BACK TO THE FUTURE,

FOR BETTER OR WORSE?

MEANINGS OF MARRIAGE FOR YOUNG

WOMEN IN THE LOWER HUNTER REGION,

AUSTRALIA

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Back to the future, for better or worse? Meanings of marriage for young women in the Lower Hunter region, Australia

by

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Some of the findings contained in Chapter Eight of this thesis can be found in a paper entitled 'Coexisting Detraditionalization and Retraditionalization Trends in Young White Middle Class Women's Marriage Attitudes', in the Refereed Conference Proceedings for The Australian Sociological Association Conference, The University of Melbourne: December 2-5, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-7340-3984-2.

Abstract

Why do young women still choose to marry in the new millennium? Although conjugal diversity in Australia has increased and crude marriage rates have decreased, the majority of young women still desire marriage. Marriage clearly remains important. The institution of marriage, despite high divorce rates, continues to exist as the most powerful and widely acknowledged form of social contract. Few empirical studies have focused on the meanings young women ascribe to marriage. Rather, marriage tends to be regarded as a stable concept around which to research and investigate. The meanings and definitions of marriage, particularly how young people identify marriage within their wider identity, has been ignored in much of the literature. This acceptance of marriage and its meaning within existing literature universalises and reinforces marriage as a dominant social and societal norm, whereby prestige is attached across cultures and through time. Marriage has sustained its centrality within social science research, yet without justification or adequate problematising. Meanwhile, in gender studies there is a tendency to assume that marriage is an outdated concept which has been superseded by the sexual revolution and by second wave feminism. As a result, feminist studies have not addressed the apparent persistence of marriage as a goal for young women. This thesis project contributes to filling that identified gap by addressing the apparent persistence of marriage as a goal for young women in Australia.

This mixed methods study maintains a focus on qualitative methodologies and feminist epistemologies, aiming to provide rich subjective accounts of marriage. The study

comprises data from 225 surveys. It also includes data from in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 75 of the survey participants. All three kinds of data collection asked about the meanings of marriage for young women. The participants were women aged 18 to 35 years, of various relationship statuses, from the Newcastle and Lower Hunter region of New South Wales, Australia. Participants were purposefully sampled to allow a spread of age and relationship status. Although this was not specifically intended, as a cohort they can be described as predominantly white and middle class. A grounded theory approach in line with Glaser and Strauss (1967) was employed to uncover subjective narratives that revealed attitudes and feelings towards the place of marriage and intimate relationships in the young women's life trajectories.

The findings of this study result from descriptive statistical analysis of survey data, and from content and discourse analysis of interviews and focus groups that indicate participants' discursive constructions of marriage. The study finds that participants position marriage as a marker of status, as important for child bearing, as well as the major factor in achieving a competent and legitimate mature feminine identity. This study presents an overview of young Australian women's aspirations for, and experiences of marriage and intimate relationships. It offers fresh insights into the ways these women imagine marriage and the marital relationship within their life trajectory. An integrated account of feminist critiques of marriage, and theorising on individualization and detraditionalization, allows us to see how gender inequalities are maintained in marital relationships under the discourse of individualization. This study offers evidence that emphasises the need for continuing feminist critiques of marriage

and the family.

The findings of this study suggest that the neo-liberal discourse of individualization has encouraged of the idea of gender neutrality, equality and autonomy within the marital relationship. At the same time the young women indicate that they expect to put the interests and wishes of a future husband ahead of their own. High levels of personal compromise are foreshadowed. Yet their imagined futures include more than marriage. They do wish for self-fulfilment and many want careers. However, marriage is constructed as the anchoring status and identity that makes those goals legitimate and achievable. The study finds evidence of both detraditionalization and retraditionalization trends in the aspirations, expectations and lived realities of the young women interviewed. It is argued that attitudes towards marriage reflect the detraditionalization process to some extent, yet concurrently indicate the retraditionalization process; for example in the desire for full church weddings and in the defence of women taking responsibility for housework and raising children.

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Chapter One

Introduction

As we approach the new millennium many people are concerned about decreasing marriage rates, increased divorce rates, increased de facto relationships and child-bearing at a later age (Relationships Australia, 2004).

