, as the primary UK government intervention for long-term unemployed adults, provides an excellent opportunity to develop research in this underexplored area and it is this scheme which forms the focus for the empirical research in the present study.

However, it is important to clarify at this stage that the present research does not directly address all of the issues raised above. Rather, as we shall see, the current study impinges upon, (and hopefully provides certain insights into) some of these issues as a by-product of the specific approach which has been taken to the investigation of CP. (More of this later). In order to clarify the specific approach taken in the present study, I shall turn now to the second aspect of the rationale for the choice of CP as a focus for the empirical research.

4.2.2 CP as A Vehicle for Further Investigation of The Psychological Experience of Employment and Unemployment

In this section I shall argue that CP, as an intermediate role, halfway between employment and unemployment, provides a potentially useful vehicle for furthering scientific understanding of the psychological experience of employment and unemployment.

As illustrated in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the empirical practice of making dichotomous comparisons between employment and unemployment (either cross-sectionally or longitudinally) has almost acquired the status of orthodoxy amongst workers in this field. This approach has been valuable as a means of demonstrating gross differences between the mental health of employed and unemployed groups, or of changes over time, but has certain limitations as an empirical strategy for the elucidation of theories which attempt to capture the underlying processes and mechanisms involved in the psychological experience of employment and unemployment. Part of this difficulty seems to arise from a more fundamental problem concerning the conceptualisation of employment and unemployment and the relationship between this conceptualisation and existing theories of the psychological experience of unemployment.

To illustrate this, consider the core claim of Jahoda's (1979) Deprivation model; that the employment role provides access to five categories of experience (latent functions) which lead to positive mental health, whilst the unemployed role fails to provide access to these crucial categories of experience. Given this theoretical account, a straightforward empirical demonstration that employed groups report higher levels of mental health than unemployed groups (or even a longitudinal demonstration of changes over time) could be regarded as evidence consistent with the deprivation hypothesis, but it could hardly be seen as providing strong empirical support for the explanatory core of the model (the psychological importance of the

"latent functions"). The empirical finding as stated above is, for example, open to the objection that perhaps only four (or less) of the latent functions were responsible for the differences between the groups, or that the explanation for the differences lay elsewhere entirely (perhaps in the effects of financial hardship).

At least part of the problem here seems to arise from the conceptualisation of employment and unemployment which is implicit within the empirical strategy. The implicit assumption seems to be that it is indeed appropriate to conceive of employment and unemployment as two sides of a dichotomy. As a result of this conceptualisation, the employed-unemployed contrast becomes an "all-or-nothing" comparison, with employment supposedly offering all of the latent functions and unemployment offering none of them.

In contrast to this conceptualisation, I wish to suggest that employment and unemployment should be regarded as lying along a continuum, with a variety of different roles and activities, such as casual employment, short contract employment, insecure employment, underemployment and (of greatest significance in the present context) participation on intervention schemes or programmes, lying somewhere between the two. These intermediate roles, may incorporate some of the suggested features of "full" employment and some of the features of "full" unemployment. Such a reconceptualisation would seem to be not only rationally justifiable, but also potentially helpful from a scientific perspective insofar as the inclusion of intermediate roles within empirical studies may provide one way of circumventing the difficulties associated with "all-or-nothing" comparisons, and exploring current theoretical explanations for the widely reported detrimental psychological effects of unemployment.

Moreover, research into intermediate roles may have a secondary benefit, in that it may assist in bridging a chasm which currently seems to divide the research literature on unemployment from the literature on employment. These two fields, which at present form distinctly separate research areas, pursued by largely separate professional groups, would seem on a rational basis to be naturally linked, and it seems probable that both would profit from greater communication, co-operation and integration. The investigation of intermediate roles, which lie at the interface between employment and unemployment, offers an opportunity to encourage precisely this sort of rapprochement. (Indeed, this raises a wider issue about whether it is possible to understand people's lives in such compartmentalised ways, and whether in fact, in order to understand one part of a person's life, such as the meaning, or effects of, employment or unemployment, it is necessary to see how this fits into the context of their lives as a whole).

A small number of authors in the field of unemployment research (eg Warr, 1987; Hartley, 1980) have suggested that the examination of such intermediate roles may represent a hitherto underexplored way of furthering the understanding of the psychological experience of employment and unemployment, and have called for empirical workers in this field to extend their investigations to incorporate such intermediate groups. However, with a few exceptions these calls have largely gone unheeded. The present study attempts to go some way towards rectifying this omission by using CP, an unemployment intervention scheme on which participants can be regarded as having an intermediate role, as a vehicle for the exploration of a variety of theoretical and empirical issues relating to the psychological experience of employment and unemployment. As I hope to demonstrate later in this chapter, CP incorporates some, but by no means all of the features of "full" employment in the mainstream labour market. Before doing so however, I

shall provide a description of the scheme itself and a review of existing research on it.

4.3 Community Programme: An Overview of The Scheme and Review of Research

4.3.1 The Historical Development and Operation of CP

Community Programme was, between 1982 and 1988, the UK Government's main "special employment measure" for long-term unemployed adults. The background to the establishment of CP lies in the rapid increase in the level of unemployment in the UK through the late 1970's and early 1980's. At this time mass unemployment had become an important political issue, and though the major British political parties held fundamentally different positions concerning both the causes and the most appropriate economic solutions, there was general agreement that long-term unemployment was detrimental to individual well-being. A broad consensus also existed concerning the need for some sort of special employment or training measures to alleviate the position of the unemployed.

The Labour Government of 1974-1979 made an attempt to tackle the problem with the Job Creation Programme introduced in the mid 1970s. This scheme was small in scale and was phased out in 1977 to be replaced by the Youth Opportunities Programme for the young unemployed, and the Special Temporary Employment Programme (STEP) for long-term unemployed adults. STEP provided 25,000 temporary jobs lasting up to twelve months. The Conservative Government, which came to power in 1979, at first reduced the budget and scale of STEP, but just over a year later in February 1981, the scheme was restored to its original target of 25,000 places and renamed as the Community Enterprise Programme (CEP). CEP provided full-time, temporary employment and was to be the forerunner of CP. As unemployment rose, CEP was expanded to 30,000 places, but as the rate of increase in

unemployment spiralled, it quickly became evident that a much larger scheme would be necessary.

In March 1982 the Government announced that it would make more money available for a programme for the long-term unemployed, and after some deliberation, Community Programme was established in October 1982 with a target of providing 130,000 places. As a Government backed practical response to adult unemployment therefore, CP was much larger in scale and expense to anything which had preceded it.

Community Programme was not the only government special measure operating at this time. Two other large scale schemes had been developed. These were the Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS), a scheme to encourage unemployed people to start their own businesses, and the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), a scheme to provide young people aged 16-17 with a course of training and work experience (see Chapter 1). In February 1987, 78,000 people were taking part in EAS, and 327,904 were involved in YTS. Community Programme was providing places for 247,000 participants at this time. Thus in total, these three schemes alone were providing 652,904 places for unemployed persons and together formed the core of the Government's response to mass unemployment. A number of other initiatives were also in operation, including the Job Training Scheme, the Jobstart Allowance Scheme, the Jobshare/Job Splitting Scheme, the Community Industry Scheme, the Young Workers Scheme and the Job Release Scheme. All these schemes though, were small by comparison with CP, EAS and YTS. Restart, the only other large scale initiative, offered a counselling interview for individuals who had been out of work for six months or more, and possible placement on one of the above schemes, but was not in itself a work or training scheme.

Community Programme therefore formed the mainstay of the Government's response to long-term adult unemployment. Like CEP, it offered temporary employment, but the work on CP was confined to projects which could be shown to be of benefit to the community. Most work was part-time, lasting for one year, and included projects which can be seen as falling into three categories: Manual projects involved building, decorating, or gardening work for individuals in need, or for community buildings. Community Care projects involved working with children, disabled people and the elderly. Specialist projects were quite varied but might have included restoration work, archaeology, or the establishment of museums of local history. Participants would usually remain on the same project throughout their year of tenure.

At the time of the study (1987/88), the eligibility requirements for entry to CP were that prospective participants of 25 years and over, had been unemployed for one year, and those under 25 had been unemployed for six months. In the last six months before CP was discontinued all participants needed to have been unemployed for one year.

Community Programme was administered at national level by a division of the Department of Employment, the Manpower Services Commission, (MSC) (now a part of the Employment Department). At local level, independent Managing Agencies were established to act as employers. These managing agencies were themselves staffed by CP participants, except for the most senior positions which were designated as "established posts" (ie. they were permanent positions). The role of each managing agency was to develop ideas for community projects and secure the necessary approvals for them from the MSC, to recruit staff for the projects, (i.e. CP participants), to take responsibility for all personnel matters including disciplinary and grievance procedures, to organise training, to monitor the operation and programming of projects including workplans, budgetting, health and safety, tools and

equipment and the management of accounts, and to provide encouragement and assistance to participants to find permanent employment.

4.3.2 Research on CP

Surprisingly, for a scheme of this scale and expense, very little systematic research has been undertaken on CP. This section reviews the only psychological research study which has been undertaken on CP, and then moves on to consider other research, including the official monitoring of the programme by MSC.

Psychological Research

The only study of CP from a psychological perspective is an unpublished MA thesis by Georgiou (1985). Although this study is impaired by some serious conceptual, methodological and theoretical flaws, it will nevertheless be considered in some detail as it is the only such psychological study available. Georgiou collected data from 147 respondents all of whom had worked for the same CP managing agency. The sample was split between two regional sites and used both interview and self-completion questionnaire methodologies.

Of the 147 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 29 of these were also interviewed. For the interview study, this represented a response rate of only 13.5% as 141 people had initially been contacted and requested to take part. The possibility of sampling bias is therefore far from negligible. The response rate for the postal questionnaire element of the study was slightly better at 39%.

However, all but 14 of the respondents were in fact *ex-CP* participants. Ninety people were unemployed and 31 of the sample were in employment. The remaining 26 respondents included the 14 individuals who were still currently participating on CP, and 12 who did not fall into any of these categories.

The questionnaire used in the study originally included four psychological scales covering employment attitudes, future hopelessness, intrinsic job motivation, and satisfaction with the CP project. The employment attitudes scale however, was discarded because of poor reliability.

With respect to *job satisfaction*, respondents were most satisfied with their fellow workers and their immediate bosses, and least satisfied with the temporary nature of the CP project and the "chance it gives you to get a permanent job". It should be pointed out that for most respondents this rating of their CP project was retrospective. As most of the respondents were unemployed at the time of the survey, this outcome might well be expected to have coloured their impression of their CP experience. Unfortunately Georgiou does not compare job satisfaction ratings of employed and unemployed sub-samples.

The results of analyses on the *future hopelessness* scale showed that those participants still working on CP were more hopeful about the future than ex-participants. But as Georgiou himself notes, the difference between the sample sizes was so great that this finding needs to be taken "with caution". With one of the two comparison groups containing only 14 individuals, this is sound advice.

The results also show that the employed group were significantly more hopeful than the unemployed group, but in these analyses, (as in the comparisons for current participants vs ex-participants) Georgiou uses only Student's t-tests rather than attempting to control for the possible effects of other variables by using regression procedures. Bearing in mind the intercorrelations reported between the variables, this may have been a sensible precaution.

Georgiou also considers the influence of possible moderating variables, but finds no effect of full-time vs part-time CP working on intrinsic job motivation, future hopelessness, or project satisfaction. This is hardly surprising with respect to the first two of these variables since they relate to the current cognitive experience of the respondents, but the predictor variable concerns their situation when they were on CP. Other predictors such as marital status and "length of time on CP", had no moderating effects on the outcome variables across the full sample. The effect of age was not entirely clear, but the youngest age group (18-24 year olds), were less satisfied with their CP project, and had less intrinsic job motivation.

The qualitative findings of the study showed that most interviewees entered CP to gain work experience or to occupy their time. Most had felt that it was a "real job" and thought that it would improve their chances of obtaining permanent employment. Helping others, and completing tasks were identified as the most satisfying aspects of CP, whilst disorganisation, lack of facilities and low grade jobs, were perceived as the most unsatisfactory aspects. Most of those who had completed their full years contract said they had only done so because their chances of obtaining a permanent job elsewhere were very limited.

Georgiou draws the conclusion that CP is a "good" form of employment, and that it "acts as a buffer against the feelings of hopelessness that are likely to accompany unemployment." (p.82) He argues that CP is a satisfactory substitute for more traditional forms of employment. These are hardly justifiable claims to make on the basis of the data presented. No comparisons are made between the satisfaction or hopelessness scores of his sample and those of other studies. Comparisons are made within the sample, but the enormous discrepancies in group sizes, the fact that only a small minority (N= 14) of the sample were actually on CP at the time of the study, and that

one of the four scales deployed was not usable, all throw considerable doubt on the veracity of such confident generalizations.

Turning to individual differences, the study is unable to provide any clear information except concerning the effect of age on the job satisfaction and intrinsic job motivation of respondents. The most useful findings of the study relate to differences between the two sites at the CP managing agency where the research was undertaken.

Thus, whilst Georgiou's research provided some practical information for the specific organisation concerned, (in the form of consultancy reports), its scientific contribution to the psychological unemployment literature *in general* is very limited. Undoubtedly the main weakness of the study is that most of the respondents were not even participating on CP at the time of the research.

Other Research on Community Programme

Other, more general research on CP does exist but is certainly not abundant. The main source of this type of research is work commissioned or conducted by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), but this is rarely published in full. Even if published for circulation within MSC the reports are difficult to obtain (even for informed enquirers), and tend to concentrate on a very limited range of questions. During the operational lifespan of CP, a small number of surveys of current and ex-CP participants were undertaken on a sporadic basis as well as some review and scrutiny studies. The author was able to secure results from some but by no means all of this research.

Courtenay (1983a, 1983b, 1984) conducted three interview surveys of CP participants on behalf of the MSC and the results of these three studies are largely similar. The research is useful because it provides background information about CP which was relevant at the time of the present study. The

most recent of the three studies (Courtenay, 1984) is described here. In this survey, a random sample of 1038 CP participants, was interviewed, and information was obtained about a range of topics.

Courtenay found that the majority of CP participants were men (79%), and that they tended to be in the younger age ranges (half were under 25 years). Most had been recruited to CP via their Jobcentre. In terms of income, supervisors were earning an average of £117.75 per week, with other workers earning £58.75 on average. Financially therefore, supervisors on average found themselves £51.58 per week better off than they had been prior to CP, and other workers were £21.32 better off. For the most part, the CP projects involved construction, gardening or clerical work, and 60% of the interviewees worked part-time (less than 35 hours per week). There was marked dissatisfaction with the part-time nature of CP work amongst men, although most women were satisfied with their working hours. Half of the interviewees had received on-the job training, and 16% said that they had received training away from the workplace.

The interpretation of attitudes towards CP was (perhaps predictably), less straightforward; almost all respondents (96%) mentioned something they liked about their work, but 53% also mentioned something they disliked. The most frequently mentioned positive aspect was that the work itself was interesting (39%), but workmates, other people, working outdoors, and variety were also often cited. Of dislikes, almost half said they could think of nothing, but the organisation, management and supervisors (14%), and the work itself (14%), were mentioned.

Respondents were not optimistic about the extent to which having been on CP would help them to find another job. Forty-six per cent thought it would make it a little easier to get another job but a third said that it would not make any

difference. Two thirds of those interviewed had looked for a job whilst on CP and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the likelihood of doing so increased towards the end of the contract.

Courtenay's study provides useful detailed background information, but little more than this. The research is extremely thorough, but it was not intended to be a scientific, in-depth analysis of CP. From a psychological perspective the findings concerning attitudes to CP are the most interesting aspect of the study, but these tend to raise more questions than they answer. For example, because the results are stated solely in the form of simple percentages, it is difficult to interpret the significance of the finding that many more respondents could identify something that they liked about the scheme than something they disliked. From a psychological perspective, this could be interpreted as *either* an indication that the scheme was very "good" *or* post hoc rationalisation of their decision to participate on the scheme *or* a social desirability effect, *or* acquiescent responding to the questions asked. Courtenay does not discuss any of these alternative interpretations.

Another report which appeared in 1984 focused primarily on the accountability and control of CP and other MSC programmes (Emmott, Cowdrey and Oxford, 1984). The majority of the report is of little interest here, but in one chapter the authors consider "The evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of CP" (Ch. 7). Disappointingly however, this refers primarily to the cost effectiveness of the programme from the perspective of the government. The authors write:

"Objectives for Government when designing new measures and comparing the effectiveness of existing measures include:- (a) minimising the net Exchequer cost of a programme; and (b)

maximising its effect on the unemployment count (the register effect)." (para 7.18)

Only one paragraph of the report hints at a consideration of the possible psychological benefits of CP for participants:

"It is also recognised that participation in the programme may have a beneficial effect on participants which is not apparent from immediate post employment experience. The annual, interview-based follow-up survey will try to probe this area by asking people to quantify the benefits they believe they have received from participating in the programme." (para 7.9)

Unfortunately however, the results of the follow-up surveys referred to here have not as a rule been published in full or made available outside of the MSC. A monthly newsletter "Community Programme News", included articles describing the successes of various individuals, but these anecdotal accounts were rarely supported by any serious attempt at evaluation or balanced by discussion of problems or difficulties encountered by participants or administrators.

As with much MSC commissioned research, Emmott et al's report is concerned more with the effectiveness of CP from the perspective of the government than from the perspective of potential participants.

A similar approach is evident in a report entitled "Value for Money in the Community Programme" (Normington, Brodie and Munro, 1986). This report also focusses primarily on financial and administrative aspects of CP, but a number of findings are of interest because they may have important psychological repercussions. The authors found that much CP work tended to

reinforce the lack of skills of participants, that the pace of work on CP bore little resemblance to the demands of normal employment, and that the projects were often marginal to the needs of the local community. They reported that CP had become financially unattractive to married people on higher rates of benefit, and therefore CP participants tended to be single under 25 year olds. Normington et al also observed that the very long term unemployed (2 years or longer) were under-represented on CP. Finally the authors state that, as a national scheme CP had a low profile, and suggested amongst other things, that in advertising CP vacancies in Jobcentres, greater emphasis be given to "Jobs for Unemployed People" and less to the name "Community Programme". All of these features of CP may have a bearing on the psychological effectiveness of the scheme for individual participants and these possibilities will be considered further later on in this chapter.

Four postal follow-up surveys of ex-CP participants have been conducted by MSC researchers. Only the results of the first and fourth surveys have been made available outside of the MSC. The first survey was conducted two years after the launch of CP in 1984, (Turner, 1985). Questionnaires were mailed to 882 ex-CP workers, of whom 51 were untraceable, and 519 replied (65% achievable response rate). At the time of the survey, respondents' average length of time since leaving CP was 8 months.

Immediately after leaving CP, 65% of Turner's respondents had become unemployed, and only 23% had gone into employment. Fifty-six per cent of the sample had had no job at all from the time of leaving CP to the time of the survey. At the time of the survey, 32% were employed, 51% were unemployed and 5% were in training of some kind.

Turner interprets these data as indicating that CP is effective in improving the long-term employment prospects of participants. This conclusion is based

upon research into unemployment flow conducted by White and his colleagues at the Policy Studies Institute (White, 1983). This research showed that in 1980-81, of those unemployed for a year or more, after a further 15 months, only 7% of the men and 11% of the women were in work. Turner argues that the findings of his survey therefore demonstrate that:

"..former (CP) participants are proving some two or three times more successful in obtaining jobs than might otherwise have been expected." (p.14)

However, as White himself (personal communication) has pointed out, CP participants are not a representative sample of the long term unemployed as a whole. They tend to be younger, have been unemployed for less time, and most importantly, are twice as likely to have qualifications (see Normington et al, 1986). Turner's failure to take into account the superior qualifications of CP participants when compared to other long term unemployed people would seem to be a particularly important omission in his analysis. It seems more than likely that this omission would introduce a systematic bias into the comparisons of the relative success of CP and non-CP participants in securing jobs. This bias would operate in favour of the CP participants' success rate, thereby providing a spurious demonstration of the effectiveness of CP in assisting people into employment.

The fourth and last postal follow-up survey was conducted between December 1986 and February 1987. A very brief summary of the results was published in an anonymously authored article in Community Programme News, (August 1987b). Of the 1,734 respondents who returned the postal questionnaire (no response rate was given), the average time since leaving CP was 10 months.

A slightly greater proportion of the sample (28%), than in Turner's study had gone straight into employment after CP. Just under half (44%), had had no job between leaving CP and the time of the survey. At the time of the research, 35% were currently in employment. One interesting finding concerns the type of work that respondents had done on CP and in subsequent jobs. Environmental/Construction work was the most typical CP project type, involving 43% of respondents, but only 14% went on to do this sort of work after CP. They were much more likely to be involved in another sort of manual work (39%), suggesting that CP did not provide the sort of skill utilisation and development that respondents might find useful afterwards.

Turning away from MSC research on CP, Finn and his colleagues at the Unemployment Unit - an independent, charitable organisation which is involved in research, lobbying, and campaigning on behalf of the unemployed - conducted a study in which they interviewed 165 CP participants (Finn, 1988). Interviewees were asked in some detail about their backgrounds and experience, their pay and conditions on CP, their attitudes to the programme, their thoughts about job prospects, grievances, and several other topics.

Finn found a similar picture to Courtenay; The majority of the sample were men (59%), and the interviewees tended to be quite young (52% of the sample were under 25). Again, part-time working was the norm (64% worked for less than 35 hours per week). One third of the sample were involved in environmental or landscaping schemes, and another third were providing services for children, young people, the elderly, or people with disabilities. When asked what they liked about their jobs, 41% of the sample said they enjoyed meeting people and making friends, 32% stressed helping a particular client group, such as the elderly, 20% expressed general job satisfaction and 18% liked working outdoors. As with Courtenay's respondents, 47% could think of nothing they disliked, and it is difficult to know if (as is commonly the

case in interview surveys), interviewees were reluctant to respond negatively. Of those who expressed a dislike, 25%, mainly part-time workers, criticised the part-time and temporary nature of the work.

In terms of beneficiaries from their work, 53% of the sample mentioned the people they had directly provided services for, and 48% said that the CP workers themselves benefitted.

Almost all of the interviewees (94%) were financially better off than they had been when unemployed, and 68% thought that they were getting a fair wage for their work. The pace of work was of some concern; although half of the respondents said they usually had enough work to do, 40% said that they had slack periods or sometimes did not have enough to do.