Rapid social change in the developed world, with higher divorce rates, fewer marriages, greater acceptance of same-sex relationships, and advancements in reproductive and gender assignation in technology, has resulted in an increasingly diverse range of family forms existing outside the traditional nuclear family model (Carauana, 2002).

As the above quotes indicate, the issue of changing intimate relationships has come to the forefront of political and popular awareness. These demographic dilemmas have fuelled much media attention, as well as moulding government strategy and policy (Caruana, 2002). The media has arguably sensationalised the extent of marriage and fertility decline in Australia. Yet concerns are ever present, particularly the 'dangers' and 'problems' associated with increased family diversity and the collapse of the traditional nuclear family and its values. Family life in Australia has changed dramatically (as in most Western countries) over the past few decades, and there is

clearly much academic and popular debate about the future of the 'family', as well as what place marriage has in contemporary Australian society. While it is true that in Australia crude marriage rates have decreased, the majority of women still want to marry.

Two influential political standpoints may be identified in academic studies of marriage. The first is the family values movement, which advocates marriage as advantageous for women and indeed for society as a whole. The second is the feminist movement, which provides a varied, yet thorough critique of marriage and the family, finding that it is not advantageous for women. While the various feminist critiques of marriage and the family have been heralded as a success in driving relevant policy reform, the academic feminist paradigm has reached something of a stalemate in accounting for the persistence of marriage as a goal for young 'empowered' women. Theorising about the processes of individualization posited variously by Beck (1992), Giddens (1992) and Bauman (1990) have come to the fore in explaining contemporary intimate relationships. These are currently proving far more popular than feminist paradigms for understanding marriage and intimate relationships between women and men.

Traditional and conventionally gendered marriages are argued to be increasingly rare, replaced by more fluid and flexible types of intimacy. Yet despite the wide acknowledgement of individualization as *the* way of explaining reflexive modern relationships, little empirical work has been carried out to support or challenge the central assertions of the concept of individualization. Further, feminist assertions of the

typically gendered inequalities in intimate relationships are assumed to be a thing of the past under late modern processes of individualization. To illuminate and interrogate these existing bodies of work, this thesis offers a synthesised theoretical framework of analysis, using rich qualitative empirical data, of the meanings young women ascribe to marriage. It does so with the aim of addressing the persistence of the marital relationship as the most attractive form of adult intimacy.

My interest in marriage in Australia

I arrived in Newcastle, New South Wales, situated on the east coast of Australia from the United Kingdom five years ago. I was immediately struck by the presence of the wedding industry in the city. Along Hunter Street, the main road leading to the city centre of Newcastle, there are six bridal gown shops within two blocks. Wedding fairs and Bridal 'Expos' are frequent, with one a week in the region during spring. In the local White Pages telephone directory, there are well in excess of 50 'Wedding' outlets or businesses listed. On a Saturday afternoon, it is not uncommon to see bridal parties patiently waiting their turn to have the wedding photographs taken at the most picturesque spots along the beach and harbour.

I was surprised by how many friends I made in Newcastle who, in their early twenties, so much desired to be married. Some were engaged, and busy planning their weddings; one hoping that her boyfriend would 'hurry up and propose', while others referenced marriage and romance frequently in their everyday conversations. These initial

observations in social situations exposed young Australian women's attitudes, expectations and aspirations – their enthusiastic engagement with the discourse of marriage – which I found fascinating. I realised that young Australian women were constantly exposed to media coverage of weddings, engagements and tales of romance, and that marital discourse was incredibly pervasive in the micro-sociological communities of my friends. My experiences with close friends going through the processes of imagining being, and becoming, a wife led to my interest in the ways young women construct marriage, and being married.

Australian government policy on marriage and the family was also personally intriguing. At a time when the British and Canadian governments, amongst others, were introducing Civil Partnerships legislation to acknowledge same-sex relationships, the conservative Howard government in Australia maintained legislative support for the traditional nuclear family. The discouragement of the stay-at-home mother from entering or re-entering the workforce for example (Brennan, 2007), emphasised the importance of marriage and the nuclear family unit in Australian culture. These policy positions and their effect in reinforcing a traditional idea of marriage seemed in stark contrast to the 'transformation of intimacy' heralded years before by Giddens (1992).

Why study young women?