New skills had been acquired by 55% of the sample, and 48% had received off the job training or education organised through the managing agency. Forty three percent said that CP had changed or modified their thoughts about the sort of work they wanted to do, and 83% said that they would be willing to do the same type of work after CP.

Half of the respondents had looked for jobs whilst on CP, and 73% of the sample thought that CP had improved their chances of getting a job either because they had broadened their skills, had more work experience or could get a reference. But a quarter of the interviewees were not so positive and felt that CP had done little to improve their job prospects. Only 20% of the sample actually thought that their job prospects were good, with another 3% actually having a job lined up.

Almost all the interviewees (95%) felt that the time they had spent on CP had been worthwhile, irrespective of whether they got a job afterwards. But only

30% were prepared to say without qualification that CP was a good way of helping the unemployed; half of the sample expressed mixed feelings about the scheme. As Finn observes:

"..the attitudes held by our interviewees revealed considerable ambivalence about the impact of the Community Programme. While one in three of the sample thought that participation could improve their chances of employment, a similar proportion was only prepared to acknowledge that it was better than doing nothing or that it gave the unemployed something to do. Again, while many expressed some gratitude for the respite CP gave them from long term unemployment, they were also critical that they were likely to end up 'back on the dole'- 'back at square one' - once their year on the programme came to an end." (p.17)

Finn's study is undoubtedly both detailed and thorough. Of the non-psychological studies reviewed here it provides the most informative account of the experience of CP. Unfortunately, however, no details are provided about the sampling frame or response rates and it is therefore difficult to determine the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the quantitative aspect of the study is rather simplistic - data are presented largely in terms of raw scores or percentages. This provides a clear descriptive account but little in the way of interpretation. For these reasons, the conclusions that Finn draws about the effectiveness of CP as an intervention cannot be justified on the basis of his data.

Overview of research on CP

This review of existing research seems to make it clear that the concern expressed about the meagre quantity and poor quality of research on interventions *in general*, applies with equal force to research on the major UK

government intervention scheme for long-term unemployed adults, CP. From a scientific standpoint, all of the research described above is lacking in conceptual and/or methodological and/or empirical sophistication. For example, the tendency to describe findings in terms of simple raw scores or percentages means that the studies provide some useful background information about the scheme at a descriptive level, but that they offer little which could be seen as helpful from a scientific perspective in terms of a contribution to the understanding of the psychological experience of CP or unemployment. This is because there is no attempt (with the arguable exception of Georgiou's study) to relate the findings to a broader theoretical understanding. No attempt is made to discuss the different features of the scheme in terms of psychological theory. In short there is no attempt made to go beyond the purely descriptive, to say what the findings actually mean.

In the next section I shall attempt to lay the foundations for a more penetrating and interpretative analysis of the psychological experience of CP, through a discussion of certain features of the scheme which might be regarded as *theoretically* significant. However, before doing so it may be helpful to identify those findings which do seem to recur throughout the studies discussed above, and draw these together into a cohesive descriptive summary.

It appears that the majority of participants are young and male. Projects typically involve construction, gardening or clerical work and the majority of posts are part-time. Almost all CP participants are financially better off than they were prior to joining CP. Aspects of CP perceived as positive by participants include the opportunity it offers for social interaction, the interesting nature of the work and the benefits it provides to others. Negative aspects include the part-time and temporary nature of the contract. Some doubts exist about the pace of work and the opportunities for skill utilisation

that CP provides. Many participants feel that participation on CP improves their job prospects, but they are nonetheless pessimistic about their chances of securing employment in the labour market after finishing CP. This pessimism seems to be justified: only one in three participants can expect to be in employment ten months after leaving.

As discussed above, from a psychological perspective these findings are at the same time interesting and disappointing. They provide tantalising insights into the experience of CP but ultimately these are not pursued in depth. In the next section I shall attempt to explore the meaning of these findings in more depth through a discussion of the different features of the scheme and their potential psychological significance in terms of the existing theory in the field.

4.4 Researching Community Programme: Alternative approaches and the development of a research strategy

So far in this chapter, two reasons have been given for the selection of CP as a focus for the current empirical research: Firstly, that bearing in mind the limited extent and poor quality of research on interventions within the unemployment literature to date, CP represents a topic of interest in its own right as a major intervention, and secondly, that CP, as an intermediate role, provides a potentially useful vehicle for the exploration of a number of empirical and theoretical issues concerning the experience of employment and unemployment.

Whilst either of these alone would seem to represent an equally valid reason for examining CP, when taken together, they introduce a potential difficulty for the development of an appropriate empirical research strategy for the current study. The essence of this difficulty is that of deciding whether in the current study, CP is of primary interest as an intervention (i.e. in its own right) or as an intermediate role (i.e. as a vehicle). Whilst the latter might suggest

the adoption of an approach grounded in the psychological literature on employment and unemployment, the former would seem to point towards the adoption of a strategy drawn from an entirely different research tradition: that of evaluation research. Since the present study is in fact concerned with CP *both* as an intervention *and* as an intermediate role, I shall attempt to develop an approach which at least acknowledges both research traditions.

However, it is important to clarify at this stage that the present study was initially developed within the context of, and intended to contribute to, the psychological unemployment literature. It is therefore this literature that I shall draw upon most heavily in the empirical study which follows. By implication then, the present study *is not designed as, nor could be claimed to be, a full and thoroughgoing evaluation study*. Nonetheless, since CP is in fact an intervention scheme, it seems reasonable to suppose that some consideration of the evaluation research literature might help to inform the current research. To this end, I shall first provide a brief overview of the field of evaluation research.

Evaluation research is a term which has come into common usage over the last 30-40 years. Although the term can (and has) been used to refer to a wide variety of research areas, its most frequent usage within the field of social science has been to refer to the systematic evaluation of social programmes. Historically, the rise of evaluation research as an academic discipline can be viewed as a response to the introduction, particularly by the United States government, of a number of educational, health, housing and other social welfare programmes during the 1950s and 1960s. Weilenmann (1980) comments that many such programmes were viewed as experimental, and as a condition of funding some sort of evaluation of the success of the programme was required. This presented an opportunity for the application of research techniques and methods developed in the field of social science, as well as

providing the impetus for the development of new tools and techniques which were both reliable and valid.

Various definitions of exactly what constitutes evaluation research have been proposed. Nunnally (1975) for example, simply suggests that "..the term evaluation research is generally concerned with the effectiveness of programs of social improvement" (p.101). Weilenmann (1980) comments more fully that with respect to social programmes:

"The concept of evaluation implies the matching of, or comparison between, values and goal images on the one hand and actual or anticipated outcomes on the other". (p.12).

He further emphasises that:

"..in addition to being able to describe, monitor, and anticipate the course of events initiated by a project activity...evaluation involves also *the identification and specification of criteria with which effects can be matched and compared*"(p.12). (italics mine)

A third view is offered by Campbell (1975) who defines evaluation research more broadly as:

"..an approach in which we try out new programs designed to cure specific social problems, in which we learn whether or not these programs are effective, and in which we retain, initiate, modify or discard them on the basis of apparent effectiveness on the multiple imperfect criteria available" (p.71).

One theme which appears to be implicit within these descriptions is that the underlying rationale for conducting evaluation research lies primarily (although not exclusively) in producing knowledge or information which will be of practical/applied value rather than scientific value. Indeed, Edwards, Guttentag and Snapper (1975) are explicit about this point, arguing that a

distinctive characteristic of evaluation research is its role in informing policy decisions:

"Evaluations, we believe, exist (or perhaps only should exist) to facilitate intelligent decision making. The scientist who conducts evaluation research, and even his sponsor, may be interested in various hypotheses about the program...out of sheer intellectual curiosity. And an evaluation research program will often satisfy curiosities. But if it does no more, if it does not improve the basis for decisions about the program...then it loses its distinctive character as *evaluation* research and becomes simply research".

In practice, this practical/applied orientation has meant that those engaged in evaluation research have tended to focus on the extent to which programmes succeed or fail in meeting specified criteria which reflect the overall goals of the programme. In the early years of the development of the discipline, with positivistic approaches at their height of popularity within social science, this often involved the implementation of a quasi-experimental design (Cook and Campbell 1979), with control groups or matched groups, the use of quantitative outcome measures which were statistically reliable and valid as well as, (in some instances), some form of cost-benefit analysis.

However, it soon became apparent to those working in the field, that this type of methodological orientation brought with it a number of difficulties. Not least of these was that in the areas where evaluation research is most likely to be conducted, such as health and education, clearly identifiable and unambiguous goals for programmes from which specific and measurable outcome criteria could be developed, were unlikely to exist. Moreover, adherence to the principles of scientific rigour was hampered by political and practical considerations such as the organisational context, the structural

constraints and requirements, and the interpersonal interactions between the evaluator and those involved in the programme.

These sorts of difficulties led commentators such as Warren (1973) to remark that there was an unhappy marriage between the controlled experiment as the preferred method of evaluation research and the operation of social agencies. In response there has been a broadening of the traditional methodological base in evaluation research, which has accompanied an ever increasing recognition that a wider range of research questions are legitimate areas of concern for evaluation researchers. In recent years for example, the examination of the process issues surrounding the implementation and operation of programmes (as well as consideration of outcomes) has been facilitated by the use of qualitative as well as quantitative data gathering methods. This shifting emphasis has encouraged an increasing number of researchers to start tackling questions about *how* and *why* things happen (process or formative evaluation) as well as *what* happens (content evaluation) and what the results are (outcome or summative evaluation).

However, this change in emphasis towards examination of a broader range of research questions through the adoption of a more eclectic methodological orientation, is not in itself sufficient to overcome one of the most common and damaging criticisms of evaluation research. This criticism, which is shared widely even amongst evaluation researchers themselves, is that the results or findings of evaluation studies are frequently ignored by policy makers and programme managers. This problem seems to stem, at least partly, from a more fundamental difficulty; that of designing and conducting evaluation studies so that the findings will be of interest or use to all of the different parties involved in the research. These parties, which Mitroff (1983) has described as "stakeholder groups", may include policy makers, programme providers and programme participants as well as the evaluation researcher.

One way of attempting to tackle this difficulty has been suggested by the proponents of action research (Lewin, 1951). French (1969) has characterised action research as involving a cyclical process of diagnosis, data gathering, feedback to the client group, action planning and action. Action research involves a joint effort on the part of the scientist and the practitioner and/or client group. The researcher or scientist is therefore no longer a disinterested observer, but is actively involved in bringing about change. Moreover, and perhaps most fundamentally, the goal of problem solving is no longer reduced to being a secondary objective, but is accorded equal status with the goal of furthering scientific knowledge and understanding. In so doing, it is hoped that action research will serve the interests of those directly involved in the programmes being studied as well as the scientific interests of the researcher.

However, even this approach to evaluation research seems to bring with it a number of significant drawbacks. One important criticism of action research is that it is simply not objective. Since the researcher is involved in the processes of planning and implementation as well as evaluation, he or she will be continually struggling to strike a balance between the conflicting requirements of objective evaluation and successful achievement of the goals of the programme. In short, the researcher is simply too "close" to the issues of concern to be objective about them. A second criticism of action research is that the findings of action research studies are too specific. Since action research projects typically attempt to produce recommendations which will be useful for a particular scheme or programme, it is suggested that findings are not always generalisable to other schemes, projects or programmes.

Ultimately then, it seems that there is little agreement over what constitutes the most appropriate design or methodological approach for conducting evaluation research (Reichardt and Cook, 1978). Nevertheless, it would be

wrong to claim that there is no discernable tradition or field which constitutes "evaluation research". This tradition does exist, and can be said to incorporate at least the following three characteristics: a focus on the extent to which programmes, schemes, projects or other interventions achieve specified goals, objectives or outcomes; a concern to produce information or knowledge which is of some practical or applied value; and usually, (but not always) the adoption of a research design which will permit an assessment of the extent of changes over time. Ideally however, it seems that evaluation researchers should also be at least aware of the potential benefits of adopting an eclectic methodological orientation, the advantages of considering *processes* as well as *outcomes* (and the relationship between the two), and the need to make close links between data and theory. In the empirical study which follows *some*, but by no means all of these features are incorporated.

How then, can an awareness of this research tradition inform the development of a strategy for the current study, so that the present study provides information about CP as an intervention as well as about CP as an intermediate role?

From an evaluation research perspective, a typical starting point would be to consider the goals of the programme being investigated, CP. The objectives of CP, as defined by the Manpower Services Commission (Normington et al 1986) the national administrative body for the programme, are:

1. To provide work for the long-term unemployed.
2. To improve the chances of long-term unemployed people getting permanent jobs or training.
3. To do work of various kinds to benefit the community.

From specifying the objectives of CP, a second stage in the process of evaluation research would be to consider which of these aims is to be evaluated, for what reason, and how. In the context of the present study, it

seems reasonable to focus on the first two aims since it is these which relate most closely to the intended benefit of the programme to unemployed people.

As we have seen in reviewing the literature on CP, it is the second, (longer-term) objective of improving participants' employment prospects which has received most attention in government-produced documents, statements and research reports as an indicator of CP's success or failure.

However, this objective itself is far from being uncontroversial. The idea that CP should significantly improve the prospects of long-term unemployed people securing permanent jobs or training, even if we ignore its sociopolitical connotations of "blaming the victim" (Kieselbach and Svensson 1988), could at best be regarded as optimistic, and at worst hopelessly unrealistic given the prevailing labour market conditions at the time of the research. (In which the number of registered unemployed people far exceeded the number of job vacancies). Moreover, the nonspecific and ambiguous way in which this objective is phrased presents significant difficulties for any attempt to design an evaluation study. It may prompt us to question how much improvement in participants' job prospects is required before CP can be deemed a success? Alternatively we might ask whether the criterion of securing a training placement should genuinely be regarded as an equal measure of success to securing employment? And how is a "permanent job" defined? Does it mean six months, a year, two years or something else? There are no clear cut, apolitical, objective answers to any of these questions, and it may be precisely this sort of difficulty in defining exactly what CP is intended to achieve in this respect (and perhaps researchers' personal/political objections to the connotations of "blaming the victim") which has hitherto discouraged any serious attempt at evaluation of CP's long-term effectiveness as an intervention designed to improve participants' employment prospects.

Clearly then, there are a number of difficulties associated with attempting to evaluate CP in terms of its long-term effectiveness, and although it should be openly acknowledged that these difficulties are not necessarily insurmountable, I shall turn instead to consider the first objective of the scheme (to provide work for the long-term unemployed).

This short-term objective is in fact identified as the "principal" aim of the scheme by Normington et al, and, in the context of the present study seems to offer a more promising route towards incorporating the insights provided by evaluation research within an overall unemployment research context.

On first sight, the objective of "providing work for the long-term unemployed" might be considered somewhat uninteresting from an evaluative perspective. After all, for CP to meet this objective, it surely has only to attract participants who are themselves long-term unemployed people and for the content of the programme to qualify as "work". (Although of course this could be elaborated in terms of specific criteria about the numbers and type of participants, and the types of work). But it is when we consider what lies *behind* this formally stated objective that it becomes more interesting.

Although this objective is stated somewhat baldly, without any elaboration about the intended outcome for individuals, the *implicit* notion seems to be that unemployment is in some way bad for people and that the negative effects can be alleviated by involvement in work of some kind. Thus, in the immediate short-term, CP is presumably intended to substitute to some degree for the employment which the individual has been unable to secure.

But at this point, the need for a theoretical framework within which to locate and interpret such a perspective begins to emerge, and it is at this point that the psychological unemployment literature may be of some help. Moreover, it

is at this stage that the two aspects of the rationale for the choice of CP as a focus for the current study (as an intervention and as an intermediate role) begin to converge.

Although as already stated, the present research cannot be regarded as a full and thoroughgoing evaluation study, it is this *implicit* objective of CP (to alleviate the negative effects of unemployment) which I shall adopt as a basis for a tentative, opportunistic and exploratory investigation of its immediate, short-term impact on the personal and psychological experience of long-term unemployed people. In particular, (and bearing in mind the intention to draw at least to some degree from the field of evaluation research) I shall attempt to use a multi-method approach to consider the content of the scheme, different aspects of the mental health of participants, and the relationship between these two and existing theory in the fields of unemployment and employment research. In order to achieve this, I shall turn next to consider certain features of the scheme which, in the light of existing theory, might be regarded as psychologically significant and which might be used to structure the consideration of the psychological experience of the scheme.

Key features of CP from a psychological perspective.

From the research on CP described earlier it is already possible to identify certain features of the scheme which, when considered in the light of the theoretical literature on the psychological effects of unemployment, (see Chapter 1) might be expected to have important psychological consequences for the individuals participating in the scheme.

In discussing these features it will be helpful to bear in mind a recurrent theme within the psychological unemployment literature which has been discussed earlier in this thesis. This is the distinction drawn by several authors between

employment (a contractual exchange relationship in which money is received in return for labour) and *work* (activity for a purpose beyond that of its own execution). Whilst CP is undoubtedly *work*, its status as *employment* is somewhat more complicated; although strictly speaking, it *is* employment, (participants do receive a wage), CP jobs differ in several ways to jobs within the mainstream of the labour market. These differences, and their potential consequences will be explored below.

What then, are the key features of CP which might be expected to affect the experience of participants? I shall consider ten aspects of the scheme which on initial inspection might be considered as being potentially significant features. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, and other important aspects of the scheme may emerge from the empirical work to be carried out in the present study. Rather, these ten aspects are intended as a useful but tentative starting point for the exploration of the psychological experience of CP. The features are:

1. It is work.
2. It is employment.
3. It is socially useful work.
4. It provides a greater income than unemployment benefit.
5. It is intended to improve participants' chances of securing permanent employment.
6. It is temporary.
7. It is part-time.
8. It provides less money than equivalent jobs in the mainstream labour market.
9. It is created employment, developed primarily for the benefit of those who participate on it.
10. The actual rates of post-CP employment success are low.

As I hope to illustrate, the first five of these features might, when considered in terms of the available psychological theory on unemployment, be regarded as potential strengths or positive aspects of the scheme. In contrast, the second five features might be regarded as potential weaknesses or negative aspects. (Again, these are speculative judgements derived from the available theory in the field of unemployment research, as discussed in Chapter 1, and which require empirical investigation in order to test their validity).

At this stage, it may already be apparent that this type of analysis bears more than passing resemblance to Warr's (1983) discussion of "good" and "bad" employment and unemployment. (see Chapter 1; Warr considers that "good" employment has more: money, variety, goals/traction, decision latitude, skill use/development, security, interpersonal contact, valued social position, and less psychological threat. "Bad" employment has less of all these characteristics except psychological threat). Indeed, in what follows it will become clear that there is considerable overlap between the content of Warr's exposition and the present discussion. In the present context however, Warr's contribution is deployed alongside the contributions of Jahoda and Fryer (also discussed in Chapter 1), and is applied specifically to CP, in line with the arguments earlier in this chapter that employment and unemployment can be viewed more appropriately as a continuum than as two sides of a dichotomy. In this respect then, CP is viewed as one example of an intermediate role lying between employment and unemployment.

I shall deal first with the features of CP which could be construed as positive and then turn to the potentially negative features of the scheme.

Firstly then, CP is work. CP projects involve manual and non-manual labour and therefore represent an opportunity for unemployed individuals to engage

in purposeful activity which might also promote the use and/or development of skills or abilities (cf. Jahoda 1979 "enforced activity"; Warr 1983 "skill use/development"). Moreover, as purposeful activity which is geared towards the achievement of specified objectives (the aims of the project) CP provides "traction", or momentum, in that there are goals to achieve, which extend beyond those of the individual participant (cf Jahoda 1979 "goals transcending those of the individual"; Warr 1983, "traction").

A second important feature of CP is that it is a form of employment. CP managing agencies operate as employers, and the pay received by CP participants is given in return for work undertaken. Although pay is not closely linked to performance (the wage is fixed, and therefore a high standard of work would not be rewarded with an increase in pay or promotion, nor with an extension to the individual's contract of employment), there is nevertheless a requirement to arrive for work at certain specified times and to work for an agreed number of hours each week. CP therefore provides not only Jahoda's "manifest function" of employment (an income), but also one of the "latent functions", by imposing a time structure upon the day or week of the individual participant (cf Jahoda 1979).

Indeed, the wage provided by CP can be seen as a third potentially significant feature of the scheme: CP offers, for most participants (since the majority are single people without families), *a greater income* than that of unemployment benefit. This is important, because, as Fryer (1987) has emphasised, not only is poverty consistently reported by unemployed people themselves as the greatest immediate source of personal and family difficulties in unemployment, but also, in a market economy, shortage of money has a number of indirect negative effects on the experience of unemployed people, by reducing choices and blocking the satisfaction of needs. For example, a lack of money will frequently prevent unemployed people from engaging in leisure activities

which could provide time structure, and the opportunity for social contact. The increased income which participation on CP provides may therefore be expected to counteract (to some degree) these negative features of unemployment.

A fourth potentially positive feature of CP is that the work itself is *socially useful*. Fryer, Warr and Jahoda have all commented that unemployed individuals are perceived (and perceive themselves) as having lower social status than other members of a community because they are viewed as a drain on resources, a group which has to be supported (through benefit payments) rather than a group which is contributing positively. It might therefore be expected that as CP provides an opportunity for participants to contribute constructively to the community in which they live, the participants will feel more self-respect because they feel a more "useful" part of that community.

A final feature of CP which might be expected to have important psychological repercussions is that the scheme aims to *improve the subsequent employment prospects* of participants. One aspect of unemployment which Fryer (1988) in particular has identified as psychologically devastating is the uncertainty and ambiguity it creates about the future. He suggests that a lack of predictability and control over the future discourages planning or orientation towards the future except in the sense of "vague hopes and dreams" (of securing employment) or "anxious forebodings" (that employment will continue to be beyond reach). Insofar as CP is perceived by participants as improving the employment prospects, therefore, it might be expected that it would help to reduce feelings of psychological threat and insecurity whilst restoring a sense of hope and a feeling of control over their lives.

Turning now to the features of CP which might be regarded as potential weaknesses of the scheme, the fact that the jobs are *temporary*, with contracts

typically lasting for only one year, could be expected to be of considerable psychological significance for participants. As Fryer (1988) has pointed out, the sense of security which mainstream employment provides, (and which is so manifestly lacking in unemployment) stems, at least in part, from the knowledge that the future is reasonably predictable (especially in financial terms). Individuals who are employed are therefore able to make plans about the future and maintain a sense of control over their environment. But this planning is not simply a matter of predicting what will happen from day to day or from week to week. Individuals also make longer term plans about their future; they think about their intentions and expectations for the next month or the next year. Whilst individuals in permanent jobs may plan to take a mortgage, to get married, or to have children, it seems unlikely that CP participants would feel themselves to be in a sufficiently secure position to make such commitments.