The organization of the private realm, the home, and intimate relations, are generally acknowledged to have undergone a considerable transformation over the past decades. These transformations are arguably of more consequence to women than men. Women, as individualized social actors, must now negotiate intimacy, family, work and autonomy. Women now must choose – choose if, when and who to marry – and no longer passively accept the pre-given life female role trajectories of family life of previous generations. Further, women must resolve the pressures associated with pronatalism and discourses of appropriate femininity, and 'good' mothering, most often while managing paid work.

For my female friends, marriage, and being married, appeared to hold great importance in identity construction. I noticed that traditional pressures like family or religion were marginalised in friends' discussion of marriage. Instead, and in line with Gillis (1999), the desire to marry appeared to be mostly associated with the presentation of the self in positive ways (Goffman, 1959). Marriage seemed to assure a legitimate social identity for women.

It is widely acknowledged, following Bernard (1982), that women and men experience marriage in different ways. Many of my female friends seemed distinctly preoccupied with marriage and marrying – and while my male friends might have been thinking about marriage to the same extent, male discussion of marriage was non-existent in my micro-sociological community. As I began to read on the topic, the various feminist

critiques of marriage provide a wealth of empirical evidence to suggest that women encounter more disadvantage, or at least benefit less from marriage than men. My experiences as an undergraduate studying gender and feminism had exposed me to the breadth of literature which elucidates continuing gender inequalities at work and in the home. Transformations in the division of domestic labour for example, do not seem to have matched the expectations of many following the second wave feminist assault on gendered relations.

Moreover, I was intrigued by feminist theorising on the prevailing norms of the roles of 'wife' and 'husband', and the extent to which the feminist critique of marriage has eroded these conventions, which in previous generations have subordinated many women. The many unanswered questions of contemporary feminist analysis demanded a focus on women in the scope of this research. While studying men's attitudes and expectations of marriage would have been interesting and worthwhile, the feminist epistemologies which emerged to shape this study demanded a focus on women's experiences. It was also important to focus on young women – those who would be at, or approaching, marrying age. It was judged that in reflexive modern 'individualized' living, these young women's accounts of marriage and intimacy, and how they position marriage and negotiate intimacy in their imagined life trajectories, could give valuable insight into women's life transitions, as well as their aspirations for family and work.

Research aims and questions

Little attention in existing work on marriage has been paid to the meanings of marriage. Rather, most studies only locate marriage in the institutional or legal sense, and investigate broad attitudinal trends using quantitative statistical methods. My experiences with friends painted a very complex picture of the way marriage was perceived and imagined by young women. In the absence of contemporary explanations for the persistence of life-long marriage as a key goal for many young women, I resolved to create a research project which could elucidate accounts of marriage from this group of women. I wanted to illuminate young women's voices on the subject, making no prior assumptions about what marriage would mean to them. The exploratory nature of the topic, and the deliberate lack of hypotheses, pointed to the uptake of grounded theory methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and qualitative data collection and analysis.

Feminist epistemologies have influenced the choice of appropriate methodologies. A project of this nature required the formulation of open questions, where in-depth responses would provide rich data to help explain the ways that young women locate marriage and the marital relationship in their lives. A mixed method approach was chosen, with a focus on qualitative data. A survey was designed as the initial method of data collection. The survey was designed to provide data on a large enough sample to establish meaningful trends and patterns in the data. Qualitative in-depth interviewing and focus group discussions then probed these trends and allowed time for each participant to give their personal account of marriage. Time and financial constraints

prevented random sampling. Instead, a modified snowballing technique was employed.

This thesis has several aims. Firstly, it was important to establish whether marriage and the marital relationship represented a desire or goal for the young women recruited. It was also vital to allow these young women to describe and explain the personal and subjective meanings they attach to marriage, in their own words. The research was then designed to elucidate participant's imaginings of the marital relationship and marital living. The design of the survey anticipated analysing the gendered nature of the marital relationships according to participant's aspirations and experiences. Interrogating the relevance of the popular individualization and detraditionalization theses in explaining intimacy in reflexive modernity, this study aims to draw attention to the significance of these meta-theoretical frameworks, according to whether they will fit with empirical data on the topic of contemporary young women's engagement with the discourse of marriage.

In response, the following research questions were devised:

1. Do the women studied desire to marry?
2. What are the meanings of marriage for these young women?
3. Why is marriage an attractive relationship option?
4. How is marriage positioned and valued in the life trajectory?
5. How is marriage constructed as desirable/undesirable, ideal or normative?
6. What are women's aspirations and expectations for the marital relationship and marital living?