A second potentially negative feature of CP jobs is that they are *part-time*. Thus although they impose some time structure on the individual's working week, there are still likely to be extended periods of unfilled time, especially where participants have few family, domestic and other commitments. Moreover, since they are only part-time, (and from a purely quantitative perspective participants spend less time at work) CP jobs will arguably be likely to provide less in the way of shared experiences or interpersonal contact, less activity, and less "traction" (in the workplace at least) than similar full-time jobs in the mainstream labour market (where job holders will spend more time at the workplace).

A third feature of the CP scheme which might be critically evaluated from a psychological perspective is the financial remuneration received by participants. CP jobs, particularly since they are part time, provide *less money* than equivalent level jobs in the mainstream labour market. As Fryer has

argued, this not only has the direct effect of constraining the individual's opportunity to exercise agency and self-determination within a market society, but is also likely to influence social perceptions about the value and status of CP jobs. In a society in which the perceived status of a job is so closely bound up with the wage attached to it, CP jobs are likely to be seen as low status employment. In turn, these social perceptions can be expected to impact heavily upon the self-concept and self-evaluation of the job holders, CP participants.

Indeed, the issue of low social position and status is reinforced by another key feature of CP. CP is *created employment*, developed in the first instance for the benefit of those who participate on it rather than in response to an external need or demand. Although CP projects have outputs which are of some benefit to the community, it is important to acknowledge that the provision of a service to others is not the initial reason for developing a project. Rather, CP projects are developed in the first place in order to "help" or "assist" unemployed people. Put this way CP begins to acquire an image which has more to do with "charity" than it does with useful, constructive employment. If CP jobs are perceived in this way, then it seems likely that the self-perceptions of CP participants about their usefulness as valuable, worthwhile contributors to society at large will be negatively affected.

A final feature of CP which may be seen as critically important from a psychological perspective is that the *actual rates of post-CP employment are low*. In other words, the probability of participants getting a permanent job in the mainstream labour market either during, or on completion of, CP is low. Not only is this a problem in itself (one of the official objectives of CP is to improve the chances of participants getting jobs), but it may also have an impact upon the psychological experience of CP participants during their period of CP employment. If CP workers feel that their participation on the

programme is only a short term palliative measure, and that they are likely to find themselves returning to unemployment once they have completed CP, then it seems improbable that CP would be effective in alleviating the feelings of hopelessness and uncontrollability about the future which typify the experience of unemployment.

What conclusions can be drawn from this type of theoretical/rational analysis of CP? Unfortunately, although the preceding comments offer some indication as to the ways in which different features of CP are likely to affect the experience of individual participants, it provides little or nothing which can tell us about the extent to which the different features are present or absent in the typical CP job. We are therefore able to make some informed guesses as to the type of impact CP will have, but are unable to even speculate about the degree of impact. Moreover, since some of these features are assumed to be positive whilst others are assumed to be negative, we cannot be certain about whether overall CP is likely to be a positive or negative experience for individual participants. For example, it may be that the temporary nature of the CP contract, and the consequent uncertainty about the future faced by participants is outweighed by the psychologically beneficial impact of involvement in socially useful work activity. However, it is equally plausible that precisely the reverse is true; that the benefit of engagement in work activity is outweighed by the negative impact of temporary job tenure.

Clearly then, even with the benefit of existing theory in the field of employment and unemployment, any attempt to understand the experience of CP from the perspective of the individual participant is likely to be a highly complex matter involving a multiplicity of factors operating in different directions. Indeed, this scenario becomes even more complicated bearing in mind that (as discussed earlier) the present study is intended to provide some tentative insights into the effects of participation on different aspects of mental

health. Earlier in this thesis, it was argued that mental health is multidimensional in nature, and this introduces the possibility that different aspects of mental health will be differentially affected by different features of CP. For example, it may be that an individual's sense of control over the environment is adversely affected, whilst affective well-being is enhanced by participation on the scheme.

In conclusion then, it is clear from the foregoing comments that the investigation of the psychological experience of CP from the perspective of the participant is a complex task, and that the experience of CP cannot be understood solely on the basis of existing theoretical expositions drawn from the psychological unemployment literature. What is required is empirical evidence to assist in determining which (if any) of the multiplicity of relationships between the different features of CP and the different mental health outcomes for CP participants are most important in practice. However, it is important to realise that empirical evidence *alone* is not sufficient to provide a full and informed picture. This evidence will require interpretation based upon available theory. Thus theoretical and empirical approaches must be used alongside one another as complementary research strategies, with theory being used both to guide empirical data collection and to interpret the results, whilst empirical evidence is used to inform theoretical understanding. It is this approach which I shall attempt to pursue in the research which follows.

4.5 The Second Aim of the Study

This chapter has provided the background to the choice of CP as the focus of the empirical work reported in the present study. The second aim of the thesis therefore may be formally stated as follows:

To explore the psychological experience of participation on Community Programme, a UK Government intervention programme for long-term unemployed adults.

CHAPTER 5: METHOD

5.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis is devoted to a discussion of the research design and procedure adopted for the empirical element of the study. Within this discussion, particular attention is given to the rationale for the research design and an explanation of how the methods to be used for data gathering relate to the objectives of the study and research questions to be explored.

The empirical research is based around two Community Programme managing agencies, one located in the Midlands and one located in South Yorkshire. All respondents who took part in the research had either previously worked for, or were currently working as, a CP participant at one of these two agencies. The same design and methodology was employed at both agencies, and involved both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The chapter starts with a discussion of three key issues surrounding the design and methodology of applied social science research in general, and then moves on to describe how the specific research design in the present study evolved. After providing some background information about the two CP managing agencies, the qualitative procedure is then described (individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with 60 current CP participants) and this is followed by an account of the qualitative data analysis. The next section deals with the quantitative element of the study (a self-completion questionnaire survey of 484 current and ex-CP participants) and in particular the measures used in the questionnaire. Details are given of the response rates and sample characteristics and some consideration is given as to the representativeness of the sample.

5.2 Design and Methodology in Applied Social Science

Over the last 70 years, social scientists interested in the design and methodology of applied research have generated a burgeoning literature which addresses an

enormous range of conceptual and pragmatic issues (see for example, Nachmias and Nachmias, 1976). Although it is not possible to review all of this material here, it may be helpful, before progressing to the specific design and methodology used in the current study, to discuss this general context by focusing upon three key concerns which appear to lie at the heart of much of this literature. Where appropriate, I shall attempt to illustrate the points raised with reference to the psychological unemployment literature. The three concerns relate to:

- (a) The difficulties associated with any attempt to establish causality in the field of social science, particularly as manifested in debates over the relative merits of cross-sectional versus longitudinal research designs
- (b) Arguments over the merits of qualitative versus quantitative methods of data collection
- (c) The tensions associated with any attempt to conduct research and produce knowledge of both practical and scientific value.

All of these issues have been the subject of extensive debate within the literature, and it is worth reviewing the arguments in greater detail.

Turning first to the area of research design and the relative merits of cross-sectional versus longitudinal designs, an appropriate point of departure might be the recognition that a great deal of applied psychological research is concerned with causal relationships between variables. When we talk of the influence of one variable on another, or of one variable bringing about an effect in another, it is clear that causality is being inferred. As discussed earlier in the thesis with reference to psychological unemployment research (see Chapter 1), it has been

widely acknowledged that cross-sectional comparisons represent an inadequate approach to the investigation of causal relationships. Writers suggest that inferences about causality cannot be made on the basis of correlational data derived from cross-sectional surveys or on the basis of data demonstrating differences between groups. It is argued that, despite the temptation to jump to causal conclusions on the basis of correlational evidence, it is impossible from such data alone to decide between A as a cause of B and B as a cause of A, or indeed neither as a cause of the other. Rather, it is suggested that longitudinal evidence is required to enable causal inferences to be made about the relationship between the two. It is argued that, since time is unidirectional, a situation or event occurring at one point in time cannot be said to have caused an effect occurring at an earlier point in time, and this fact can be exploited by the researcher using a longitudinal design to help in determining the aetiological sequence of events. This argument is difficult to refute (except perhaps on the potentially important grounds that humans have the capacity to anticipate events) and advocates of longitudinal research designs have undoubtedly held the upper hand in debate over recent years. It is therefore perhaps surprising to find that in practice, within the field of unemployment research at least, cross-sectional surveys continue to be more frequently deployed by empirical workers.

The question therefore arises as to why cross-sectional research designs continue to be more popular in the field of unemployment research, despite their widely recognised drawbacks. One obvious explanation is a pragmatic one: "one-shot" cross-sectional surveys are quicker and easier to conduct than longitudinal studies. By definition, they avoid the requirement to take repeated measurements over time and consequently, they avoid difficulties associated with longitudinal studies such as sample attrition. (It is rarely possible to recontact all the respondents within a large initial sample at a later point in time, and it may be difficult to gauge the effect of drop out rates on the data collected).

Moreover, once the data from cross-sectional surveys have been collected, they require less complex forms of analysis than the data from longitudinal studies. Longitudinal data are frequently analysed using procedures such as cross-lagged correlation analysis (Campbell, 1963), but such techniques are far from being uncontroversial. For example, Davis (1978) is "not much impressed by the utility of panel analysis for establishing causal direction" (p 173), whilst Jackson (1982) has commented that "Cross-lagged correlation analysis has generated a great deal of enthusiasm from users and at the same time almost universal disapproval from statisticians" (p 156).

Now, although these points cannot be regarded as damaging to the scientific case for the superiority of longitudinal evidence, they do illustrate that longitudinal designs are associated with certain pragmatic disadvantages. Indeed, it might be argued that to reject cross-sectional designs entirely as being scientifically worthless would be ill-advised. Whilst longitudinal designs are undoubtedly a more powerful method of discerning aetiological primacy, it is worth bearing in mind the pragmatic advantages of cross-sectional surveys, especially perhaps in tackling research areas where longitudinal designs are difficult to implement because of practical or political constraints.

One final comment on cross-sectional designs is in order: Although it has commonly been argued that correlational evidence from cross-sectional studies is of no value whatsoever in identifying causal relationships between variables, this is not entirely true. As Jackson (1982) has pointed out, the researcher who has established a correlation between two variables and who wishes to claim a particular causal relationship between them, can do so if they are able to reject alternative causal hypotheses as being implausible. Of course, the problem in this scenario lies in the enormous number of potential alternative hypotheses and the consequent size of the task faced by the researcher in ruling out all of these

alternatives. Nevertheless, the point is an important one because it illustrates that the crucial difficulty with cross-sectional data does not necessarily lie in the quality of the data themselves, but in the interpretation of those data. This is a point which I shall return to later in the thesis.

Turning now to the second issue raised above: the debate over the relative merits of qualitative versus quantitative methods of data collection. Historically, proponents of qualitative or quantitative approaches in psychology have engaged in lengthy and heated arguments about the merits of their own preferred methodology (see, for example Reichardt and Cook, 1978). Although it is not possible to fully recount all of the relevant arguments here, it is worth conveying the flavour of this debate by mentioning some of the key issues at stake. Advocates of quantitative approaches have criticised qualitative methods on the grounds of subjectivity, ungeneralisability, a focus on description rather than explanation, and a focus on processes rather than outcomes. Meanwhile, supporters of the qualitative school have criticised quantitative approaches on the grounds of overgeneralisation, oversimplification, a focus on results rather than understanding, and the failure to consider underlying processes and mechanisms.

However, in recent years, such confrontational debates have gradually been replaced by a general consensus that the choice of methods should be guided by the research questions and the phenomena under consideration rather than dogma (Patton, 1987). Broadly speaking, within the field of unemployment research, it seems that quantitative approaches represent an appropriate method for the investigation of generalisable effects at a group level. For example, as we have seen in earlier chapters, they enable researchers to make estimates about typical responses to job loss amongst the population at large. Needless to say, this ability to make generalisable statements about typical responses is bought at

a price, and that price is frequently a loss of information about the meaning of the experience of unemployment for the individual. Tables of statistically significant data are unable to convey the personal and psychological significance of unemployment for those who lose their jobs. In order to understand the human reality of unemployment, to gain a full and detailed picture of the experience, qualitative evidence is also required.

But qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection are not mutually exclusive alternatives. In recent years, it has increasingly been recognised that qualitative and quantitative methods can be used productively alongside one another within the same empirical study. This approach has been referred to as "triangulation" by Denzin (1970), who points out a number of advantages, not least of which is the opportunity it affords for convergent validation of empirical findings. Unfortunately however, within the field of unemployment research, triangulation is a concept which has been far more frequently praised than implemented.

The third issue raised above, that of balancing the practical and scientific objectives of the research is perhaps best illustrated with reference to a particular research field. I shall consider the field of evaluation research, although many of the difficulties encountered by researchers in this field apply equally to other areas of applied social science [see for example Barkham's (1990) comments on the relationship (or lack of it) between psychotherapy research and psychotherapy practice; or the comments of West, Arnold, Corbett and Fletcher (1992) on "near market research" within the field of occupational and organizational psychology which often proceeds "at the expense of basic theoretical development and theory testing" (p.2)].

As discussed in Chapter 4, social scientists wishing to evaluate the success of a programme, scheme or project typically (or perhaps *should?*) have a dual objective of (a) producing information which is of practical value to those involved in the programme, whilst also (b) producing knowledge which is of scientific/theoretical interest. On the surface therefore it would seem to be important for the researcher to establish clearly, and in advance of conducting the research, exactly what he or she wishes to find out, and what information is likely to be of interest to those who are closely involved with the scheme or programme, so that the research can be designed to meet both objectives. As Twain (1975) has commented:

"One of the first tasks of the administrator and the researcher during preliminary discussions is to determine just how their collaboration might be beneficial to each of them and to any others whose cooperation is required. The experience of social scientists and program administrators in working out their mutual interests has shown that *there must be some 'payoff' for each of the major participants* if collaboration is to be successful, and these benefits, both immediate and potential, must be recognised at the outset" (p.30) (italics his).

Unfortunately however, this apparently straightforward prescription is often far from being simple to implement in reality. The first, and most obvious problem is that there may be little or nothing in the way of common ground between the scientist/evaluator and the programme administrator. Research questions and findings which may be of great scientific/theoretical interest may have little or no immediate practical application in terms of advice or guidance for the programme administrators and the same may be true in reverse: information which is of great practical value may be of little scientific interest. A second

difficulty is that of ambiguity; administrators may be unclear about exactly what they hope to gain from the research (indeed they may be unwilling collaborators whose participation in the research is a condition of funding), and the scientist/evaluator may have difficulty specifying in advance to what extent the results of the study will be of practical versus theoretical value. A third problem concerns the political and practical constraints under which the scientist and administrator may be working. Evaluation is, by its very nature, a potentially threatening enterprise, and there may be key questions about the effectiveness of the programme which programme administrators or policy makers actively wish to avoid addressing. Moreover, it may be that it is simply not feasible, given financial or time constraints, to carry out the "ideal" evaluation study which would satisfy both the scientist and the programme administrator.

Ultimately, there are no simple solutions to these problems. All that the researcher can do is to maintain a constant awareness of these issues and potential pitfalls throughout the design and implementation stages of the research. What the researcher must not do, is to succumb to the temptation to design and conduct a study which is pseudo-scientific insofar as its scientific content is purely technical, with elaborate methodological techniques and statistical analysis, but with no theoretical foundation. Where the researcher does succumb to this type of atheoretical approach it is unlikely to produce any contribution to scientific understanding, and indeed, even the objective which is supposedly being put first (that of producing information of practical value for the organisation concerned) may be undermined by the lack of theoretical foundation. (See Lewin's (1951) comments concerning the need for evaluation researchers to make close links between theory and data).

Rather, the researcher must bear in mind the dual objectives of the research, and must be clear about their own (scientific) objectives whilst at the same time

clarifying the objectives of the collaborating individual or organisation through a process of discussion and consultation. In this way the study can be designed to maximise the possibility that the research questions eventually formulated (and the research methods which follow from these questions) will produce knowledge or information which is of interest to all concerned.

5.3 The design and methodology of the present study

What bearing do the preceding comments have upon the selection of an appropriate design and methodology for the present study? Perhaps the most important issue which emerges is the restatement of the tenet that research design and methodology should be linked closely to the overall aims and research questions under consideration. In the present study, two general aims have been specified for the empirical research: the consideration of individual differences in the mental health of unemployed adults, and the exploration of the psychological experience of participation on Community Programme, a UK government scheme for long-term unemployed adults. In earlier chapters of the thesis I have already provided some initial indications of how I intend to approach these issues. (By using a guiding conceptual framework to explore the first aim; and through an exploration of the psychologically and theoretically significant features of CP for the second aim).

However, as we shall see, in some respects the design and methodology adopted for the present study were not entirely satisfactory approaches to examining these overall aims and research questions. Partly this was a result of the author's own lack of clarity about what he intended to achieve at the design stage, but also (although perhaps to a lesser extent) it resulted from (and reflects) the difficulties of conducting applied research within organisational contexts.

In order to elaborate upon this, and bearing in mind the comments made earlier in this chapter about the requirement for applied researchers working in organisational settings to adopt a collaborative approach, I shall turn now to discuss how the present research design evolved through a process of consultation and negotiation with the CP managing agencies.

5.3.1 Research chronology and the development of design

One positive aspect of the present study was that, in line with the comments made in section 5.2, the design and methodology *was* developed through a collaborative process of discussion and negotiation with the CP managing agencies. I shall turn now to describe how this process unfolded.

Research access was negotiated with CP Agency A, in the Midlands, in February 1986. The author then entered into a series of lengthy discussions with the senior management of the agency in order to learn as much as possible about the organisation, structure, and functioning of CP in general and the operation of the agency in particular. A number of day visits to the headquarters of the agency were made, and these involved discussions and tours of the different projects run by the agency. During this period the author also read and learnt as much as he could about CP from sources outside the agency. The content of the discussions with the agency management moved gradually towards the development of a research strategy. The intention throughout was to maximise the input of the agency to the research process so that the final strategy would be one which had been jointly developed and agreed upon.

At this stage the author hoped that he would be able to carry out a study which (a) provided some information about the individual differences in the experience of unemployment and (b) provided some information about the experience of CP, whilst at the same time providing some information which would be of direct

practical benefit to the agency. Within these overall aims, he hoped to be able to collect empirical evidence about both the outcomes of these experiences for the individuals concerned and the underlying processes, mechanisms and explanations for these outcomes. As we have already discussed, within the field of unemployment research, there has been a great deal of emphasis on the measurement of group-level outcomes through the use of quantitative methods (typically large scale cross-sectional, questionnaire-based surveys). This approach has been helpful in identifying typical effects of job loss, but as we have seen, it has been associated with certain drawbacks. Not only has it proven inadequate as a means of discovering and conveying the personal and psychological reality of the experience of unemployment for the individual, but has also, (apparently) become an end in itself, rather than a means of informing and elaborating theoretical understanding. It seems that these tasks, which broadly speaking could be termed "process research", have fallen to those researchers whose preference is for idiographic/qualitative approaches, and particularly for the use of in-depth interviews as a method of data collection. It is this type of research which has offered both an insight into the meaning of the experience of unemployment for the individual concerned as well as providing empirical evidence which seems to relate closely to existing theoretical accounts of unemployment from a psychological perspective.

Given this historical context, the preference of the author was to adopt a multi-method design which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative approaches, thereby facilitating consideration of both processes and outcomes, and in which "triangulation" of the different approaches would be possible. (Ultimately, as we shall see, this objective was not realised - the qualitative and quantitative elements provided complementary rather than convergent evidence).

It was jointly decided by the author and the management of Agency A that the first stage of the research should take the form of semi-structured interviews with 30 of Agency A's CP workers. This "qualitative-first" strategy seemed to offer several advantages: First, at this early stage, the intention was to explore issues rather than to test research questions. It was hoped that this would help to clarify the author's and the agency's objectives and avoid wasting resources and effort on avenues which might later prove to be fruitless; second, the author needed to become more familiar with the experience of CP for the participant; third, it would be quicker and simpler to implement than a large scale research initiative; fourth, it would cause less inconvenience and disruption to the organisation. Interviewing was conducted during June and July 1986, and a preliminary report of the interview data was produced by November 1986.

In December 1986 discussions started in South Yorkshire with Agency B, and it was decided to adopt the same initial research methodology as for Agency A, as this would allow for comparisons between the agencies. Interviewing was carried out between January and April 1987.

Discussions with Agency A meanwhile had led to the conclusion that a large scale questionnaire survey would be an appropriate next step. It was hoped that this would permit a quantitative assessment of the extent and generalisability of some of the interview findings, as well as (from the author's perspective) providing the opportunity to explore the relationships between the individual difference variables and mental health outlined in the theoretically-grounded conceptual framework described in Chapter 3. It was decided that this survey should include individuals who had now left CP as well as current CP participants, thereby providing information on the experience of participants after leaving CP. As these individuals might be either employed or unemployed,

such a design would also provide groups whose experiences might be compared with those of the CP participants.

However, one important error of judgement was made at this stage. Namely, that in the author's and the agency's haste to collect data as quickly as possible, the questionnaire was designed with insufficient attention being paid to the interview findings. Although the analysis on these interviews had not been fully completed, there were, as we shall see, some clear indications about significant areas of interest which were not incorporated within the questionnaire. As we shall see, this severely undermined the author's original intention of using the qualitative and quantitative data to "triangulate".

It was therefore only at this stage that the full research design was finalised. The quantitative survey was conducted between April and July 1987 and a report produced for the agency in December 1987. The same survey was undertaken for Agency B in January and February of 1988 and the final quantitative report of this survey produced in May 1988.

The design which finally evolved was therefore a multi-site, multi method, cross-sectional study, the sampling frame for which is outlined in Table 5.3 (b).

Table 5.3 (b): Sampling frame

Agency A	Agency B
30 INTERVIEWS (current workers)	30 INTERVIEWS (current workers)
300 QUESTIONNAIRES (current workers)	172 QUESTIONNAIRES (current workers)
200 QUESTIONNAIRES (past workers-employed) (past workers-unemployed)	204 QUESTIONNAIRES (past workers-employed) (past workers-unemployed)

A note on limitations of the design

Several limitations of the design (and methodology) eventually adopted became apparent during the course of the research. These limitations will be discussed later in the thesis. However, one critical design feature in particular is of such significance that it requires comment at this stage.

Undoubtedly the single most important weakness of the design eventually selected is that it was cross-sectional. As discussed above, although this design feature follows a well-established trend within the field of unemployment research, it nevertheless has serious and fundamental ramifications for the causal interpretation of the empirical data collected. Ultimately, it may prevent the researcher from making any definitive claims about causal relationships between key variables. In the present study, this issue is perhaps of greatest significance in relation to any attempts to make causal interpretations about the effects of participation on CP upon mental health. As we shall see, this limitation is ultimately inescapable.

The only defence which can be made for the selection of cross-sectional design is, as discussed above, a pragmatic rather than scientific one. Cross-sectional designs are quicker and simpler to implement than longitudinal designs, and require less complex and controversial forms of data analysis. They also avoid the complications associated with sample attrition - an issue which might be expected to be of considerable importance when dealing with a highly and unpredictably mobile population.

5.3.2 The Two Community Programme Agencies

Agency A was a medium sized agency located in the Midlands, employing (at the time of the research) approximately 450 people in some 41 project teams. The agency was a limited company established in 1983 specifically and exclusively to administer CP projects. The project types at the time of the research varied from clerical support work to archaeological work but a typical example would be an "area action" project. There were 10 "area action" project teams involving some 190 of the employees. They involved the provision of a free, multi-purpose community help service comprising assistance with decorating, repairs, gardening etc. for pensioners, disabled people and single parent families, and a service for community organisations. Another major project type were playschemes. Approximately fifty employees were involved in the nine playscheme project teams, which mainly provided after school clubs for 5-13 year olds. These teams were also involved in running playgroups and toy libraries.

Agency A focused particularly on tackling rural unemployment in an area where local levels of unemployment are lower than the national average. At the time of the research the local unemployment rate was 10.3% compared to the national average of 12.5% (Employment Gazette, June 1987). One particularly noticeable

feature of the agency was the considerable emphasis placed by management on presenting a "professional" image of the organisation to the outside world.

Agency B was somewhat smaller, employing just over 200 people on over 50 different projects. Agency B's focus was on youth and community work, so the larger projects involved working with, for example, Oxfam, the Commission for Racial Equality and various local youth organisations.

Several features of Agency B made it a complementary group to Agency A. The agency was located in South Yorkshire and therefore local rates of unemployment were considerably higher than the national average. At the time of the research the rate of unemployment in the area was 17.9%, compared to the national figure of 12.5%. Agency B's focus on youth and community work meant that there were very few manual work projects, and that participants frequently worked autonomously or alongside permanent staff of organisations rather than as part of a large CP team. The selection policies of the two agencies were also different. Whilst Agency B usually operated a straightforward competitive selection policy, Agency A's policy could be described as more philanthropic. This contrast arose from a more fundamental difference between the agencies in terms of their perceived objectives. The management of Agency B appeared to place more emphasis on the services which they were providing to the community as an objective, whereas the management of Agency A focussed on the needs of the unemployed individuals who became the CP participants.

How representative were these two agencies of CP in general? Whilst it seems reasonable to suppose that the decision to focus upon two different agencies from different parts of the country would have reduced the possibility that the overall sample might be atypical, an ideal design would of course have involved sampling from a much larger number of agencies. In the current study however,

this alternative would have been prohibitively time-consuming bearing in mind the need to negotiate research access, develop a positive working relationship with the organisation, organise the implementation of the research project, analyse the findings and write reports for the organisations as well as to pursue the author's own scientific interests.

It is difficult to gauge how representative the CP Agencies were, although there were some indications (particularly from the qualitative work, where some interviewees had worked at more than one CP agency), which would seem to run counter to the suggestion that significant sampling bias was at work within the study. In terms of organisational structure and functioning the agencies were certainly similar to others throughout the country. The functioning of both agencies was carefully regulated according to Manpower Services Commission guidelines which apply to all CP agencies. Neither of the agencies was exceptional in terms of size, management structure, project type or funding arrangements. The only indications of possible bias that the author was able to obtain were comments from a small number of interviewees that indicated that these agencies (particularly Agency B) might be slightly better than others in terms of administration and provision of stimulating or interesting CP jobs. As we shall later, this suggestion may have important consequences for the extent to which the findings of the present study can be seen as generalisable to CP as a whole.

5.4 Qualitative Method

5.4.1 Procedure

Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted by the author with 60 Community Programme participants (30 from each agency), who had been selected to give a demographically representative cross-section of the individuals within the agencies. This included men and women, part-time and

full-time workers, project workers, key workers, and supervisors. A range of urban and rural sites on different types of project were selected under the advice of the agency management.

The author's objective in conducting the interviews was to gain an initial impression of the experience of participation on Community Programme (Aim 2) and to elicit interviewees' thoughts and feelings about how their experience since joining the scheme compared with their experience of unemployment (Aims 1 & 2). In order to provide a context within which to locate these data, the author hoped to be able to explore the way in which Community Programme fitted into the overall pattern of the respondents' lives at two levels: Firstly, the way in which their year of Community Programme related to their ongoing life/career cycle, and secondly, the way in which Community Programme affected their daily routines and experiences.

Thus, the structure of the interviews was (broadly) biographical, progressing chronologically through the interviewees': background since leaving school; employment history and qualifications; family situation; experience of unemployment (including positive and negative features); recruitment to and experience of CP (including positive and negative features); interests and activities outside employment; and the future (including job search).

The author hoped that working from the data collected in this way, it would be possible in the process of analysis to draw out those features of CP (and unemployment) which were of greatest personal and psychological significance to the employees, and to consider these features in the light of the available theoretical literature on the psychological experience of employment and unemployment (see Chapters 1,2,3).

The biographical interview structure was selected not only so that the author could gain an impression of how the experience of CP fitted in to the overall pattern of respondents' lives, but also because the author hoped to minimise the extent to which he influenced interviewees' comments about their experiences of CP or unemployment. Although it might have been possible to adopt a different interview structure (for example, one in which the features of CP discussed in Chapter 4, or the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 3, formed the basis for discussion), it seemed to the author that by using a biographical structure rather than one which was explicitly related to the theoretical literature in the field, he would at least reduce the risk of putting words into the mouths of the interviewees. (Although see Potter and Wetherell (1987) for an excellent discussion of the status of interviewee accounts as discursive repertoires designed to achieve situationally specific performative effects vis a vis the interviewer). The interviewing style used was also intended to reduce the risk of the interviewer leading the interviewee. Within each chronological period, the author followed (rather than leading) the thoughts and feelings expressed by the interviewee, and asked supplementary questions to encourage the interviewee to elaborate on the themes which had meaning for them, thus covering the ground without the need for a rigidly imposed structure. As we shall later, these decisions about the interview structure and the interviewing style created a number of difficulties for the process of analysing the data and relating it to (a) the aims of the thesis (b) the quantitative data and (b) the theoretical literature in the field.

Initial contact with each interviewee was made by the agency personnel manager who explained very briefly the purpose of the interview, what it would entail and stressed its confidentiality. Participation was of course voluntary. If the prospective respondent agreed to be interviewed, an appointment was made for the interview which was then communicated to the interviewer. From this stage

onwards the personnel manager was not involved. The effect on the sample of the initial contact by the agency personnel manager is difficult to gauge. On the one hand it could be argued that it would bias the sample towards individuals who were favourably disposed to the scheme as they might have better relationships with the personnel manager and they would be more prepared to express their views about CP without fear of recrimination should confidentiality not be maintained. On the other hand, it might be argued that it would bias the sample towards individuals who felt negatively about the scheme as they would have more investment in expressing their views in the hope that it would lead to improvements. Ultimately, it is impossible to say, although it is worth mentioning that the two personnel managers reported that refusal rates for prospective interviewees were negligible.

As far as possible interviews were conducted at the project sites. Although these were not always ideal locations for an individual interview (they were sometimes quite uncomfortable or noisy), this strategy had three major advantages over interviewing at the head office of the agency. Firstly, it provided the author with some insight into exactly what the different projects involved and the atmosphere at the workplace. Secondly, the author hoped that the interviewees, being on "home territory", would be more likely to feel at ease and prepared to talk openly about their experience of CP and unemployment. Thirdly, the interviewer was able to maintain at least some "distance" from the management of the agency. It is not difficult to imagine that interviewees would feel constrained about what they could say if they had been "summoned" to the head office of the agency for an interview.

On meeting with the interviewee, after introductions, the interviewer first thanked him or her for agreeing to be interviewed and gave a brief explanation about the study, the purpose of the interview and its likely duration. He then

talked for a short while about himself and his background. The interviewee was given the opportunity to ask any questions about the study or the interview. Agreement was sought to tape the interview and confidentiality was stressed. It was made clear that other than the author no-one (particularly the agency management) would have access to the tape recordings of the interviews, nor any information that was traceable to specific individuals. None of the participants refused at this stage to be interviewed and none refused consent for the interview to be recorded.

Each interview began by recording a number of individual demographic details (name, age, gender, etc.), and then the author moved on to the substantive part of the interview, covering, in broadly chronological sequence, the different topic areas outlined above. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 95 minutes depending on how much the respondent had to say, and how quickly the ground was covered. At the end of the interview the interviewer asked if there was anything the respondent wanted to add either in general or on the themes within the interview. Finally the interviewer thanked the interviewee and offered to answer any questions that they might have.

5.4.2 Data Analysis

The tape recordings of the interviews were later replayed in full to enable a written summary to be taken of the interview. A strict protocol was developed for taking these individual summary or "case notes". This was considered necessary since the interviews were not to be fully transcribed nor the summaries checked by independent raters. A criterion of "actual verbalisation" (Fryer and Payne, 1984) was used. Nothing was recorded in the notes except that which the interviewee (and sometimes interviewer) had actually said. This could be either as a direct verbatim quotation or as a narrative of the interview, but not permitted were the interviewer's thoughts or interpretations of what the

interviewee *meant* by what they said. This rule applied even if the meaning was felt to be unambiguous. No record was taken of what appeared to lie behind statements (e.g. some broader political or philosophical belief), unless this underlying belief was actually stated.

At this stage the author had 60 sets of case notes (30 from each agency) each containing detailed information about an individual. These case notes included over 450 verbatim quotations of interviewee statements.

Semi-structured interviews of this length yield very rich data which are by no means easy to analyse. A primary concern of the author was that the depth and richness of the data should not be lost or become trivialised in the process of analysis. However, in order to simplify analysis, the author focussed on those sections of the case notes which were most closely related to the central concerns of the thesis; the experience of unemployment and the experience of CP. Under these two headings, further divisions were made, separating positive aspects and negative aspects and also making a distinction between personal outcomes and structural features of the environment.

Clearly the latter division in particular is somewhat arbitrary: Individuals and environments, people and situations, features and outcomes are not unitary entities which can be separated from each other without some loss of meaning. However, in order to develop a clear and accurate picture of these experiences, some kind of organising principles were required. The divisions described above have at least face validity and appeared to be congruent with the data. More importantly, they allowed for the possibility that the same feature (for example the availability of free time in unemployment) might be associated with both positive and negative outcomes for different individuals. This approach permitted the same individual to express ambivalent feelings or even

contradictory views about an aspect of CP or unemployment. (The expression of contradictory views by the same individual is not as uncommon as might at first be thought.) Once the categorisation of different aspects of the experiences had been completed, attempts were made to re-integrate the data and make links between features and outcomes.

Within each of these major sections, content analysis of the case notes was undertaken. Following common practice, a "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) approach was adopted. In this type of analysis categories or themes are generated inductively from the data through a slow process of reading and re-reading the case notes. Then the material can be grouped under these headings to see whether clear-cut patterns of thoughts, feelings or actions are in evidence across the sample. For this process, simple binary matrices were used to record as much information as possible on one display (see Miles and Huberman, 1984). At first the case notes from the two agencies were considered separately. This allowed the drawing of distinctions between the agencies and enabled a clear picture to be obtained as to how the agencies were similar. The complete set of case notes was then considered as a whole. As a coherent account developed this was repeatedly checked against the data as it appeared in the case notes.

5.5 Quantitative Method

5.5.1 Measures

As discussed above, the rationale for carrying out a large scale questionnaire survey was to enable a quantitative assessment of the extent and generalisability of some of the interview findings, as well as providing the opportunity to explore the relationships between the individual difference variables and mental health outlined in the theoretically-grounded conceptual framework described in Chapter 3. Thus the main variables within the questionnaire included the

operationalisations of the variables within the conceptual framework, as well as questions about participants' level of satisfaction with different features of CP, and their CP post, (eg was it part-time or full-time?). These variables will be discussed below.

Two versions of the self-completion questionnaire were developed, one for individuals currently working on CP and one for ex-CP participants (see Appendices A and B). The questionnaires were only slightly different: In the questionnaire for ex-CP participants some items were re-worded in the past tense; in Section Two past CP participants were asked about their experiences since leaving CP, and current participants were asked about their plans for the future. The psychological measures which formed the main part of the questionnaire were the same in both versions. Questions about demographic variables and the experience of CP constituted the remainder of the questionnaire. The same pair of questionnaires was used at both Agencies.

Because the psychometric properties of the newly operationalised variables were unknown, and because the author wanted to reduce the risk of producing spuriously inflated scale reliability coefficients (i.e. that the scales might appear to have high internal consistency simply by virtue of the items being presented consecutively) the items in each scale were *not* always grouped together within the questionnaire. The measures which appeared in the questionnaire were then subjected to preliminary factor and reliability analyses and were modified accordingly before being used in the main statistical analyses. (These modifications are described below). Appendix C therefore shows a list of the items for each measure as finally constituted and used in the statistical analyses.

As outlined in the conceptual framework in Chapter 3, three major groups of variables will be considered: personal characteristics (including demographic

characteristics and dispositions); intervening variables (mediators in the present framework); and mental health outcomes. These will be dealt with in reverse order. In this section I shall deal only with the issues surrounding the operationalisation of these variables rather than repeating the substantive issues of conceptualisation which were dealt with in Chapter 3.

Mental Health Outcomes

Affective Well-Being. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) was originally designed as a self-administered screening test for detecting minor psychiatric disorder in community settings. However, as discussed in Chapter 1 it has been adopted by workers in the field of psychological unemployment research and used widely in large scale quantitative surveys as a measure of: (according to the particular author) psychological distress, psychological ill-health, mental health, and affective well-being. Indeed there seems to be little doubt that this instrument is by far the most commonly used mental health outcome measure in psychological studies of unemployment, but that there is considerable confusion over exactly what it does in fact measure.

In the present study the GHQ will be regarded as an operationalisation of affective well-being (one aspect of mental health) rather than as a more general measure of mental health as a whole. The reasons for this decision relate not only to the general arguments presented in Chapter 2 concerning the unacceptability of conceptualising mental health as a unidimensional construct, but also to the item content of the questionnaire which seems primarily (though not exclusively) to relate to the subjective feelings of happiness, contentment, and enjoyment (or lack of them) which are at the heart of the conceptualisation of affective well-being proposed in Chapter 2. For example, one question is 'Have you recently been feeling reasonably happy all things considered?' with the

four response options: 'not at all', 'no more than usual', 'rather more than usual', and 'much more than usual'.

Originally developed by Goldberg (1972), several versions of this scale (of varying lengths) exist. The shorter, 12-item version used here contains the 12 "best" items (i.e. the most discriminatory within the original development samples) from the full set of 60 questions. The shorter version was chosen for reasons of speed and convenience. The Likert method of scoring was used, assigning values of 0,1,2 and 3 to the response alternatives (see Banks, Clegg, Jackson, Kemp, Stafford and Wall, 1980). It is important to note that using this scoring system, a *high* score indicates *lower* affective well-being. Reliability analysis of the internal homogeneity of the scale gave a Cronbach (1951) standardised item alpha coefficient of 0.89 for the present data.

The GHQ has some limitations which are worth mentioning. Perhaps the least important of these is the unsuitability of the GHQ for detecting psychotic disorder. This is not of great concern in the context of the current study, but a second problem, that long standing low affective well-being may be underreported is more relevant. Warr and Jackson (1985) have commented that due to the wording of the questions, respondents with long-standing low affective well-being may not be identified as such unless their symptoms are "rather more" or "much more than usual". Although this may be true for very long standing low well-being, it should be borne in mind that most people sustain the notion of their "usual" selves for a long time (Goldberg, 1972). Despite these limitations, the GHQ was considered the most appropriate instrument for the current study, particularly because it would enable comparisons with previous work in the same area.

Perceived Competence. The second aspect of mental health incorporated in the present study, perceived competence has been discussed in Chapter 2 within the account of mental health, and in Chapter 3 as part of the guiding conceptual framework for the study. A new, six-item operationalisation of this variable was developed from Warr and Jackson's (1983) measure of positive self esteem augmented by three items from the Pearlin and Schooler (1978) Mastery and Self-Esteem scales. Examples of questions are: 'I can do just about anything I really set my mind to' or 'When I do something I always do it well', and are scored on a five point Likert scale from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. The scale is intended to measure the extent to which individuals feel a sense of mastery, an ability to deal with their environment and perform effectively in different spheres of life (see Chapters 2 & 3 for a fuller conceptualisation). Following factor analysis and reliability analyses, one of the original seven items was dropped from the scale, giving an standardised item alpha coefficient of 0.86.

Intervening Variables

Activity Level. A new scale was developed to measure the first of the two intervening variables in the guiding conceptual framework (Chapter 3), activity. This scale measures the extent to which an individual feels that their time is occupied, that they are active and have plenty to do. It is a six-item scale, with three of the items developed by the author and three items taken from Miles' (1983) Access to Categories of Experience Questionnaire. Reliability analyses lent support to the combination of these items, giving an alpha coefficient of 0.82. Illustrative items are 'My time is filled with things to do', or 'Things that I have to do keep me busy most of the day'. Each item was scored on a five-point Likert scale from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'.

Personal Control. This scale measures the extent to which the individual feels they are able to exert influence over their immediate environment. It was

developed by Jackson (personal communication, 1986) using three items from the Pearlin and Schooler (1978) Mastery scale with two additional items. In the present study, reliability analyses led to one of these original five items, ("Many times we might just as well decide what to do by tossing a coin"), being discarded. The remaining four items gave an alpha coefficient of 0.76. Examples of questions are: "There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life" or "Many times I feel I have little influence over the things that happen to me".

Personal characteristics

Work Commitment and Employment Commitment. As noted in earlier chapters there is, in the psychological literature on unemployment, extensive use of an individual difference variable referred to as Employment Commitment to predict psychological health in unemployed samples (e.g. Jackson et al., 1983; Jackson & Warr, 1984). The Employment Commitment scale measures the desire to be in paid employment, and has been compared to scales measuring Protestant Work Ethic (e.g. Mirels and Garrett, 1976). However, several writers have pointed out that the term "work" has often been used to refer to employment, both within the literature and in everyday talk and that there is a need to distinguish between "Employment" (a money-for-tasks-undertaken agreement) and "Work" (an activity for a purpose beyond that of its own execution), (Fryer & Payne 1984).

For the current study it was therefore hypothesised that it would be possible to measure Employment Commitment and Work Commitment as separate and independent variables, the first measuring commitment to having a paid job, and the second commitment to working hard irrespective of it being within or outside of employment.

Jackson and Warr's (1984) Employment Commitment scale was slightly modified to remove the vague references to "work" (meaning "employment"), and these were replaced with the more precise and specific term "job". Items included "Having a job is very important to me" and "I hate being on the dole".

A new Work Commitment scale was developed by the author which referred to "work" and "tasks", but avoided the use of the words "job" or "employment" - for example, items included "I like to use my time as productively as possible" and "I take pride in doing a task as well as I can". Principal Components factor analysis (see Appendix D) entering both scales concurrently showed that the items from the two measures clearly loaded onto two separate factors, one corresponding to work commitment and one to employment commitment. One item was discarded from the work commitment scale ("My opinion of myself goes down when I am being lazy"), giving alpha coefficients of 0.87 for the seven-item employment commitment measure, and 0.77 for the five-item work commitment measure. Both scales were scored on a five point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree".

Self Motivation. This scale was developed by the author, and is intended to measure the extent to which the individual is able to motivate themselves internally or plan their own lives rather than needing externally imposed structure or motivation. Illustrative items are "I am good at setting my own goals for myself" and "I prefer to have targets set for me". Following reliability analyses two of the original eight items were discarded, giving a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.69. The discarded items were: "I often put off doing things that I don't enjoy", and "I often find it difficult to get started on a task". Again a Likert scale on five points from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" was used.

Growth Need Strength. A slightly reworded version of the Warr, Cook and Wall, (1979) measure of "Higher Order Needs Strength". (The rewording involved the use of a slightly different item stem which was considered more appropriate for CP participants as opposed to employees in the mainstream labour market). These authors describe their own scale as measuring the individual's need for "satisfaction and achievement through skilled and autonomous work". The present scale is also similar to the earlier Hackman and Oldham (1975) measure of "Growth Need Strength", and for the reasons explained in Chapter 3, this term is preferred in the present study.

Reliability analyses gave a Cronbach alpha of 0.85 for the seven item scale. Items ask about the importance of "the opportunity to learn new things", or "the chance to achieve something that I personally value" and are scored on a Likert scale of five points from "Not at all important" to "Extremely important".

Additional Measure

Project Satisfaction. As noted above, the author intended that within the questionnaire survey there should be some consideration of the different features of the scheme, and the way in which these related to the psychological experience of the participants. To this end, a modified version of the Warr, Cook and Wall (1979) 15-item measure of Overall Job Satisfaction was used. This scale is defined as a measure of the degree to which the person reports satisfaction with the intrinsic and extrinsic features of the job. Items are concerned with satisfaction with a number of aspects of the job including hours of work, recognition for good work, the amount of variety and immediate boss. The scale was adapted from the original to make it appropriate to CP. Three of the original items (those on promotion, job security, and management-worker relations) were omitted, as it was felt that these items (particularly the job security item) might provoke feelings of resentment on the part of participants

whose contracts of employment were almost without exception, limited to one year and very unlikely to be extended, and whose promotion prospects were almost nil.

Other changes were the inclusion of the optional, general question, "Taking everything into consideration, how do you feel about your job as a whole?" and the inclusion of an additional item on the amount of training given. This then gave a 14-item scale which remained highly reliable (alpha coefficient = 0.88), the alphas in the two original assessment studies being 0.85 and 0.88 (Warr, Cook and Wall, 1979). The answers are scored on a five-point Likert scale from "Extremely satisfied" to "Extremely dissatisfied", higher scores indicating greater satisfaction.