This project contributes to existing scholarship that attempts to explain women's aspirations and expectations for marriage and marital living. It aims to integrate relevant aspects of the feminist critiques of marriage with prevalent individualization and detraditionalization theorising of intimate relationships in reflexive modernity.

Organisation of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, **Chapter Two** considers the dominant existing theoretical work on marriage and the family, and includes a synthesised analysis of feminist perspectives which critically address marriage. It considers the historical dominance of feminist theorising on marriage for women, and then highlights the implicit shortcomings of relevant feminist theoretical critiques. The chapter then looks at the recent popularity of the individualization and detraditionalization theses for explaining trends in contemporary intimate relationships, and the significance of studying marriage within these frameworks. Chapter Two includes discussions of the key theorists' work on intimacy in late modernity, focusing on the work of Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, and Anthony Giddens. The arguments in Chapter Two determine the scope for the research project, because both feminist and individualization theorising predicts the large scale abandonment of marriage. Both positions fail therefore to adequately explain the continued attractiveness of marital living for most young women.

Chapter Three offers a synthesised review of scholarly literature relevant to the topic of this thesis. Focussing on existing empirical work on western marriage, this chapter considers the methodologies employed in empirical studies on marriage, and makes reference to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used. Firstly, a brief overview of marriage and family statistics in an Australian context is offered. Then, empirical work from the Family Values movement is considered, where marriage is asserted to be advantageous for women. This is followed by discussion of the empirical work offered by feminist scholars, who generally view marriage as perpetuating the subordination of women. The chapter concludes with a critical analysis of empirical work on marriage and the family, taking into account the individualization and detraditionalization theses.

Chapter Four outlines the methodologies employed for this research project, and the underlying theory behind such choices, according to the research question outlined above. The chapter outlines the feminist epistemologies and grounded theory methodologies employed for mixed – predominantly qualitative – data collection. Chapter Four describes the processes of data collection and analysis, as well as reviewing the study's sampling strategies, ethical considerations and limitations. The chapter concludes by reflexively analysing the position of the researcher.

An introduction to the Newcastle and Lower Hunter region, and to the sample of surveyed participants, is included in **Chapter Five**. General trends in the participants' attitudes towards marriage are described. The significance of demographic variables such as age and relationship status on the participants' constructions of marriage are

examined, followed by a discussion of the impact of childhood experiences of marriage, with particular reference to those (few) participants who were brought up by two (voluntarily) unmarried (biological) parents. Finally, a table is included to introduce the interview and focus group participants.

Chapter Six provides insight into the meanings of marriage. Content and discourse analysis from interview and focus group data is employed to detail the multiple meanings of marriage for participants, particularly the ways that marriage is associated with commitment, security, children and status. Specific attention is paid to the positioning of marriage in the life trajectory, and with this in mind the chapter is structured according to meanings of marriage during youth, middle, and old age.

The ways that marriage enables the construction of a legitimate and competent adult feminine identity is explored in **Chapter Seven**. The chapter considers how the identity imagined when achieving married status, and being a wife, 'fit' into the imagined life trajectories of participants. The ways in which married status is identified as beneficial at work, in social life and in motherhood are examined. Finally, an analysis is included to address the widespread aspiration amongst participants to be more than 'just' a wife, to strive to 'do' and 'have it all'.

Chapter Eight offers a critique of the dominant theoretical frameworks, mentioned above, for explaining marriage and intimacy in late modernity, using evidence from the empirical data. The impact of the pervasive discourse of individualization in the

participant's narratives is examined. Subsequently the chapter discusses trends for coexisting detraditionalization and retraditionalization in the participant's attitudes towards, and expectations for marriage.

A summary of the findings is given in **Chapter Nine**, which concludes this thesis. The chapter analyses the theoretical and empirical contribution of the thesis, noting the limitations of the study. The implications of the research are considered, arguing for a synthesised approach to research on marriage, one that brings together feminist theorising and productive tenets of the individualization and detraditionalization theses. Suggestions for policy and practice are included, as are recommendations for future further research.

Chapter Two

Theorising Marriage and Intimate Relationships

Introduction

In order to address the persistence of marriage as a goal for young women, this chapter will consider the various dominant theoretical perspectives on marriage, which have shaped this study. There is a particular focus in this chapter on the feminist critique of marriage and the family. Subsequently, the 'individualization' thesis will be considered. In relation to the historical dominance of both the feminist critique of marriage, and to the significance of marriage in the individualization thesis, this chapter will examine the implicit shortcomings of these theoretical positions. In essence, both predict the large scale abandonment of marriage, and thus fail to accurately explain why marriage continues to be attractive for most young women.

The feminist critique of marriage

'Marriage has been a topic of feminist theorizing and political activism for hundreds of years' (VanEvery, 1995:18). Early first-wave feminist literature postulated that marriage was advantageous for women, as long as they had rights in public life (for example, Wollstonecraft, 2004). Some early second-wave liberal feminist literature also assumed the centrality of marriage for women, as long as the marriage partners were equal, birth

control was practised, and women undertook paid work if they wished (for example, Friedan, 1963).

Later feminist research on marriage provided far more critical viewpoints (for example Pateman, 1988). Over the past thirty years, there has been a significant amount of research undertaken by feminist authors, both theoretical and empirical, which, in contrast to both early feminism and to the conservative Family Values movement, postulates that marriage is not advantageous for women, and as an institution serves to perpetuate their subordination. Marriage is viewed by most recent and contemporary western feminists as an institution that exists within patriarchy, and serves men's interests more than women's. Within this patriarchal system, those women (and men) who strive for equality are constrained by larger social, political and economic realities (Eisenstein, 1983). The following sections outline the direction of feminist theories on marriage, and examine the shortcomings of these theories.

The meaning of marriage represents somewhat of an ideological battleground in second-wave feminist thought. Most feminists assert that marriage is oppressive for women and as an institution, assists the maintenance of patriarchy within capitalist structure (Tong, 1998). A further commonality throughout feminist theorising of marriage is the acknowledgement that attitudes towards, and experiences of, marriage and family are different for women and men. This assertion is not based on biological determinism, instead is theorised as a political construction of gender, stemming from the history of marriage laws which favour men and allow a husband power over his wife. Even though

marriage laws have been reformed over time to negate the material ownership of the wife, most feminist thought remains supportive of the argument that the institution of marriage is favourable to men, evidenced for example, by continued gender inequalities in the distribution of domestic labour.

The foundations of contemporary feminist critiques of marriage

Mid twentieth century feminist work served to highlight the status of the wife as a commodity, often citing Levi-Strauss' (1969) anthropological work on kinship and marriage systems, depicting women as the archetypal object for exchange between men through marriage. Levi-Strauss theorised that women were passive objects – the property to be exchanged – not partners in the exchange. The aim of the early feminist critique of marriage was to undermine marriage as an institution which principally served to regulate men's sexual access to women as a patriarchal right. De Beauvoir (1949) in the existentialist feminist work 'The Second Sex', further stressed the role of women as subordinate and enslaved to domesticity in marriage, citing marriage as 'women's biggest trap', again emphasising the material disadvantage of women as wives.

The liberal feminist critique of marriage in the 1960's, popularised by Betty Friedan's (1963) 'The Feminist Mystique' shifted the focus from marriage as an inherently patriarchal institution, to one which could be salvaged. Liberal feminism highlighted in particular the ways in which women are oppressed and enslaved by engaging in the roles

of wife and mother, where marital life for women, as constructed by Friedan (1963) was a 'comfortable concentration camp'. The aim of this critique was to popularise the idea that women could reach outside of marriage for fulfilment in life. Friedan's argument supported the productivity and creativity of married women, rather than turning away from marriage as a tool for organising the family. Bernard (1982) theorised that men and women experience marriage differently, with the concept of 'his' and 'her' subjective experiences of marriage, often resulting in gender inequalities in that personal relationship, to the detriment and subordination of women.

During this time the focus of feminist critiques of marriage was on the relationship between the apparently separate private and public spheres of home and work – where the interaction between the home and economy provided the means for women's oppression. Feminists such as Oakley (1972) sought to depict gender, and the construction of gender, as a reflection of social institutions and cultural mores, undermining the notion of gender as the property of an individual. This formed the principal critique of marriage. The dominant discourses on sex roles in marital relationships as biologically determined, were attacked in favour of social constructionist analyses of domestic tasks and gendered experiences in marital living. This hard-fought battle to strip back the biologically deterministic dualisms associated with sex roles in marital relationships continues today. Residual attitudes towards the pervasive discourse of 'good mothering' for example, are discussed in depth in this thesis in Chapter Seven.