As is commonly the case in self-completion questionnaire studies of this type, the scores on several of the measures were significantly intercorrelated. (The possible role of common-method variance is considered in the Chapter 8). This might be taken to indicate that each scale was only measuring the same variable in a different way. Principal components factor analyses were therefore conducted on intercorrelated scales (Appendix D). These clearly illustrated each of the scales loading heavily onto a different factor, strongly suggesting that the scales, despite being intercorrelated, were in fact measuring separate constructs.

5.5.2 Procedure and Sampling Method

Slightly different procedures were used at the two sites and they will therefore be described separately.

Agency A

At this site, the agency management administered the delivery and collection of the questionnaires as they were unwilling to make names and addresses of

individual employees available to the author. Three hundred questionnaires were sent in individually named envelopes to a 60% sample of the agency workforce. The envelopes were delivered by hand via project supervisors. Enclosed in each envelope was the questionnaire, a covering letter explaining the purpose of the research, and a return envelope. Questionnaires were returned via the project supervisors, but in sealed envelopes to preserve anonymity and confidentiality, particularly as reassurance to respondents that the agency management would not have access to the responses. The agency management allowed five weeks for the return of the questionnaires after which time all returns were excluded from the study. The sealed envelopes were then mailed to the author in Sheffield. The procedure for the sample of former CP participants was similar except that delivery and return of the questionnaires was by post. The most recent two hundred ex-employees were selected from the agency's records.

Agency B

The management of Agency B made available the names and addresses of participants, and the author therefore undertook the administration of the quantitative study. One hundred and seventy two current CP participants (representing an 86% sample of the full workforce) were sent questionnaires in individually named envelopes which also enclosed a covering letter, and a pre-paid return envelope (to the Social and Applied Psychology Unit). These envelopes were delivered either by the author personally (via project supervisors) or by post. Again the author allowed five weeks for the return of the questionnaires after which time all returns were excluded. A similar procedure was used for the 204 most recent ex-CP participants except that the questionnaires were mailed to the home address of the respondents. In addition, in order to improve response rates, a reminder letter was sent to all the addresses after 10 days.

5.5.3 Sample and response rates

Of the 876 questionnaires which were sent out, 484 usable questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate for the whole sample of 55%, which Babbie (1973) has considered adequate for analysis. (This figure omits nondeliverable questionnaires, including, for example, those sent to an address where the respondent no longer resided and which were therefore returned to the sender). However within this overall response rate there was considerable variation. The response rates for the different sub-samples are shown in Table 5.5.3

Table 5.5.3: Response rates for the four sub-samples

Agency A		Agency B	
Current CP Sample	Ex-CP Sample	Current CP Sample	Ex-CP Sample
63%	43%	59%	52%

Response rate for full sample: 55%

The lowest response rate was for the ex-employee sample from Agency A (43%), and this was presumably due to the impersonal nature of the contact (postal survey), coupled with the absence of a reminder letter. A higher response rate (52%) was achieved for the corresponding sample for Agency B which was administered by the author, where potential respondents could be more certain of confidentiality (as questionnaires were mailed directly back to the research institution), and perhaps most significantly, a reminder letter was sent. The highest response rates (63% and 59%) were achieved for the Current CP workers samples, presumably because of the personal nature of the contact, and encouragement from supervisors that the questionnaires should be completed.

5.5.4 Sample Characteristics

Details of the characteristics of the sample are valuable as they provide some indication as to whether the sample is representative of the population from which it is drawn. The characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 5.5.4 (a).

Table 5.5.4 (a): Sample characteristics

Full sample (N = 484)

	N	%
(a) Agency A	276	57%
Agency B	208	43%
(b) Current CP Participants	290	60%
Ex-CP Participants	194	40%
(c) CP	290	60%
Employed	88	18%
Unemployed	82	17%
Other	24	5%
(d) Men	265	55%
Women	219	45%
(e) F/T (over 35hrs)	117	24%
P/T	363	75%
	(4 missing)	
(f) Single	329	68%
Married	105	22%
Other	48	10%
	(2 missing)	

- (a) Of the full sample of 484 respondents, 276 (57%) respondents were from Agency A, and 208 (43%) from Agency B, this reflecting the relative sizes of the two agencies and the equivalence of response rates.
- (b) Individuals who were currently participating on CP were easier to contact than ex-participants because current workplace addresses were always available. The initial sampling frame therefore included more current participants for purely practical reasons. To add to this inequality the ex-participants were less prone to respond to the questionnaire (see Section 5.5.2). For these reasons, the final sample included a greater proportion of current participants (60%) than ex-participants (40%).
- (c) Ex-CP participants were asked in the questionnaire about their current employment status. Splitting the group according to their answers to this question generated two of the three major sub-samples used in the analysis: the Employed group (N=88), and the Unemployed group (N=82). These two groups were used in comparisons with the third major group, namely Current CP participants (N=290). The remaining 24 respondents defined themselves as neither employed nor unemployed and were either retired, in full-time training, or parenting children.
- (d) The sample included more men (265) than women (219). These figures mask the fact that at Agency B, a majority of respondents were women (64%), whereas at Agency A, considerably more respondents were men (69%). The present overall sample is more balanced between the genders than is the case in CP nationally. The 1986 figures show only 22% of the national CP workforce to be female (New Society, March 1987), whereas 45% of the present sample are women. (See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the reasons for this bias).

(e) A full-time CP position is defined here as being 35 hours per week or more. As is the case nationally, part-time positions (usually either 17 or 24 hours) are more usual, with 75% of respondents working part-time and 24% having full-time places. Throughout the country as a whole, only 14% of positions are full-time, so these agencies have a somewhat larger proportion of full-timers than might be expected.

(f) Single people accounted for 68% of the sample, whilst 22% were married. (Although it should be borne in mind that perhaps these definitions are somewhat narrow in current society. It may have been more advisable to have worded this question so that respondents indicated if they were married *or living as a married couple*). Individuals who were widowed, divorced or separated accounted for the remaining 10%. Again the present sample is biased in the same direction (although not to the same extent) as the national figures: across the country as a whole, 79% of participants are single (Unemployment Unit, 1987).

Age distribution

The age distribution of the sample is shown in Table 5.5.4 (b). The choice of age groupings was made in part to allow comparisons with official statistics (these age categories have been used in Government research on CP).

Of the total sample, 51% were 18-24 years of age, 38% were between 25 and 44 years old, and only 11% were aged over 44 years. This represents reasonably the skewed age distribution of all the workers within the agencies taken together, but masks the fact that Agency B had very few older workers.

TABLE 5.5.4.(b): Sample characteristics - Age distribution

		Current study	CP Nationally*
	N	%	%
18-24 years	246	51%	62%
25-44 years	182	38%	25%
45+ years	53	11%	14%
Total	481	100%	100%
	(3 missing)		

*Normington, Brodie & Munro (1986)

Nationally, the direction of the age bias is similar, but there are even more CP participants in the younger age category, and fewer in the middle category. The national figures show that 62% of CP participants are 18-24 years, 25% are 25-44 years, and 14% are aged over 44 years. The reasons for this skewed age distribution amongst CP participants are again discussed in Chapter 4.

Duration of Unemployment before CP

As noted in Chapter 4, exemptions from the eligibility requirements for entry to CP are relatively rare. Only 7 people from the sample had been unemployed for less than six months before starting CP. Just over half (51%) of the sample had been unemployed for over a year before starting CP, and 25% had been unemployed for two years or more.

Representativeness of the Sample

The demographic statistics presented here suggest that the current sample is not untypical of CP participants in general. Departures from the national statistics

have been noted, but it is clear that as is the case nationally, participants (and consequently ex-participants) are more likely to be young, single men working on CP in a part-time capacity.

5.5.5 Comparisons between The Two Agencies

Table 5.5.5: The two agencies compared - Mean scores on all variables

	AGENCY A (N=276)	AGENCY B (N=208)	F	p
	Mean	Mean		
Proj Satis	3.79	3.86	2.16	n.s.
Aff W-B (R)	.82	.88	0.20	n.s.
Competence	4.13	4.20	0.57	n.s.
Activity	3.84	3.68	0.71	n.s.
Control (R)	2.57	2.60	0.12	n.s.
Work Commit	4.35	4.36	0.06	n.s.
Self-motiv	3.79	3.95	6.5	<.05
Growth Needs	4.43	4.56	5.19	<.05
Employ commit	4.00	3.63	17.90	<.001

(R) Indicates a scale which is reverse scored

(N varies from 453 to 484 depending on missing values)

Mean scores on major variables for respondents from each of the agencies are shown in Table 5.5.5. Analyses of variance were conducted to test for main effects of Agency (Agency A v Agency B) on each of the variables. Two-way analyses were used to control for the possible effects of differences in the sizes of employment status groups (CP, Employed and Unemployed) across agencies.

This was necessary for example, because the larger proportion of unemployed people in Agency B might have produced an artefactual difference in the mean well-being scores of the two agencies.

The table shows that there are no differences between the agencies on six of the variables, but that the sample from Agency A report lower self-motivation ($F=6.45$, $df=1,442$, $p<0.05$), and lower levels of growth needs ($F=3.87$, $df=1,440$, $p<0.05$), than the Agency B sample. By contrast those in Agency B tend to be less committed to employment than those in Agency A ($F=17.10$, $df=1,436$, $p<0.001$). These differences are dealt with in the discussion chapter, but the extent of similarity between the agencies, particularly in the mental health outcome variables provided support for combining the data from both of the agencies in analysis.

CHAPTER 6: QUALITATIVE RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

The findings of the interviews with CP participants are presented in this chapter. The results are presented in four main sections. The first of these is a brief description of the characteristics of the qualitative sample of 60 CP workers. The second, third and fourth sections relate to the substantive aims of the thesis; the second section deals with the interviewees' experiences of unemployment, and the third section discusses individual differences in the experience of unemployment. Finally, the fourth section describes the experience of CP. In this chapter I shall be interpreting and discussing the data will also be used to illustrate a number of points in Chapter 8.

Before these findings are presented however, I will address some issues relating to the analysis, presentation and interpretation of the qualitative data. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews tend to yield large quantities of rich, complex, and detailed data. Of course in one sense this is precisely why qualitative methods are so attractive; they produce data which seem to have high face validity, or what Smith (1978) has referred to as a quality of "undeniability". However, the very complexity and quantity of the data creates difficulties for the processes of analysis and interpretation. (In the present study, as we shall see, these difficulties were severely exacerbated by the chosen interview structure and approach taken in analysing the data. As a consequence, the interview findings were considerably less informative than had originally been intended). Some indication as to the size of the task of analysis in the present study is given by the fact that the set of 60 case notes included over 450 verbatim quotations. In order to simplify the process, the author focussed primarily on those sections of the case notes which were most closely related to the central concerns of the thesis: the experience of unemployment and the experience of CP. Content analysis of the case notes was undertaken: recurrent themes were identified, content categories created, and interviewee statements coded according to these categories (see also

Chapter 5). This process enabled the author to determine the proportions of the sample who referred to different aspects of unemployment and CP and to make some accurate generalisations about their experiences. These proportions are included in the text below, but it was the author's intention not to over-quantify this section of findings.

On first inspection, the absolute numbers of individuals raising specific issues may be somewhat lower than might be expected. For example, where it is indicated that one third of the sample expressed a particular view, it will be obvious that two-thirds (a majority) did not express that view. However, in considering the findings it should be borne in mind that during the course of the interviews the interviewer took great care not to lead interviewees by suggesting features of unemployment or CP drawn from his own knowledge of the literature. Thus, simply because an individual did not spontaneously raise a particular issue, it cannot be assumed that it did not form part of their experience. Moreover, it is important to remember that, as we have seen in Chapter 1 of this thesis, quantitative studies conducted in real-life field settings are often able to account for only a small proportion of the variance in outcome variables and "exceptions to the rule" are far from being a rarity even in the results of studies which are designed to be highly generalisable.

All of the preceding comments relate to issues surrounding the analysis, interpretation and presentation of the qualitative data. They are intended to clarify and make explicit these processes so that the reader is able to make a judgement about the weight which they wish to attach to the qualitative findings. They are not intended to obscure the fact that the final account of the data is a personal one. Despite the care which has been taken to maximise objectivity in the analysis, it is inevitable that the final account will to some extent reflect the attitudes, beliefs and prior knowledge of the author.

6.2 The Interviewees

At the time of being interviewed, all 60 of the interviewees were participating on a CP project. In accordance with the qualifying requirements for CP, almost all of the sample had been registered as unemployed for at least six months prior to their entry to CP.

Two thirds of the interviewees were men and one third women. The average age of the participants was 30 years, but a wide range of age groups was sampled. The youngest person interviewed was only just 18 years of age and the oldest interviewee was approaching retirement age at 64 years. The majority of the CP workers interviewed were single (38 interviewees), with only 12 being married, and 10 being divorced or separated.

6.3 The Experience of Unemployment

In this section I shall attempt to provide an overview of the experience of unemployment for this group of interviewees by focussing on those aspects which were mentioned most frequently in the interviews. In considering these findings it should be borne in mind that all interviewees were currently participating on CP at the time of the interview, and therefore that the findings which follow are based on retrospective accounts of the experience of unemployment. In one sense this could be regarded as a weakness of the design inasmuch as individuals' perceptions of their personal experience may change and develop over time. Thus, the reliability of these accounts as a source of evidence about the experience of unemployment might be called into question. However, an alternative view is that retrospective reporting of this kind would enable the interviewees, with the benefit of hindsight, to consider their experience within a wider personal historical context, and to offer a broader, more informed perspective than would be possible during the course of what (for many) would have been a particularly distressing period in their lives. It is in this latter spirit that the following results are presented,

although of course the potential disadvantages of this approach should be borne in mind throughout.

How then, did the interviewees describe their experience of unemployment? In general, there was a clear-cut weight of opinion that the experience of unemployment was largely negative for most of these interviewees. Interviewee statements about negative features of unemployment and negative personal outcomes far outnumbered statements about positive features or positive personal outcomes, and only a minority of the interviewees described their experience of unemployment in largely positive terms. This general finding is not at all surprising and is entirely consistent with almost all existing empirical and theoretical accounts within the psychological literature on unemployment (see Chapter 1).

However, unemployment was not experienced as being entirely negative. Some individuals described unemployment in largely positive terms (see Section 6.4), and many of the interviewees remarked upon positive aspects even when in general they had found it a negative experience. Bearing in mind that unemployment was largely perceived negatively, I shall deal first with the negative features of unemployment, and then move on to discuss positive aspects. At the end, I will provide an initial (and brief) comparison of these findings with the theoretical accounts of the experience of unemployment put forward in the psychological literature. (The issues raised will of course be discussed further in Chapter 8).

Without doubt, the single, most frequently cited negative aspect of unemployment was the lack of money. It was mentioned spontaneously by more than half of the respondents, several of whom reported that they had had to borrow money to make ends meet during their spell of unemployment. This borrowing had been necessary not only because their income from social

security benefit payments was so meagre, but also because some of the sample had experienced considerable delays in receiving payment. Several of the younger respondents had attempted to limit their outgoings by continuing to live with their parents. A minority of interviewees mentioned that they had had partners who were in either part-time or full-time employment, but even then the resulting income, (combined with benefit payments) still left many of the respondents struggling to get by financially:

I 07 "You can't afford anything, you can't afford any luxury."

I 43 "You see what the world's really like: Tough, especially if you haven't got any money."

What were the personal and psychological consequences of this financial hardship for the experience of the interviewees? Perhaps more than anything else, it had imposed severe constraints on what they were able to do with their time. In a market society, where almost any (non-employment) activity involves some sort of financial cost, the interviewees often found that their attempts to occupy themselves, to be active and to productively fill the time which they would otherwise have spent at the workplace, were frustrated:

I 60 "The main thing about being unemployed is the lack of money. It's great having all that time, but with no money you can't do anything with it."

I 54 " ... it (unemployment) gets a bit tedious because of limited money and because of that, then you've only got a certain amount of things that you can actually do."

I 22 "I used to drift round town endlessly, (but) you can't buy anything because you haven't got any money."

One key personal consequence of financial hardship then, was a reduced level of activity. This was spontaneously mentioned by one quarter of the respondents, several of whom commented that a lack of money meant that they had felt constrained to stay at home all day rather than going out of the house:

I 52 "Probably the worst thing was not having anything to do."

I 58 "Once I'd done my housework and all that, there were nothing to do."

I 03 "All I wanted was anything to get me out of the house."

Not surprisingly, these low levels of activity had led to *feelings of boredom*, lethargy and listlessness amongst many of the respondents. Feelings of boredom were cited as a personal outcome of unemployment by one-third of all those interviewed:

I 59 "What I remember most about it was being bored."

I 14 "The first six months it was brilliant...out of school, you get out and have some fun ..., then after that it gets boring and you want to work."
"I used to ride around on my bike, just to do something."

I 52 "..the sheer boredom of just sitting, I mean I used to just sit and two or three days would pass while I was sat, with just nothing."

I 03 "A bit soul destroying really - you've got so much time on your hands."

Inactivity and associated feelings of boredom however, were not the only consequences of a shortage of money. Several of the interviewees indicated that they had felt worried about paying their bills or anxious about whether they would be able to support their families, whilst others implied that poverty had undermined their sense of autonomy and self-respect:

I 51 "Now I had nothing, no money or anything - scrounging off people for food, it was terrible."

"I felt no-one really wanted to know what I felt cos everything was done on rules and regulations which had nothing to do with the way people thought and felt so I just sat and did nothing".

I 58 "I used to be afraid of my bills... There's times when you want things and you take it on HP and you never stop paying."

I 46 "I was worried about money ... It took 12 weeks for my supplementary benefit to come through."

Aside from lack of money, another negative feature of the unemployed environment mentioned by several of the interviewees was a *lack of structure* in their day to day experience. This lack of structure typically incorporated two conceptually distinct elements: the first concerned the interviewees' experience of having few aims, goals, targets and objectives to work towards, whilst the second related to the lack of time structure, or "markers" to break up the days, weeks or months:

I 59 "There's no structure - you don't have to be organised."

"You can just rot really if you're unemployed and you don't keep your head together and organise things for yourself to do."

I 22 "Without work its a sort of void in your life. There's no aim to the days, there's no aim to life really."

I 51 "There's so much time in a week that its very difficult to fill in a whole week of leisure time - it's nice to have to fill in half a week or a quarter of a week ..."

Amongst several of the younger interviewees this lack of structure was initially perceived as a positive aspect of unemployment, inasmuch as it represented a release from the restrictions imposed by the routine of the educational environment. However, for most, this feeling had not lasted long, and was soon replaced by feelings of aimlessness and boredom:

I 40 "The first month was like a holiday. Then it hit me that forever and a day, I'd be getting up not for work, (but) just to go to the jobcentre."

I 27 "For the first two months it was like a holiday, but after that I wanted to go back (to school) because I was bored."

I 14 "The first six months it was brilliant ... Out of school, you get out and have some fun. Then after that it gets boring and you want to work."

It was clear that for those interviewees who reported a lack of structure as a negative aspect of unemployment, this was frequently exacerbated by the constraints on personal activity imposed by financial hardship. Thus these two factors (lack of structure and financial hardship) could combine to effect a double blow to the interviewees:

I 59 "..see, if you've got nothing to do all day, then its just boredom and you haven't really got any money, so you can't go out. I just used to end up sitting round."

For some interviewees, the combination of a lack of money (and consequent inactivity), a lack of structure, and concern over the future had had serious affective consequences. Over one third of the sample reported that they had become very unhappy or depressed. Two interviewees had become so unhappy that they had seriously contemplated suicide, and one of these had taken an overdose. Most respondents had not reached this stage, but nevertheless many stated clearly that they had become extremely unhappy. Several felt pessimistic about the future and some began to question their own ability to deal with the world around them:

I 38 "I got very very very unhappy in the end - I think mostly because I didn't really look after myself."

I 51 "...just terrible, the worst time of my life...I had nothing to offer anybody anymore."

I 52 "I used to go through really depressive patches where I couldn't care less what was going on around me.... I just used to sit in the chair and watch the world go round me."

I 22 "There was no future ... everything seemed pointless"

I 40 "I was quite sure I was never going to get a job actually ... at the eight month stage."

I 34 "I were ready for a breakdown ... Everything had got on top of me ... I just felt as though I couldn't cope..I'd got too much against me."

But what of the positive aspects of unemployment mentioned above? Over half of the sample identified at least one aspect of unemployment which they considered to be positive. One theme which emerged strongly here was that of learning or developing through what had been a psychologically painful experience. Interviewees commented that they had grown or matured in some way or had learned new things about themselves and others through the experience of unemployment. Other positive outcomes included feelings of self-value or self-acceptance, feelings of control (sic), and feeling less pressure or responsibility.

These findings however, are not easy to interpret. Sometimes these positive outcomes could be seen as a direct result of unemployment itself, but for many interviewees it was clear that the positive outcomes were related to specific activities which had been encouraged or permitted by virtue of the interviewee being unemployed. In such cases it would seem more appropriate to regard these outcomes as only indirect effects of unemployment:

I 55 "It (unemployment) was quite a productive time for me. It made me realise where I wanted to go in the future.... It gave me the opportunity to stand back and take stock of what I actually wanted to do."

"I found I'd got a lot of opinions that I'd never even thought of before."

"I felt I'd actually achieved something. It was something over which I had some control."

I 59 "I learnt self value. I got quite a bit stronger. What I learnt was ... I've got to value myself for what I can do. Don't let anybody else tell me what I can and can't do."

"I also decided that I'd do something. Like, learning to play the bass (guitar) was a really big step. You know it was the first positive move that I'd done with my life."

I 39 "I grew up a lot ... more responsibility. In relationships I had more confidence in dealing with people."

I 36 "(Unemployment was) ... very difficult regarding money, but I gained such a lot out of it because I learnt a lot, met a lot of new people and I became more involved actively and politically."

"I learnt that people lived in poverty through no fault of their own."

I 31 "It was nice - just a continuation of my student days basically. No, I didn't mind it at all really. (I) Moved into a house which was like, other people in the same position as me ... All the time I was involved in doing things, I was like, really busy. It was like doing what I wanted to be doing as opposed to doing what somebody wanted me to do in a job like."

I 29 "I loved it ... moving around a lot. I liked the people (travellers) they had a good attitude, they had a laugh."

However, by far the most frequently mentioned positive aspect of unemployment was the increased availability of time, which enabled the interviewees to pursue activities of their own choosing. This feature was mentioned by over half of the interviewees, and other positive features such as escaping unsatisfactory employment, or financial concessions for the unemployed were insignificant by comparison. The activities which they pursued varied widely and included voluntary work, socialising, hobbies, sports, political activity, travel and DIY.

I 54 "You had time to yourself, you had time for your friends, you had time for everything."

"Working, you don't necessarily get enough time to yourself."

I 31 "(On CP), you get more money, but you have to give up your time. That's what I really miss about being on the dole."

I 36 "A lot more time to get involved in community work."

"I took a risk by giving up my job and it meant that I had to struggle with money, but also I got involved with a lot of interesting things which made me develop as a person, which a paid job doesn't always do."

I 51 "In unemployment, you've got time to spend in your own way."

That the availability of time should be by far the most cited positive aspect of unemployment is particularly interesting, bearing in mind that boredom and inactivity were two of the most cited negative aspects. However, these findings are not necessarily incompatible, and as one interviewee put it:

I 54 "Time is both the best thing and the worst thing."

One way to interpret this combination of findings is in terms of the relationship between available time on the one hand, and the extent to which the individual is able (given the opportunities and constraints that they face) to use and to structure that time in satisfying and personally meaningful ways on the other hand. Thus, the availability of time would be perceived positively if the individual is able to use it as an opportunity to engage in activities which are personally valued. However, having free time would be perceived negatively if the individual is unable to find ways to use and structure that time

with valued activities, or cannot fill it because of other constraints such as lack of money.

Such an explanation would seem to be consistent with the explicit acknowledgement of several interviewees that in order to cope psychologically with the experience of unemployment, it was critical to stay active:

I 60 "When you're unemployed like that you've got to keep active because if you don't keep active you'd just end up thinking too much and getting depressed."

I 56 "I didn't mind it because I kept active. If you keep active, if you go to college, stay on at school, even come to an unemployment centre, you're not going to be as distraught about unemployment."

This is perhaps why so many of the interviewees (over one third of the sample) had participated in some sort of voluntary work whilst unemployed:

I 55 "It (a local conservation group) was something I enjoyed doing, something I felt was very important and something I gave a lot of commitment to."

"I needed the fulfilment, that if things had've been easier, that I could've got from a job - paid employment."

I 04 "People are made (created) to work I suppose...and that you get a certain satisfaction out of working. It doesn't have to be paid employment, it can be voluntary, but providing you've got something."

I 54 "I felt better because I felt I was still doing something ... that I was achieving something, that it was something I wanted to do and it gives

you a sort of half-identity. If you're doing voluntary work and you meet people who say 'What are you doing now?', at least you've got that to say you're doing."

How do these findings compare with the theoretical accounts offered by Jahoda (1986), Warr (1987) and Fryer (1988a) within the psychological literature on the experience of unemployment? (see Chapter 1). Clearly, the overarching theme of these theories, that the experience of unemployment is (for most people) largely a negative one, is reflected in the accounts given by this group. Certainly some of the key issues which have been highlighted to explain the negative consequences of unemployment in the theoretical literature were also salient ones for these interviewees. For example, Jahoda's claims that "engagement in activity", "time structure", and "the provision of goals transcending those of the individual" are critical factors influencing the affective experience of unemployed people would seem to be borne out by the present findings. The accounts of the interviewees would also seem to be broadly consistent with Warr's (1987) emphasis on the psychological significance of "the availability of money", "externally generated goals", and "environmental clarity". (This is not surprising bearing in mind the overlap between the two accounts described in Chapter 1).

However, it is equally clear that not all of the "latent functions" or "vitamins" described by Jahoda and Warr emerged so strongly from the interviewees accounts as being personally significant aspects of the experience of this group. In particular there seemed to be less within the interviewees' accounts which could be construed as a reference to a lack of "physical security", "valued social position", or "opportunity for interpersonal contact" (Warr). Similarly there was little mention of a lack of "shared experiences with others outside the nuclear family", or "undermining of personal status and social identity" (Jahoda). Now, we cannot infer that these putative features of unemployment

were of no significance to the interviewees, simply because they were less frequently reported. (The "underreporting" of these features might be explained in a variety of ways, including for example, the suggestion that, for a group whose reports were retrospective, they were simply less memorable). But the fact that these features were less salient for the interviewees in comparison with other features (notably lack of money, inactivity, and lack of structure) might be taken as some indication of their relative personal and psychological significance.

Whether or not such an interpretation is accepted, it nevertheless suggests an important weakness in the accounts offered by Jahoda and Warr; namely that they provide no indication about the relative importance of their different latent functions or vitamins in bringing about the detrimental psychological consequences of unemployment. In other words, they do not make clear what they consider to be the most important factors in bringing about the negative psychological consequences of unemployment.

However, such a criticism could not be levelled (or at least not to the same extent) at Fryer's Agency Restriction account. Fryer has been quite explicit about the factors (or perhaps factor) which he considers to be most important. He has forcefully and repeatedly emphasised that it is financial hardship, and its implications for personal agency, which lie at the heart of his account: "..it is frustration of agency by relative poverty, and associated social, psychological repercussions, which is at the core of the approach" (Fryer 1988a, p.228).

Clearly the present findings concerning the significance of lack of money, and consequent constraints on activity are highly consistent with both the central role which Fryer accords to poverty, and with his explanation of why financial hardship is important. Moreover, the present findings also reinforce Fryer's explanation for positioning poverty at the core of his account. He writes:

"..whenever research gives unemployed people the opportunity, they repeatedly, emphatically and consistently tell us that lack of money is their greatest source of personal and family difficulties" (Fryer 1988b, p.59).

In relation to the psychological significance of a lack of structure however, the present findings are not so closely aligned with Fryer's theoretical contribution. Fryer does consider "the experience of time" to be a crucial issue in explaining the effects of unemployment (see Fryer and McKenna, 1987), but whereas Fryer's account can be seen as emphasising the importance of a lack of long-term time structure (the uncertainty over when unemployment will end), the current findings highlight the significance of a lack of short-term (day-to-day) structure and the lack of goals or objectives to work towards. (Uncertainty about the future was mentioned, but it emerged less strongly than lack of short-term structure). In this respect then, the present findings, (as noted above), are perhaps more consistent with the accounts of Warr and Jahoda. An interesting corollary of this interpretation of the current findings is that it would seem to contradict the argument advanced in Chapter 1 of this thesis, that Fryer's "temporal insecurity" could be regarded as simply a rephrasing of Jahoda's "time structure" rather than as a conceptually distinct construct. Rather, it now seems clear that that these are indeed two quite different notions, with the former focusing on the importance of future uncertainty and the latter emphasising the importance of a lack of a current frame of reference.

To conclude this section, I shall draw attention to what is perhaps the most important issue to emerge from the interviewees accounts of their experience; namely that they illustrate the importance of recognising that the different vitamins, latent functions or features of unemployment will interrelate in a number of ways. To take one example, the availability of money is important

not only because financial hardship is likely to have direct effects such as creating financial worries about paying bills, but also because it is likely to have indirect effects on mental health by restricting or preventing participation in activities which might in turn help to structure time (and in all probability, to provide opportunities for interpersonal contact, variety, skill use etc).

One implication of this is that the accounts offered by Warr and Jahoda in the form of "lists" of important factors would seem to be misleading in their simplicity (despite the claims of these authors to recognise the complexity of the phenomena they describe). What is required is a far more sophisticated and detailed account which explains how these factors interrelate, which are most important, why, for whom and under what circumstances.

A second implication is perhaps even more important in that it may provide a helpful insight into the somewhat confused arguments concerning the relative merits of the agency restriction and deprivation theories. The present findings would seem to lend a good deal of support to Fryer's suggestion that there has been a consistent underemphasis on the financial consequences of unemployment within the psychological literature. However, they also suggest that Jahoda and Warr's vitamins/latent functions may hold some explanatory potential. One way of reconciling these findings is through a recognition of the fact that the agency and deprivation theories are complementary rather than competing theories. The deprivation theory emphasises the loss of the latent functions/vitamins of employment through the loss of the work role, whereas the agency theory focuses on the loss of income and consequent financial hardship. But these explanations are not contradictory, and indeed, one key consequence of financial hardship is that it further impedes access to these vitamins/latent functions in addition to their loss as a direct result of the loss of the work role.

Thus, unemployment can be seen as having a negative effect not only in that it will deprive the individual of the vitamins/latent functions associated with the work role, but also indirectly insofar as the loss of income will restrict, obstruct, or prevent the individual's attempts to cope with their predicament by finding the vitamins/latent functions outside the institution of employment.

6.4 Individual Differences in the Experience of Unemployment and CP

The preceding discussion of the experience of unemployment has focussed on general features and on typical outcomes for the interview sample as a whole. However, the experience of unemployment (and of CP) will in reality be unique for each individual. Not only will their experience be influenced by the particular circumstances and situation in which they find themselves, but also their responses to this situation will vary according to their own personal attitudes, beliefs and personality. Whilst it might be interesting (and in many ways simpler) to provide a detailed account of each interviewee's experience, such a proposition is clearly impractical, and would not necessarily be particularly helpful or informative from a scientific or psychological perspective; it would almost certainly serve only to confirm the dictum that "every man (or woman) is an exception" (Nicholson and West, 1984).

How then is it possible to make sense of differences between individuals whilst at the same time bearing in mind that many aspects of the experience of unemployment and CP will inevitably affect individuals in similar ways? Although there is no way to solve this dilemma entirely satisfactorily, the author attempted to tackle this problem by considering the experience of CP and unemployment within a broader personal historical context for the individuals concerned. It was hoped that through a consideration of the personal histories of the 60 interviewees, it would be possible to identify at least some of the key personal and situational factors relating to individual differences in their current (or recent) experience of, and attempts to cope

with, unemployment. (As we shall see later this approach proved to be less than ideal).

With this objective in mind, further analysis of the case notes considered the personal histories of the 60 interviewees, and this enabled the identification of three relatively cohesive groups of respondents, each with a characteristic pattern of previous employment. These three groups were:

- Group 1 Younger individuals with little or no employment experience.
- Group 2 Individuals with long, stable "traditional" employment histories.
- Group 3 Individuals with ephemeral or intermittent patterns of previous employment.

For reasons which will become apparent below, Groups 1 and 3 were further divided into two sub-groups. Each of these groups will now be described in more detail, and a brief, illustrative case history of one individual from each group will be presented.

6.4.1 Group 1

The first and largest group, constituting just under half of those interviewed, were people with little or no employment experience. They were young adults (average age 21 years), who were mostly single and after leaving full-time education had spent a period without employment before joining CP. Several of this group still lived with their parents. Many described the initial period of unemployment as being like a holiday, although this feeling had typically been short-lived. Within this group of respondents two sub-groups were distinguished:

The first sub-group 1(a), had experienced some form of higher or further education, had often had some experience of temporary or casual employment and tended to be quite geographically mobile. Typical of this group was Jane:

Aged 23 at the time of the interview, she had stayed on at school to take A-levels, and had subsequently studied history at a University in the South-east. After graduating, she had spent a month travelling in Europe. On her return she was living with her parents in the south of England and took a temporary Christmas job in the toy department of a chain store "to earn some money". When this job finished, she continued to live with her parents and spent six months living on the dole. She learned to drive, spent time horseriding, doing odd jobs around the house, going to the library and the cinema. She also visited friends in different parts of the country. She said of this period:

"On the whole, I didn't really think about being unemployed ... I can't really say I was bored ... I was enjoying myself ... I just felt I should be doing something more".

After six months she was bored of living with her parents and decided to move to South Yorkshire. Her closest friend from university was already living there, and the social and nightlife of the area was also an attraction. She was still unemployed and made the most of the concessions available for unemployed people.

However she began to doubt her decision to move soon after arriving in South Yorkshire. Money was a particular problem, with her state benefit taking 12 weeks to materialise. She became quite unhappy and felt strongly that she wanted to get a job.

Four months after her move from the South, she joined CP, working part-time in a children's toy library. She had been attracted to the job because it involved working with children. She felt that CP was providing her with useful experience for the future but that as a general response to unemployment CP was simply "... a way of fiddling the figures" and that it was "Not a real job".

Since starting CP she had applied for and been accepted on a postgraduate teacher training course and would have to leave CP a month before the end of her contract. She hoped to specialise in working with deaf children.

Although the individuals in this group described a number of negative aspects of unemployment (particularly financial difficulties) it was abundantly clear that their experience was not for the most part representative of the stereotypical picture of the highly distressed and demoralised unemployed person. Admittedly, some had at times become unhappy or dissatisfied whilst unemployed, but many reported that substantial parts of their spell of unemployment had been pleasant or enjoyable. Moreover, even in the face of extended periods of unemployment, they seemed to have retained a fundamental belief in themselves as capable and effective individuals possessing a range of skills or abilities. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising to find that few of the individuals within this group claimed to feel happier or more confident since joining CP.

Why then were these individuals able to cope so effectively with joblessness, when the psychological literature on the experience of unemployment would lead us to expect precisely the opposite outcome for most individuals? A partial explanation would seem to lie in the age and financial circumstances of the individuals in the group. There were several indications that by virtue of their age, the individuals within this group had *to some extent* been protected from severe financial hardship whilst unemployed. Most were single and did not have families to support, and some had reduced their outgoings by electing to live with their parents. Moreover, if hardship is viewed in relative, rather than absolute terms, it might be seen as significant that several, having come straight from full-time education, experienced little change in their net income

when they became unemployed. Thus it might be expected that with fewer outgoings, and little relative change in their net income, these individuals would not suffer to the same extent from the psychological consequences of poverty described in the literature and by the majority of individuals in the sample as a whole.

However, this explanation alone cannot fully account for the relatively positive experience of this group. Several of the interviewees in this group clearly stated that despite their attempts to minimise their outgoings, lack of money had indeed been a problem for them during unemployment. What other factors might help to account for their atypical experience of unemployment? One potentially significant issue relates to their perceptions of their own job prospects. Few of the individuals in this group had felt concerned or worried over whether they would ultimately be able to secure employment. They tended to regard their entry to the labour market as being temporarily delayed rather than blocked, and several had seen this period of unemployment as an opportunity to plan their career options. In this sense most still felt able to influence their position; they could have got a job if they had wanted to, but it might not have been the sort of career job that they were seeking. Another potentially important factor was that these interviewees had found little difficulty in occupying their time. They had been engaged in a variety of different activities and had used their time whilst unemployed to pursue their own interests. Consequently, they did not typically report having suffered from the feelings of boredom reported by the majority of the overall sample.

The second sub-group 1(b), had few qualifications, having left school at 16, or having started A-levels but not completed them. Often their work experience included participation on government youth schemes such as YOP or YTS. Steve's account is illustrative of this group's experiences:

Aged 19 at the time of the interview, he had stayed on at school to take A-levels but had left within the first year because "I wanted to go on the dole". He spent time with four friends who were all unemployed. They played sports and went drinking together.

"It were great for the first three months - the only thing wrong with it was the money. After that the reality of what's happening to you begins to sink in".

After four months of unemployment, under pressure from his parents he started a one year YTS placement working in a company specialising in computer programming and systems analysis. He "spent a lot of time making tea" and did not feel that this was a valuable experience.

"You knew there was so much uncertainty ... After your year that's it. Because there's no guarantee to it, it's disheartening".

At the end of the YTS placement, he returned to being unemployed, but for a brief period managed to get a part-time job with a catering company at a local football club. He was working hard and earning at the same time as claiming benefit because the manager was prepared to lie about the numbers of hours he was working.

When this job finished, he moved away from his parents house and spent eight months unemployed. This was a particularly depressing period as he had moved away from his friends and started having problems with his girlfriend.

"I started to feel a lot of anger ... I was wasting away"

He decided to move back to his parents house because living on his own, he couldn't afford to get a job "unless it paid some ridiculous amount".

Soon after this he applied for the CP job. He had heard about it from a friend who was already working on the CP project. It was a part-time place, which involved teaching computing skills in the community by taking portable computers out to community centres and youth clubs. He knew that it would be "easy" to get the CP job.

Since starting on CP he felt more confident and positive about his own skills and abilities.

"Compared to what I used to be like, it's a remarkable change."

He looked forward to going to work each morning and enjoyed teaching other people. He did feel that CP made a positive contribution to the community, but, his views on CP as a response to unemployment were quite negative:

"They're just juggling numbers ... they are not offering anybody any long-term security."

"For me it's alright. I'm 19, I have no marital commitments, no mouths to feed. I can play this game ... I can go from CP to CP."

For himself, he felt the biggest drawback was that the CP job only lasted for a year. However, for the time being he felt satisfied with what he was doing and planned to look for a job only towards the end of his CP contract.

Overall, the experience of unemployment for this group was less positive than it had been for the individuals in Group 1(a). However, even within this group, unemployment was rarely described as having been an overwhelming or

devastating blow. Boredom, rather than depression was commonly identified as the worst aspect of their experience of unemployment. Although several had remained in contact with friends from school who they could meet and spend time with (often these friends were also unemployed), a lack of money had constrained their socialising. This often meant that their social lives had simply involved "hanging around" rather than anything more positive or enjoyable. Although they, like the interviewees in group 1(a), had often been able to reduce their outgoings by continuing to live with their parents, lack of money was still frequently seen as a significant problem. Indeed for many, their initial motivation for wanting to secure a job was so that they had a greater disposable income which would enable them to "buy things" and "go out" more often. However as it had become more apparent to them that it would be difficult to gain employment, they tended to become increasingly concerned about whether (and when) they would be able to secure a permanent or "proper" job. Although only a minority of this group talked about feeling self-doubt or under-confidence during unemployment, several commented that since joining CP they had felt much more confident in themselves.

6.4.2 Group 2

This was the smallest group, with only a sixth of the sample. They tended to be older (average age 50 years) and had had long, stable employment histories. For the majority of their working lives they had been in employment and had little experience of joblessness. They had changed jobs only infrequently. However, for a variety of reasons, they had become unemployed before reaching retirement age and then found difficulty in securing another job, often precisely because of their age. The experience of unemployment was usually a shock to them as they had been used to the everyday routine of employment. Most were married or had been married. Typical of this group was Peter:

He was 39 at the time of the interview and was married with four children. Two of these children were older and had left home. He had joined the army at the age of 18 and stayed for 13 years, spending several years in Germany. He enjoyed army life but finally decided to leave so that his youngest two children could go to secondary school in England.

Almost immediately on returning to England, he found a job with a security firm, but quit after only a brief period because it was particularly boring. He started working for a mail order company and stayed for two years, but eventually resigned after a dispute with the management about working hours. He was then unemployed for four years. This was a highly distressing period of his life:

"I used to sort of go through really depressive patches where I couldn't care less what was going on around me."

"Probably the worst thing was not having anything to do."

In addition, he found unemployment a great financial burden particularly because his hobbies, photography and winemaking (which might have provided some escape from the boredom) were expensive.

For six months he trained for a marathon, and during the summer helped to coach a junior soccer team, but nevertheless found it very difficult to fill his time. His relationship with his wife also suffered. He continually applied for jobs without success:

"I got the feeling that although I was only thirty-six, thirty-seven, I was too old. And I thought 'God, if I'm too old at this age, I've got no chance for the next 20 or 30 years'".

He had been "helping out" for eight months on a voluntary basis at a local advice centre when a CP job came up. At first he wasn't going to apply because he felt that he was not sufficiently experienced, but eventually, under pressure from the other workers at the centre, he applied and was successful. The CP place was a full-time position as a community information worker.

He was delighted to get the job, and since starting he was much busier, and felt a lot happier in himself.

"I like the job. I've never in my life done as many different things in so short a period."

"It's given me a lot of confidence ... It's made me a lot more outward going. I find it a lot easier to approach people and talk to people."

The variety within the job was particularly important to him, but he said that he would still prefer to be in the army as that was a permanent position.

"It's a damn sight better than, first of all, being on the dole and secondly, it's better than a factory job. It's better than washing vehicles down. It's better than a lot of jobs I've done in the past. The only reservation is, it's not permanent."

When asked about CP as a response to unemployment, he was not positive:

"In some ways it causes more problems than it solves. Alright, it gets people off the dole and I think that's the only good thing in it's favour. CP jobs - people approach them with the view that its getting them off the dole for a year and giving them something to do for a year and that is it. If they were made into 2 year jobs...people would put a lot more into it."

"They're not used as a training scheme or to give people work experience in a different field - they're just used to get people off the dole."

After nine months, he was appointed project supervisor and gained a one year extension to his CP contract. Nevertheless, the prospect of his contract ending was disturbing:

"I'm really dreading June, when I have to sign on again. I'm frantically looking for a job at the moment. I really hope I get one before the end of June."

Although he was seeking jobs as an advice worker, he didn't feel that CP had helped his job prospects:

"No, it's been a good experience and I've enjoyed doing it..but..I don't think it'll have helped me at all."

For this group of interviewees, unemployment had frequently been a devastating experience. They tended to report feeling extremely unhappy and worried about whether they would be able to cope with the situation in which they found themselves. A variety of factors seem to have contributed to these affective outcomes. Firstly, the loss of income which the individuals in this group suffered following job loss had been of particular personal significance

since the majority had families to support. They tended to be extremely concerned about the hardship which they, their spouses and their children faced in having to survive on the meagre income provided by state unemployment benefit. Secondly, having had long, stable careers in full-time employment, these individuals were accustomed to spending a great deal of their time at the workplace. Finding themselves without jobs, they frequently reported having had considerable difficulty in finding activities to fill the days and weeks which were now available to them. Thirdly, although all of the individuals in this group emphasised that they had desperately wanted to return to employment, several felt that they were disadvantaged within a depressed labour market by virtue of their age (even though the average age of the group was only 50 years). Consequently they had tended to worry about whether they would be able to return to full-time, permanent employment in the future. Not surprisingly therefore, on joining CP, they were often happy to have at least secured a job, but dissatisfied with the part-time and temporary nature of the contract, and were still concerned about what the future held for them after the one year contract expired.

6.4.3 Group 3

This group constituted just over one third of the sample. They were individuals who had intermittent patterns of previous employment, usually having had a number of different jobs, often with periods of unemployment in between. The ages of the respondents in this group varied greatly but the average age was 31 years. Within this group, two sub-groups were distinguishable.