Second-wave feminist positions on marriage

During the 1980s there was a shift in feminist thought on marriage and family, which recognised the wider social structures impacting on women's position in the family. An obvious example was the shift from theorising women's disadvantage in the labour market as a reflection of the time spent engaged in domestic work, to theorising this burden of domestic work as a result of gender inequality and segregation in the paid work force (Jackson, 1997; Walby, 1990). Oakley (1979) theorises that the focus of capitalism on paid employment outside the home serves to marginalise women, particularly when they are primarily constructed as having the identity of a wife and mother. She notes that the term 'working mother' exemplifies the difficulties for women in attaining legitimacy in the workplace.

To Marxist feminists such as MacKinnon (1989) the family is inextricably linked to capitalism and capitalist modes of production, where the nuclear family provides a site for women's oppression. This argument is based primarily on Engels' (1884) assertion that nineteenth century industrialization and the onset of the capitalist economy separated spheres of public and private work, where men came to dominate the public sphere and women the private. Marriage was positioned as oppressive for women in analyses such as MacKinnon's. A distinct aim of such feminist work was to reveal marriage as the socially constructed linchpin of the nuclear family rather than as natural or normal. Attempts were made to analyse the subordination of women in terms of the economic value of work within the home (Mitchell, 1976/2001; Delphy and Leonard, 1992) This body of work can be criticised for frequently positioning the woman as a

passive subject, ascribed with little agency to escape patriarchal structures.

Marriage as a sexual contract

Much of the feminist theorising of marriage during the 1980's moved on from the economic focus to the analysis of marriage as a sexual contract. Pateman's (1988) socialist feminist analysis of marriage in terms of the 'sexual contract' has acted as a basis for much later feminist empirical and theoretical research. Socialist feminists have argued for many years that marriage, although often called a contract, is far removed from a contractual relationship. Rather it is an institution rooted in class and capitalist modes of production (Walby, 1990). Pateman criticises marriage as a contract, since women cannot set the terms themselves. She argues that the contract of marriage serves to oppress women in a range of social, structural, societal and economic ways. She writes extensively about the inequity of the sexual contract, and her analysis of marriage is worthy of discussion. She notes that for a woman to marry, she must consent to marriage in order to shift from the unmarried to the married state.

This, on face value, would appear fair and just, with women seeming like any other free person who can consent to enter into a contract. However, the marriage contract is different, Pateman argues that it is different, in the way that women are not able to enter into a contract of marriage as individuals, only as women. The peculiarity with this situation is in the fact that women must consent to marriage, therefore must be free, but, cannot be seen as free as they were never politically free. In other words, married

women are both free and subordinate. Pateman refers to the way that, once married, a husband used to gain all rights to his wife's property; thus having been free to consent to marriage, the woman is now contracted into a subordinate gender position. She argues, therefore, that the process of becoming married, and married life thereafter, oppresses women by definition of the contractual nature of the institution, as well as what marriage has legally and traditionally represented (Pateman, 1988).

Marriage and women's choices

Other feminist writers have also critiqued the idea of choice applied to marriage, arguing that marriages, like the practices of prostitution and surrogacy, are based on offensive views of women as sexual servants, breeders or domestic helpers; these ideas of women underlie the supposedly free choice that women have to enter marriage (Tong, 1998; Eisenstein, 1983). Conversely, Hakim (1996, 2000) adopts a more functionalist economics-based feminist perspective on choice applied to marriage. She draws on her own empirical qualitative and quantitative research, concluding that the heterogeneity of women's preferences and home and work decisions are based on women's personal choices alone.

Hakim's (1996, 2000) research, drawing on a controversial version of rational choice theory, describes women's life decisions in terms of family and career. This theory Hakim calls 'preference theory', emphasising women's 'free' personal choices. Hakim is criticised for categorising women into three simple categories: those who are 'career

oriented'; those who are 'family oriented'; and the rest, labelled by Hakim as 'drifters'. The sociological basis of the theory is that women choose between the two main 'life priorities' depending on their commitment to either career or family. Hakim emphasises women as self-determining actors, rather than people whose behaviour is affected and determined by social structures and constraints, or family characteristics. This agency over structure perspective is rejected to various extents in feminist studies. Socialist and Marxist feminist perspectives in particular refuse to reject structural power relations in this way. Many authors, including Wallace (1987) and Proctor and Padfield (1999), oppose preference theorists' focus on individual choice, in favour of the notion that women's work or personal situations determine and lead to the adaptation of aspirations accordingly.