The first sub group, 3(a), had had ephemeral work histories through their own choice. Either they had taken breaks in their working lives because they wanted to bring up children, or they were individuals who had chosen to change jobs frequently because they sought variety in their working lives. Some explicitly stated that they were primarily concerned with finding

interesting, fulfilling work rather than pursuing more conventional ambitions of career progression. The essential characteristic of this group was that they were not greatly threatened by the prospect of being without a job. Some made a distinction between being unemployed and being "not employed", classing themselves in the latter category. Several also stated that they were not typical of CP participants in general.

However, they did not describe the experience of unemployment as an *entirely* positive one. Most expressed some reservations about joblessness even if it had been of their own choosing. An illustrative example of this group was Graham:

Aged 46 at the time of the interview, he was single and had no children. After leaving school he had worked briefly as a cartographer in the civil service and then left to study art at college in the south. Following this, he had intermittently taught part-time at art colleges whilst working as a creative artist. After twelve years he had moved to London to become involved in social work. He worked on urban aid projects with young people and with an alcoholics recovery programme. He became involved in a community co-operative and worked on a newspaper produced by the co-operative. After this, he enrolled for a part-time postgraduate course in curriculum studies at a university in the south. On completing this course, he took a job as a community arts worker in the Midlands. Although this was a full-time job the hours worked were very flexible and he continued with this post for 4 years. He then decided to go on the dole in order to pursue his own art work. Asked about the experience of joblessness, he said:

"It didn't really concern me, because I'd been through that process before - of doing my own work and surviving on a low income."

"I never set myself up really for long periods of full-time employment and I've never been used to it to feel deprived."

He was clear that his own experience of unemployment was exceptional:

"I'm perfectly aware of the effects unemployment can have on people ... unemployment can have a debilitating effect on you if you're not self motivated to do something else."

For the first 18 months this was a highly productive period in terms of his art work, and he had few financial difficulties because he had savings from when he had been employed. However, after four years on the dole he decided to look for a job:

"In the end I thought it was too cushy a life and it was affecting my work."

The CP project on which he worked involved the restoration of a windmill, and his job included both research and artwork. He had taken the job because it was of interest to him rather than simply because he wanted to become employed. The CP place was part-time which suited him as it was not only interesting, but he was also able to pursue his own art when he was not working on CP. Starting to work on CP had not increased his confidence or general level of well-being.

Looking to the future, he hoped that he would be able to spend a further year working on the project, but if that was not possible he would become unemployed again and spend more time painting.

In summarising his feelings about the institution of employment, he said:

"If I was really asked, I don't believe in the work ethic."

However, he acknowledged that given his middle-class, well-educated background, he was in a privileged position which enabled him to "opt out" of the traditional labour market.

Although the individuals within this group identified a number of negative aspects of being unemployed (particularly financial difficulties), their experience, like that of the individuals in Group 1(a), did not conform to the "typical" account of unemployment given in the psychological or sociological literature. Indeed, many of these individuals indicated that they had felt happy, confident, or fulfilled during their spell of unemployment. Most had had a clear sense of purpose and direction in pursuing various self-selected activities and alternative roles which they undertook. Their reasons for joining CP tended to relate more to the nature of the work involved, and the opportunity it offered to pursue an activity that they valued than to issues surrounding the psychological or financial security of the employment role, or the avoidance of unemployment. They gave little indication that they felt happier or more confident since joining CP.

How had these individuals managed to cope so successfully with unemployment? One key factor seemed to be that many had been able to find roles and activities which offered an alternative to traditional employment. In contrast to the interviewees in the other groups, who had found it difficult to occupy their time, these individuals had often used unemployment as an opportunity to pursue their own objectives rather than being committed to conventional employment-related or career goals. They had had a clear sense of what they wanted to achieve and were able to initiate activities and pursue projects which they found fulfilling and rewarding. They expressed little

concern over their future job prospects and made it quite clear that even if they had not joined CP, they would have been able to find alternative roles or activities for themselves.

The second sub-group, 3(b), had disrupted patterns of previous employment which were not of their own choosing. Most preferred the security offered by permanent jobs, but had not managed to remain continuously in employment. Most of this group had experienced more than one prolonged period of unemployment. Two of the respondents had served prison terms, two others had experienced serious health problems, and one was disabled. Typical of this group was Mike:

Mike was aged 40 at the time of the interview, and was divorced but had custody of his 12 year old daughter. His working life had started quite steadily with a year's apprenticeship in electrical work, followed by 4 years working in different sheet metal firms. After a brief spell of unemployment, he had spent five years working as an installer of air conditioning but was eventually made redundant. At this time he started to have problems with a serious back complaint which made it very difficult for him to undertake physical work. He eventually decided to become self-employed in partnership with an acquaintance from work. However, this was unsuccessful and lasted only one year. Again having to look for work, he found a job with a surgical equipment manufacturer. However he started having more and more problems with his back, and having to take more and more time off work. Eventually he had to take a year off work, receiving only social security payments as an income, and thereafter, his employers felt unable to keep him on their books.

He then spent three years on invalidity benefit. This was a highly distressing and difficult period:

"I was alternating between the bed and the settee for two and a half years ... I was very depressed at the time."

He was offered an operation, but told that there was a 50% chance that he might become paralysed, so he chose instead to continue with the medication he was already receiving.

To make things more difficult, his wife met another person and left him. He was therefore having to cope with raising his daughter alone. However, he felt that his wife leaving had ultimately brought about a positive outcome in that he had been forced to concentrate on parenting his daughter rather than allowing the pain of his back to dominate his life.

"It did me a lot of good, her leaving, in a way, because it made me a lot stronger to actually live through this."

After three years, at his annual medical checkup for invalidity benefit, he was told that he was fit to work. Initially he was angry at the implication that he was idling, but decided that he would try to find a job anyway:

"I'd had enough of it all - the system of social security"

His financial position also provided a motivating factor - he felt that his state benefit was not sufficient to support himself and his daughter. He found a part-time job rebuilding lathes and started to feel much happier, particularly because he was getting out of the house and meeting people:

"It throws another slant on life altogether don't it - and it helps you to cope with life outside work."

However, after a year and a half, this firm went into liquidation and he returned to living on social security for a year. This time, being out of work was very different. He did odd jobs around the home rather than just "sitting around". It was much better than the 3 years he had spent on invalidity benefit but nevertheless difficult financially. He had more time to look after his daughter and was doing odd jobs for people as well as claiming benefit.

"It made me stronger and made me forget my own personal problems and think that there was more important things (than his health problems) in my daughter and my home."

However, he wanted to find work:

"I wanted to get a job again - and obviously something permanent."

The CP job which he found involved repairing and adapting toys for physically handicapped children. It was a part-time job and this enabled him to organise the work around his home life and raising his daughter. He was offered a full-time post but refused it because he would have lost too many of his statutory benefit payments.

He enjoyed the work because it was socially valuable, he had met new people, and it required craftsmanship. He also felt that CP had helped his job prospects in that employers would prefer a person who had been working for a year to someone who had been unemployed for the previous year. His criticisms centred around the temporary nature of CP:

"As regards CP, there's for and against it isn't there? People say, y'know, it does you good to go on back and do a bit of work for a year but, it's when you get to the end of that year and you've really got a job that's interesting to you and then you're thrown back on the scrapheap again. Generally I don't believe it should be run...It's like false hopes in a way."

In the future he hoped to do something similar to his CP job, but had not, at the time of the interview started looking for other jobs. He intended to stay on CP until the end of his contract.

For this group, unemployment had frequently been an extremely distressing experience. Although most of these interviewees had been unemployed before, there was little indication that this previous experience had in any way equipped them to cope more effectively with the personal and psychological consequences of joblessness. Several described vividly their feelings of insecurity, resignation and loss of confidence. Lack of money had been a constant source of concern and many had feared whether they were ever going to secure another job. They had found difficulty in filling the hours, days and weeks which were now available to them as "free" time. Many had simply spent this time at home passively attempting to fill time and dwelling on their plight. They had been desperately keen to secure employment of any kind and therefore, not surprisingly, of all the groups within the sample, they were most positive about having joined CP. They described the immediate change in themselves since joining CP in terms of being happier and more self-confident. They talked about the useful experience they had gained, and hoped that this would improve their job prospects. However, they still expressed considerable anxiety about the future and particularly the possibility of becoming unemployed again once the CP contract expired.

6.4.4 Descriptive summary of the findings

In this section I shall attempt to draw together the findings, and provide an overview which highlights some of the key similarities and differences between the experiences of the groups. In the next section I shall then use this summary to consider how these findings compare with the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

It seems relatively clear from the accounts given above that the experience of unemployment had been most distressing for the interviewees in Groups 3(b) (those with involuntarily disrupted employment histories) and 2 (those with long stable "traditional" employment histories). The individuals in these groups were more likely to describe themselves as having felt "depressed", "bored", "dejected", and "worried". For both groups, financial hardship had been a serious problem (they were more likely to have families than other groups) and they had found it very difficult to occupy their time. The interviewees in both groups had typically been desperately keen to secure jobs, but were pessimistic about their employment prospects and consequently were very pleased and relieved to have joined CP. They frequently reported increases in self-confidence since joining CP, but were still worried about what the future held for them.

In contrast, the interviewees in groups 1(a) (those who were younger, with limited work experience and some further or higher education) and 3(a) (those with intermittent employment histories through choice) seemed to fare much better; they were more likely to have described themselves as having felt "happy", "satisfied" or "contented" (although not at *all* times) and their comments suggested that they had sustained (at least to some extent) confidence and belief in their own capabilities whilst unemployed. It is therefore not surprising that they rarely reported increases in self-confidence on joining CP. The individuals in these groups seemed to have had little

difficulty in finding activities, projects or roles to pursue and to occupy their time whilst unemployed. There were some indications that the younger interviewees in group 1(a) in particular had suffered slightly less financial hardship as almost all were single and able to reduce outgoings by living with their parents. Overall, the interviewees in these groups seemed to be less committed to securing jobs, either because they were engaged in other activities (group 3(a)) or because they were waiting for the "right" job (group 1(a)).

The experience of the interviewees in group 1(b) (those who were younger and with little experience of employment or further education) seemed to fall somewhere between these two contrasting pairs of groups, describing themselves as having been "bored" but less often as "depressed". Being younger, they, like the interviewees in group 1(a), had typically suffered slightly less in financial terms than some of the other groups, and the initial period of unemployment had been "like a holiday". However, eventually they had found it difficult to occupy their time, and boredom and lack of financial resources had encouraged them to look for jobs. When these had proven to be difficult to find they had become more concerned about their future, and several said that they had felt more confident since joining CP.

6.4.5 Implications for the conceptual framework and some alternative interpretations of the findings

In this section I shall offer some cautious observations about the implications of these findings for the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 3 of the thesis, and in particular will attempt to point out where the findings depart from, or are consistent with, the framework. (These observations are necessarily *very* tentative since neither the chosen interview structure nor the way in which the data were analysed facilitated this process. Indeed this would

seem to be a crucial weakness of the approach which was adopted and I shall discuss this issue further in Chapter 8).

To briefly recap on the framework itself, there were three blocks of variables, referred to as personal characteristics, intervening variables and mental health outcomes. Taking these in reverse order, Block 3 (the mental health outcomes) incorporated two variables; affective well-being and perceived competence. Block 2 (the intervening variables) also contained two variables; activity level and perceived control. Finally, the personal characteristics within Block 1 of the framework included: age, gender, employment commitment, work commitment, self-motivation and growth needs. The personal characteristics in Block 1 were assumed to be relatively stable characteristics of the individual which moderated the impact of unemployment on mental health. The variables in Block 2 of the framework were assumed to be influenced by the personal characteristics in Block 1 and in turn to affect the the mental health outcomes in Block 3.

On first inspection, there appear to be many more areas of discrepancy than consistency between the empirical findings and the framework. However, I shall start by considering those areas in which there appears to be at least some overlap between the two.

Starting with the impact of unemployment on the mental health of the different groups, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that in the absence of any "hard", quantitative measures, the following represents a somewhat imprecise interpretation based on the interviewees comments. Nevertheless it does seem relatively clear from the accounts given by the interviewees that there were substantial differences between the groups in what has been conceptualised as affective well-being in the present study (see Chapter 2). Specifically, groups 1(a) and 3(a) were more likely to have

described themselves as having felt "happy", or "satisfied" whilst those in groups 2 and 3(b) were more likely to have described themselves as having felt "depressed" or "dejected".

I shall turn to a consideration of the factors which lay behind these differences shortly, but before doing so will focus on the second dimension of mental health in the conceptual framework, perceived competence. The conceptualisation of this variable is less "transparent" and it is therefore even more difficult to make inferences about it on the basis of the ordinary language descriptions given by the interviewees. However some helpful clues in this respect are provided by the interviewees' comments on "self-confidence" and the extent to which they felt "able to cope" (two aspects of perceived competence as conceptualised in the present study). On this tentative basis, there again appear to have been substantial differences between the groups, with the pattern of differences mirroring that for affective well-being. (Groups 2 and 3(b) were more likely to have described themselves as having lost confidence in themselves during unemployment than groups 1(a) and 3(a) and they were also more likely to report increases in confidence upon starting CP).

Considering these mental health outcomes as a whole, the preceding interpretations are in one sense encouraging, but in another sense disappointing in terms of their implications for the conceptual framework. On the positive side, they do seem to suggest that there were indeed considerable variations between the groups in terms of mental health. In this respect the findings would at least be consistent with the arguments advanced in Chapters 1 and 3 and which provided the rationale for developing the framework; that "the unemployed" should not simply be regarded as a homogeneous group whose experience is uniformly negative. However, on the negative side, there is little in these accounts to support the assertion that the two supposedly conceptually distinct dimensions of mental health, (affective well-being and

perceived competence) are actually independent, since the pattern of between-group differences was similar for both dimensions. I shall discuss this issue further in Chapter 8, once the quantitative findings have been presented.

Turning to Block 2 of the framework, (and again focussing on areas of consistency between the empirical findings and the framework) the findings do provide some promising indications that activity level was a factor influencing mental health outcomes, and that the relationship between activity level and mental health was in the expected direction (see Chapter 3). Thus, those groups which seemed to fare best (groups 1(a) and 3(a)) were those who had managed to stay relatively active whilst the groups which fared worst (groups 2 and 3(b)) had experienced greater difficulty in occupying their time or keeping busy whilst unemployed. There seem to be two ways in which the beneficial effect of activity could be interpreted. Firstly, involvement in certain activities might in itself be expected to provide stimulation, interest, and a sense of achievement. Secondly, activity could be seen as beneficial insofar as "keeping busy" precludes, (or at least reduces opportunities for) destructive introspection and rumination. (As one interviewee put it: "having too much time to think"). The interviewees comments provide some limited support to both of these explanations, but they provide no indication as to whether activity level was more closely related to affective well-being or perceived competence, and perhaps even more significantly, they leave open the possibility that higher activity levels resulted from higher levels of mental health rather than vice versa.

With respect to Block 1 of the framework, there seems to be some indication that employment commitment and age were related to mental health outcomes. Concerning employment commitment, the interviewees who fared worst (groups 2 and 3(b)) also expressed their desire to secure a job much

more frequently and emphatically than the other groups. Concerning age, the younger interviewees in the sample seemed to fare better (Group 1(a)) or moderately well (group 1(b)) in comparison to the other groups. However, when we consider what lay behind these differences, the empirical findings start to diverge radically from the conceptual framework, and to raise serious questions about its explanatory value.

In particular, the age of the interviewees seems to have been largely a proxy for financial circumstances, with younger interviewees typically suffering less financial hardship than those who were older. Indeed, the financial circumstances of the interviewees emerged from the interviews as being the single factor which appeared to be most strongly related to the mental health outcomes. Although the findings are not entirely clear, it seems that on the whole, the groups which had suffered greatest financial hardship (groups 2 and 3(b)) fared worst in terms of mental health. The interviewees in these groups were more likely to have had families to support, and expressed their concerns about money much more frequently. By contrast the younger individuals in groups 1(a) and 1(b) tended to have had fewer financial commitments and had often been able to reduce their outgoings by continuing to live with their parents, whilst the interviewees in group 3(a) were much more mixed in the extent to which they reported having had financial difficulties.

Moreover, the financial circumstances of the interviewees could be seen not only as accounting for the relationship between age and mental health, but also as a more parsimonious explanation of the apparent relationship between employment commitment and mental health. In other words, the apparent relationship between employment commitment and mental health could be regarded simply as reflecting the fact that both were related to financial hardship. (It seems reasonable to surmise that individuals who suffer most financial hardship will be more concerned about finding paid employment).

Again, it appears on balance that the interview findings would weigh in favour of such an explanation, inasmuch as the groups which reported having greatest financial difficulties were (a) more committed to securing employment and (b) suffered most in terms of mental health.

In relation to the conceptual framework then, the fact that financial circumstances as a variable is not incorporated at all would seem to be a serious omission. Indeed, to take an extreme view, it might be argued that the effects of all the intervening variables and personal characteristics in the framework could be accounted for, or are insignificant in comparison to, the effects of financial hardship.

If this argument (or perhaps a slightly less forceful version of it) were to be accepted, would this then mean that the personal characteristics and intervening variables within the current framework are of no explanatory value whatsoever? The author's view is that this is not necessarily the case. If we accept that financial hardship is a key factor in bringing about distress, the question then arises as to why it is so important from a psychological perspective. In attempting to answer this question, some of the variables within the framework do indeed seem to have some explanatory potential. (Note that this argument is similar to that advanced in section 6.3 concerning the links between the deprivation and agency approaches to explaining the negative consequences of unemployment). To take one example, it might be argued that one important consequence of financial hardship is that by depriving the individual of the means through which, within a market society, autonomy and self-determination is largely achieved, it undermines their sense of control (a variable which is included in the framework) over their immediate environment (cf. Fryer, 1988b).

Although the empirical findings concerning the experience of the different groups cannot strongly substantiate this claim, a second example does seem to be supported within the interviewees accounts of their experience. This interpretation focusses on the way in which the relationship between financial hardship and mental health may be mediated by activity. For those interviewees who suffered greatest financial hardship, this imposed severe constraints on how they were able to occupy their time. For those who were worst affected, much of their time whilst unemployed had been spent passively, stuck at home, with little to do except dwell on their situation. In contrast, those who were in a slightly less financially precarious situation, were more able to keep themselves active and occupied by getting out of the house, socialising, and pursuing projects or activities of personal interest. Clearly then, one way in which the financial circumstances of the interviewees were important was in enabling or preventing them from maintaining at least moderate levels of activity. In turn, (and as we have already seen) the extent to which the different groups were able to engage in activity did appear to one key factor influencing mental health outcomes.

Before turning to the remaining variables within the framework, it is worth stating that although financial circumstances may be very important as a factor in the experience of unemployment, it is equally important to recognise that this does not mean that it, (or indeed it and other situational variables) are the only factors affecting unemployed people. (This would represent a situationalist/deterministic perspective). As discussed in Chapter 1 some individuals will cope more effectively than others even under similar circumstances, and a recognition of this fact points towards the significance of intrapersonal variables such as dispositional or personality characteristics.

Turning finally to the variables in Block 1 of the framework which have not as yet been mentioned, (gender, work commitment, self-motivation and growth needs strength), it is once again difficult to determine from the interview findings the extent to which these personal characteristics could account for variations in the experience and mental health of the different groups. However, the comments of some of the interviewees in group 3(a) might be regarded as revealing in this respect. For example, their comments concerning the fact that they had chosen to be unemployed, their views about the "work ethic", the rewarding activities which they had pursued, and the fulfilment which they had got from these activities, might be seen as reflecting dispositional characteristics not unlike those which have here been conceptualised as work commitment, self-motivation and growth needs strength. Remembering that these interviewees had managed, sometimes despite financial hardship, to sustain their levels of activity by pursuing different (non-employment) projects or by adopting roles which were of personal interest, and that they, of all the groups, were more likely to describe their experience of unemployment in relatively positive terms, we might speculate that they were in some ways similar to the group of "proactive" individuals interviewed by Fryer and Payne (1984) who had been able to cope very effectively with the experience of unemployment. Such an interpretation is certainly speculative rather than being firmly grounded in the data, but it is nevertheless interesting to note that a key difference between this group and group 3(b), (who had clearly fared much worse) is that those in group 3(a) had frequently chosen not to be employed. This distinction would certainly seem at least potentially to have important implications for the extent to which the different groups felt themselves to be in control of their own destiny.

However, as I have suggested, these comments are very speculative and can be seen as being prompted, rather than supported, by the data. This outcome can largely be seen as a result of the interview structure, and analytical strategy

adopted by the author. Nevertheless, it is hoped that some of the issues raised above will be amenable to further investigation within the quantitative study.

6.5 The Experience of CP

This section describes the interview findings relating to the experience of participation on CP. The findings are presented in two sections, addressing the positive and negative aspects of the scheme raised by the interviewees. Once these findings have been presented, I shall turn to consider the ways in which they are consistent with, or divergent from, the putative "key features" of the scheme described in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

Perhaps surprisingly, (given common stereotypes of government employment schemes), taking the interviewees accounts as a whole, there was a clear consensus from the interviewees within these managing agencies that the experience of participation on CP was largely, (but not entirely) positive. (Statements relating to positive features and personal outcomes of CP far outnumbered negative statements). I shall therefore address the positive aspects of the scheme first.

6.5.1 Positive Aspects of The Experience of CP

The most frequently cited personal benefit of participation on CP was increased confidence. One third of the sample indicated that they felt more confident or self-confident since they had started working on the programme.

I 34 "It's given me back my independence, it's given me back my self-confidence ... which is what I'd lost. I've got respect back within myself. It's given me one hell of a lot this job."

"If it weren't for getting this job I don't know where I'd be now."

I 07 "At first I thought I might as well stay where I am (on the dole) for the same money, but then I thought 'I'll go for the interview', and when he said I'd got it, my whole outlook changed, really, I was full of it, full of confidence and everything - a really good feeling".

"My attitude's changed, I'm feeling more confident when I apply for jobs ... feeling useful again."

I 58 "It's given you the confidence to say; 'Well I can work, I've got a year's experience - that proves something.'"

I 12 "It's given me a bit more confidence. I'm doing something and I know I can do it."

I 11 "... confidence that I can do a job and do it well. I've proved not only to myself, but to a potential employer that I can do it."

I 38 "I think now I have much more of a positive attitude about myself. I'm much more confident."

I 34 "It really put me right back on my feet."

Another salient personal outcome of CP was the *sense of achievement* or "feeling useful" or "actually *doing* something" that interviewees got either from the results of their work, or simply from their general involvement in an environment where the money they received was as a result of work they had carried out. Just under one third of the sample mentioned this benefit of CP.

I 37 "I felt a lot more satisfied in myself and the work that I were actually doing."

I 07 "It's only the same money as I was getting on the dole, but ... I actually feel better because now I'm working for what I'm getting, I don't have to rely on a social security handout."

"It's just that thing of being wanted again - being useful and actually earning what you're getting."

I 36 "For me, I've thoroughly enjoyed my CP job because I've got a lot out of it and I've put a lot in."

I 16 "With this (the CP project) I've actually achieved something in my own right. It was a challenge and people have accepted that I set it up. I've got it going, it's considered to be a good worthwhile project and I actually did it ... and that's important to me to actually succeed ... to prove to myself that I could do it."

I 37 "I think I felt a lot better because I were actually getting a wage and I was actually doing something to get a wage."

I 13 "I'm actually earning my money - not like the dole, which is just generosity."

I 03 "You feel at the end of the day as though you've done something."

I 57 "The fact that I'm actually doing something at last."

"I mean ... seeing some results from what I've done."

Although happiness was not the most often cited personal outcome of participation on CP, it was mentioned by a quarter of the interviewees, who gave a variety of reasons for feeling positive.

- I 15 "I feel more happier now than I've done in a long time - I'm actually doing something I want to do."
- I 24 "I'm more cheerful. It's done me good to get out of bed. It's taught me that you've got to be a part of society."
- I 42 "I were more happier for a start ... I liked the job."
- I 14 "It just changes you - you're always happy 'cause you know you're coming in to work and you'll see somebody - a different face every time."
- I 21 "I can honestly say that I've enjoyed every minute of being here. It's very rewarding."
- Several of the respondents commented that they valued the learning and development which CP had brought them. Younger participants especially felt that they had matured or developed in some way. Just under a quarter of the interviewees mentioned benefits in terms of learning or self development.
- I 40 "I've grown up a lot more ... I can handle people a lot better - I can communicate better with older people."
- I 51 "I've made a lot of mistakes, but I'm starting to develop. I feel I can now take on a sense of responsibility. I've learnt so much over the year."
"I'm more of an adult - I've developed over the year - probably through the sense of responsibility that's been placed on me."
- I 32 "I've changed a lot - learnt how to talk to people."

Other interviewees said that, since starting on CP, they felt that they were more motivated, more disciplined, more organised, more independent or more responsible. Such outcomes, however, were less frequently mentioned than those outlined above.

I 15 "I'm pleased with myself for getting off my backside."

I 36 "It's good to have a status - I've now got a job with a title."

I 16 "I've got my identity back now and I feel I want to hang on to it."

I 33 "It's nice to have a job to come to because it gives you, like, an identity ... you feel you belong to something."

I 21 "(I'm) ... back with the living again, going to work in the morning, home again at night."

I 24 "It's done me good because it's taught me to get back out and about."
"You have to get up at 9am. It's done me good, it's brought me back a bit."

I 32 "It's good for you to get up in the morning and go to work."

Turning away from the themes which concerned personal outcomes, and towards different features of the scheme, over one third of the sample stated that the nature of the work was something which they valued. The content of CP jobs was described as being interesting, stimulating, or rewarding.

I 33 "They are usually the most interesting jobs in the jobcentre."

I 21 "Very rewarding work ... The time just flies, compared to in the factory where I just used to watch the clock the whole time."

"I would never go back now - never go back to the factory, because after 24 years, I realised I'd just wasted it."

I 56 "I'm actually doing something that I enjoy."

I 20 "A very worthwhile year, very well spent."

I 49 "I like this job as much as I've liked any other job. I don't particularly like getting up early in the morning and I don't particularly like spending all my days in the same building, but it's a job and I do enjoy the job and I don't think I could get a better job anywhere else."

A second feature of CP work raised by a third of the interviewees was that it provided them with valuable work experience which would improve their job prospects.

I 13 "It also helps me when I do leave, 'cause I can say that I haven't been on the dole for 12 months."

I 44 "I will be getting a written reference."

I 45 "Once you've got a job, it's a bit easier to get another job."

I 39 "It's helped my job prospects because it's been a job - it's the first job I've had."

I 30 "I've got an enormous amount out of it ... mainly management experience."

I 44 "I will be leaving with valuable experience."

"I'm doing this job because it's giving me an opportunity to gain experience and to use resources that is valuable for me."

I 47 "I think people can use them for two things. They can use them for a year of getting more money and hopefully starting something off - their own business. Or they can use them as a stepping stone - like myself - where you get as much experience as you can, feed off it, learn and then move on to a permanent job."

Unsurprisingly, the money that the interviewees were earning whilst working on CP was also a salient feature. This feature was also raised by a third of the sample, most of whom had found that CP wages put them in a better financial position than when they had been unemployed and receiving only statutory benefits. However it is important to acknowledge that CP did not offer improved financial status for all participants. Young unemployed people receiving only Supplementary Benefit (now referred to as Income Support) were likely to benefit financially upon starting CP, but older individuals, especially those with families frequently experienced no improvement in their financial position, whilst others even suffered a small loss of income.

I 27 "I've never had a job that's paid so much."

I 34 "The wages here are absolutely fantastic, but when you go out looking for a permanent job, there's a considerable drop."

I 38 "It's nice not having to worry about food and rent."

"It's nice being able to afford little luxuries."

Bearing in mind that CP projects are required to be of benefit to the community, it is not surprising that a third of interviewees cited the social value of the work as an important positive feature. This positive aspect of CP was usually mentioned by those interviewees whose work involved direct contact with the beneficiaries as opposed to, for example, conservation work. (This was not always in caring jobs. It included decorating or gardening projects.) It seems reasonable to suppose that this feature is related to the positive personal outcome identified above of satisfaction.

I 50 "I've been doing something that serves a need."

I 37 "It doesn't sound much when you said 'integration', but what you're actually doing is you're changing somebody's life."

I 23 "I think it is a real job because people benefit from it."

I 22 "It's a worthwhile job - it's doing things for people in need."

An interesting finding was that part-time working was frequently perceived in a positive light. This came under the more general positive feature of the flexibility of the CP jobs, which was mentioned by a third of the interviewees. Often interviewees were able to adjust their working hours to accommodate other personal commitments.

I 43 "It's a good job, because it's not like a 9-5 job, its flexible hours. I can have my life and my work fits into it ... just about."

I 25 "I'd rather work part-time. You've got more time for other things haven't you?"

I 23 "With me, I couldn't take a rigid job 9am to 5pm or even 9am to 1pm."

I 01 "It's so flexible - you make it how you like it."

I 38 "I wanted to work part-time, so it would leave some time free to do writing."

Finally, working relationships were cited as a positive feature of CP by a quarter of the interviewees.

I 34 "The people I work with are great - a right good atmosphere."

I 40 "I couldn't believe I got on with them so well."

I 12 "We have a laugh and a lark about. Not all nose to the grindstone."

I 50 "You meet some nice people."

6.5.2 Negative Aspects of the Experience of CP

Very few negative *personal* outcomes of being on CP were raised by the interviewees. The only negative aspect raised by a substantial proportion (one third) of the sample concerned feelings of insecurity, anxiety or uncertainty about the future. These feelings were strongly linked to the two features of CP covered below, namely, the temporariness of the CP contract, and the notion that CP offered no long term improvement of job prospects.

I 21 "After 12 months we're going to be back where we were ... It's a worry."

I 34 "You get settled into a job, but then, when you have to leave it's heartbreaking."

"It builds people's hopes up, then just drops them."

"At the end, you're still left with unemployment."

I 53 "I don't want to go on the dole. I'm quite frightened about it, 'cause I've got a lot of things to pay for."

"I just want something in life that's gonna make me ... more of a secure person."

I 32 "It's only for a year ... you've still no hope for the end of the year."

I 54 "At a certain point you're going to want some sort of job security."

"If you're talking about the financial and security aspect of permanent jobs, then CP is no answer whatsoever."

I 37 "You're still in the same situation really ... You've got a job, you're getting paid, but you still haven't got that much hope at the end of the year really."

I 49 "It's cruelty to take people off the dole and give them a taste of having a small wage and then throw them back onto the dole."

I 51 "When I've finished this job, there'll be nothing for me again."

I 55 "I don't expect to walk out of this job and get another job from CP."

I 58 "At the end of this, if I don't get another job before I mean, I'm going to be in the same boat I was before."

Other negative personal outcomes which were identified by only a few interviewees included depression, occasional boredom and feeling demotivated.

As suggested above, although the interviewees identified few negative personal outcomes, they did describe a number of negative features of the scheme. Half of the interviewees cited the temporary nature of the CP contract as a drawback, and it seems reasonable to surmise that this was related to the uncertainty about the future experienced by the participants. Often, these statements were coupled with the view that CP jobs were not "real" jobs.

I 21 "It's not a real job is it? It's not permanent."

I 18 "The trouble with (Agency A) is, they only keep people for a year."

I 45 "With CP, there's no way they'll take you on afterwards, so you don't work as hard as you might if you thought you might get taken on."

I 46 "If it was permanent ... it would be much better."

I 44 "I dislike the fact that it's not a permanent job, full stop."

I 15 "I'd prefer to have a permanent job - you've got a job for life."

I 54 "It is difficult to maintain enthusiasm for a job if you think you're going to be laid off in September."

I 36 "I've acquired all this knowledge and self-confidence and more skills than I had before, and at the end of the year, I've got all this, but what do I do with it?"

I 58 "Seventeen and a half hours a week - It's getting you out of the house, right, but you've got no real commitment to the job ... because you know at the end of the year you're back on the dole."

I 24 "The idea is very good. The only disadvantage is you know you're going to be back out of work in 12 months, so you can't put your mind fully into it."

I 38 "It's not a long term thing is it? ... I know people who do a CP job for a year, take six months on the dole, do a CP job, and go on like that ... It's not really a career."

I 51 "When anybody asks me what I do, I don't say I'm on CP, I say I've got a job. But yet I know that it isn't really a job because it comes to an end."

Also linked to the themes of insecurity and impermanence, were concerns over whether CP improved job prospects. A third of the sample raised this issue.

I 08 "The problem with CP is ... how many people are getting a job at the end of it?"

I 13 "You ought to be guaranteed a job at the end of it."

I 59 "What happens to the people who get dropped? They're probably back where they started unless they've managed to set something up for themselves."

I 39 "Realistically, I'll probably be on the dole in 4 months."

I 53 "There's definitely no jobs at the end of it."

I 37 "There's no guarantee of a job at the end, like."

I 51 "In unemployment you've got the prospect of not working and in CP you've got the prospect of not working at the end of it."

A final issue, related to the negative aspects of CP already raised, was the view that CP was an unsatisfactory Government policy as a response to unemployment. Several of the interviewees questioned the motives for the development of CP, suggesting that it had been implemented primarily to reduce the numbers of registered unemployed and thereby improve the government's political standing.

I 38 "I think it's a Government ploy to convince people they are doing something worthwhile."

I 46 "It's just very convenient for them to say 'Right, X hundred people have now got jobs', but ... within a year of course they won't have those jobs, they'll be back on the unemployment lists."

I 55 "I think very few people have got prospects of going out and getting a job from CP and I don't think the Government believe that people are going to get a job from CP either, whatever they say."

"Very few people actually get a job from CP. And they don't expect to. They come here and its a job for a year and that's it."

I 41 "I think all they (the Government) set it up for was to get the unemployment register down."

I 49 "The CP scheme is just another attempt to repair the cracks that keep appearing."

I 43 "I don't think it is an answer ... to unemployment."

I 55 "I feel that people are being exploited to an extent."

"I feel that they could be doing something much more constructive to get people back to work."

I 60 "I call CP jobs 'joke jobs' because it is all messing about with figures."

I 35 "I don't think it is a very positive solution to unemployment."

"I don't see why giving people jobs for one or two years is going to make it all better."

6.5.3 Summary of Findings Concerning The Experience of CP

Although the different themes identified above are to a limited extent interesting in themselves, the account presented is somewhat disparate and largely descriptive. There are however, some indications that some of the themes are linked in a variety of ways. The following represents an attempt to explicate some of these links and thereby to provide an account which is more coherent and interpretive rather than being purely descriptive.

Although we cannot be certain, the interview findings seem to suggest that for this group of individuals, CP had in some respects acted as an effective intervention against the debilitating effects of unemployment. The informants described the experience of unemployment in largely negative terms whilst describing their experience of CP in largely positive terms. Of course, a possible explanation of such a finding might stress the retrospective nature of the accounts of unemployment. It might be the case that the respondents were simply prepared to evaluate past events and situations (unemployment) more negatively than present situations or events (CP). (To evaluate one's present situation negatively is likely to be more threatening and likely to create uncomfortable feelings of dissonance). However, bearing in mind the substantial body of literature in which interviewees describe their current unemployment in very negative terms, whilst recalling past employment positively, such an objection would seem to lose some of its force. But perhaps above all else, we should note that many of the interviewees described positive overall personal and psychological changes upon making the transition from unemployment to CP.

Of course, although CP might be regarded as being in some way "better" than unemployment from a psychological standpoint, it does not automatically follow that it is *as good as* other forms of employment. One weakness of the scheme which emerged strongly from the interviews was that the jobs were only temporary. Consequently many of the interviewees still felt worried or anxious about their future, particularly in terms of their job prospects. It seems that the major drawback of CP, for these interviewees at least, was that it failed to alleviate their concerns that they might end up "back on the dole". But if we accept that CP can at least to some extent alleviate the detrimental psychological consequences of unemployment, the question arises as to how this positive outcome could be explained. In other words, what lay behind the interviewees' comments that they felt "happier" since joining CP?

Of course, there are likely to be a variety of different factors which accounted for this affective outcome, and different individuals will have benefited from the scheme in different ways. However, one theme which emerged very strongly from the interviews, and which would seem to hold some explanatory potential, was that many of the interviewees described themselves as feeling "more confident" since joining CP.

When we turn to consider what the interviewees meant when they said this, there seem to be two quite separate aspects to these increases in confidence. Firstly, some of the interviewees were clearly referring to increases in self-confidence or an immediate sense of mastery which stemmed from the successful acquisition and development of various skills and abilities and/or the useful application of these skills and abilities within their work. Secondly, some of the interviewees were referring to the fact that they felt more confident about the future in terms of securing a job, by virtue of having a year's worth of employment experience to their credit. This latter finding however, does not seem to sit easily alongside the finding that the temporary nature of the CP contract, and the associated uncertainty about the future, were the most frequently reported negative aspects of CP. It is difficult to know how to resolve this apparent paradox, except perhaps to suggest that CP did improve job prospects to some extent, but not as much as most of the interviewees would have liked. The uncertainty over the future, and particularly over whether they would be able to find a job at the end of it all, therefore remained a key drawback of the scheme.

Turning to other explanations for the positive affective outcomes of participation on CP, it seems likely that the satisfaction the interviewees had gained from contributing to projects which were of considerable social value was an important factor. The interviewees clearly indicated that they were

pleased to be involved in such projects and that this made them feel useful and brought a sense of achievement.

Another aspect of CP which was described in positive terms, the working relationships within the programme, could also be regarded as potentially important. Despite the fact that lack of interpersonal contact was rarely mentioned as a negative aspect of unemployment, it seems clear that for these interviewees, the relationships they had developed at work also contributed to their positive experience of the programme.

Finally, given the comments made in sections 6.3 and 6.4, concerning the impact of financial hardship on mental health and the comments of some of the interviewees about the increased income they had gained from participation, it would seem likely that this had had both direct and indirect effects on their positive experience.

6.5.4 Comparison of The Findings with The "Key Features"

In this section I shall attempt to compare and contrast the empirical findings described above with the claimed positive and negative features of the scheme identified in Chapter 4. To recap on these features they were:

1. It is work.
2. It is employment.
3. It is socially useful work.
4. It provides a greater income than unemployment benefit.
5. It is intended to improve participants' chances of securing permanent employment.
6. It is temporary.
7. It is part-time.

8. It provides less money than equivalent jobs in the mainstream labour market.
9. It is created employment, developed primarily for the benefit of those who participate on it.
10. The actual rates of post-CP employment success are low.

In presenting the framework it was argued that on a theoretical basis, (drawing largely from the work of Jahoda, Warr and Fryer), the first five of these features could be expected to represent strengths of the scheme from a psychological perspective, whilst the latter five features could be expected to represent weaknesses.

Taking the first feature, that CP is work, it was claimed that this would represent a psychologically positive aspect of the scheme since, by implication, it would offer an opportunity for participants to engage in purposeful activity which required the use and/or development of skills or abilities, and would provide "traction" or momentum. Broadly speaking, this claim seems to be at least partially supported by the empirical evidence presented above. The interviewees did describe their involvement with the projects and the learning and development which resulted from this as being positive aspects of the scheme. There is however, little direct support for the claim that CP provides "traction" or momentum.

I shall leave discussion of the second feature, that CP is employment until all the other features have been discussed, since many of these have fundamental implications for the status of CP as employment.

Turning then to the third feature, that CP involves socially useful work, and that this would also represent a strength of the scheme, it appears once again, that this claim is broadly supported by the comments of these interviewees.

Many of the respondents clearly conveyed that they were pleased to be contributing to a worthwhile project which benefitted others in the community and found this aspect of their participation on the scheme very rewarding. It seems clear that this was indeed a strength of CP as far as these interviewees were concerned.

With respect to the fourth putatively positive feature of CP, that it provides a greater income than unemployment benefit, the findings were more mixed. Many of the younger interviewees (who had been receiving the minimum level of state benefit) had benefitted financially and saw this as a positive feature of the scheme. However, the older interviewees, (and especially those with families) tended to have been receiving higher levels of benefit and therefore the CP wage represented either little improvement or (for some) a decrease in income. For these interviewees then, the CP wage was certainly not regarded as a benefit of participation. (Indeed, this raises the interesting possibility that their decision to participate had not been made on financial grounds (Jahoda's manifest function of employment), but on another basis entirely. In turn this might lead us to question whether Jahoda's latent functions of employment are quite as unintended as she suggests. It would also seem to raise difficulties for any attempt to explain of the negative effects of unemployment based entirely on financial grounds).

Turning to the fifth feature of CP, (that it is intended to improve participants' job prospects), it seems that for some of the interviewees this was indeed perceived as a benefit insofar as they would have a year's worth of employment experience to their credit when looking for another job. In this respect, they felt more hopeful and less pessimistic about the future than when they had been unemployed.

However, although some of the interviewees felt more hopeful than they had whilst unemployed, it was very clear that the temporary nature of the contract (Feature 6) was regarded as the single most important drawback of the scheme. This seemed to be closely linked with the concern and anxiety that they expressed over the future, and particularly over their job prospects once their contract expired (Feature 10). Thus the claim that both of these features would represent weaknesses of the scheme from a psychological standpoint was strongly supported.

Turning to the seventh feature, that CP is part-time, it was argued that this would be a weakness of the scheme, since it would offer less in the way of the latent functions of employment than other comparable jobs in the mainstream labour market. In fact, the findings above would seem to suggest quite to the contrary; the part-time nature of the contract was largely perceived by the interviewees as a positive feature of the scheme inasmuch as it offered flexibility and gave them time to pursue their own interests.

The eighth feature, that the wages on CP are less than for equivalent jobs in the mainstream labour market was again expected to represent a weakness of the scheme. Surprisingly however, this did not emerge strongly from the interviews. One potential explanation for this might be that for the interviewees, comparisons with unemployment were more salient. (Especially bearing in mind that at least for some of the interviewees, the wage represented a substantial increase on their unemployment benefit).

The ninth feature, that CP is "created" employment developed primarily for the benefit of those who participate on it, was expected to represent a psychologically negative feature of the scheme in that CP jobs might be regarded as "charity" (with the implication that it would undermine the self-perceptions of participants about their own competence). Here, the comments

of the interviewees were again somewhat mixed. Whilst their comments concerning the scheme as a government "ploy" to reduce the unemployment figures could be regarded as a recognition of CP as created employment, their comments concerning the social value of what they were doing would seem to count against the suggestion that it would be perceived as "charity".

Turning finally to the second feature, that CP is employment, it was claimed that this would represent a positive aspect of the scheme since it would provide at least some of the latent functions of employment suggested by Jahoda. In this respect, it is interesting that for many of the respondents, the issue of whether CP was a "real" job or not was an important one, and many argued that by virtue of the fact that it was temporary, it was not a real job. However, this declared position needs to be seen alongside two significant facts. Firstly, all of the interviewees referred to their work as a "job" and not as a "scheme" or a "project" and secondly, very few of the interviewees intended to look elsewhere for employment until the end (or near the end) of their CP contract. These observations would seem to indicate that whatever their declared position about whether it was a "real" job, they did, in many respects treat their CP post as at least a form of employment.

Indeed, it is clear from the discussion of the other features of the scheme (and the findings described earlier), that in some respects CP was a very good form of employment, in that for many of the interviewees, it (a) provided interesting and stimulating activity, doing work which (b) was perceived to be of considerable social value, as well as providing (c) highly valued social contact. If (speculatively) these features of the scheme were taken as an indication that CP offered three of the latent functions suggested by Jahoda (activity, status/identity and shared experiences), and if these features were assumed to underpin the positive psychological changes reported by the interviewees upon joining CP, then the findings could be seen as consistent with at least part of

the deprivation theory. But these are big assumptions, and in any event, this explanation would still leave open a question as to why the remaining two latent functions (goals and time structure) did not emerge so strongly as positive aspects of the scheme.

These mixed findings in respect of CP as "employment" might be regarded as some indication that the sort of "intermediate roles" identified in Chapter 4 do exist, and that CP is one such intermediate role. However, what is very unclear is whether (as was hoped) this helps to provide any psychological insights into the experience of employment and unemployment, except perhaps insofar as it adds weight to the argument advanced that the distinction between employment and unemployment is not always as clear as has been suggested within the unemployment literature. However the current findings do seem to move us forward in two small ways. First the inherent conflict between what the interviewees said explicitly about CP as a "job" and the way they regarded their roles on a day-to-day basis, does seem to highlight the need to consider more carefully the personal, social and psychological *meaning* of the work activities in which individuals become involved. I shall return to this point in the discussion. Moreover, (and perhaps with greater confidence) the interviewees comments about the one respect in which CP was not a "real" job (that it was temporary and therefore did not alleviate their anxiety about the future) do seem to point towards one very important omission in Jahoda's deprivation theory, namely the psychological significance of future orientation. This weakness has been pointed out by Fryer (1988b) and I shall return to it later in the thesis.