The literature of the critique of Hakim's theory is complex, with many authors criticising her work on a methodological or theoretical basis. Preference theory is challenged by Proctor and Padfield (1999) for neglecting the majority group of 'drifters', where little theoretical focus is placed. Another factor of Hakim's work that is criticised by many feminists is that, within preference theory, women's orientations are said not to change over time. In fact, women's aspirations are very varied in Hakim's research, particularly in terms of their situations at the time of research, but Hakim attaches little importance to the potential for these aspirations, or situations, to change over time. A widely acknowledged critique of preference theory is the fact that it does not explain 'why' women may have various and/or distinct career and family orientations at different points in the life stage. For Hakim to suggest that each woman chooses her life

priority, she must neglect the notion that choices and decisions can never be made freely or in the abstract.

Contemporary marriage – a feminist stalemate?

It would be obtuse to suggest that there has been just one prevailing feminist view of marriage and what it represents as an institution. Feminists have defined marriage in a variety of ways. Some have constructed marriage as a social contract between two individuals who have a level of freedom to determine its terms. Others, such as Delphy and Leonard (1994) and MacKinnon (1997) theorise marriage as completely oppressive; as slavery or servitude; as the material appropriation of women by men; as a system of economic exchange; as a trade in women; as a system of legalised rape and prostitution; or as a trap promoting security and disability simultaneously. Most agree that women marry for practical, economic, political, spiritual, legal or emotional reasons, with many interpretive possibilities. The range of feminist opinions on marriage is large and critically diverse, although most feminists criticise traditional marriage as an institution, and agree that marriage theoretically exists to oppress women (Brook, 2002). As Brook notes, most feminists fall into one of two categories: those who view marriage as a reformable, but sexist institution, and those who condemn marriage as irredeemably patriarchal.

The 'wife' and the nuclear family

In recent feminist literature, Jackson (1997), Pocock (2003) and VanEvery (1995) propose not only that marriage has different meanings for men and women, but that the prevailing norms of the roles of 'wife' and 'husband' result in the legacy of subordination of women in marriage continuing, through, for example, the allocation of domestic work and childcare. VanEvery (1995) suggests the role and identity of 'wife' is central to women's oppression. The subordinate position of women in marriage stems from women's inability to pursue a career at the same time as being primarily responsible for parenting. Pateman (1988) advocates stable and secure incomes for women, as a platform for gender equality, and notes the fact that many women remain dependent on their male partners economically, which often allows them to be subject to physical, sexual or psychological abuse by their husbands (Gordon, 1996). This vulnerability to poverty is arguably a justification for some women to marry, because the marital relationship is widely viewed as more difficult to dissolve than other forms of partnered lifestyles.

Mackinnon (1989) and Jackson (1996), who adopt the perspective of marriage as an irredeemable institution, note that as only a man can be a husband, and only a woman can be a wife, marriage as a set of power relations is fundamentally and structurally oppressive. As long as heterosexuality continues to eroticize husband-wife power relations, no amount of matrimonial law reform will alleviate women's subordination in marriage. The contention is that the model of the traditional nuclear family with a male breadwinner should not be considered as natural, and should be challenged (Jackson,

1997). Further, in terms of government strategy, Jackson (1997:339) notes that marriage 'is central to the definition of heterosexual family life and establishes patterns of rights and dependencies around which much state policy revolves'. In other words, if the conventions of marriage change, so then will follow those policies of the State that pertain to these rights and dependencies.

Marriage and the division of labour

Some feminist authors have focused criticism on marriage in terms of the gendered division of labour. These authors (for example Pateman, 1988, and Pocock, 2003) argue that the division of labour in the family, even if chosen freely, operates within an underlying system of injustice. Moreover, the fact that it may be freely chosen is not grounds for justification. They argue in favour of maintaining fair background social structures by increasing awareness of choices that may undermine these structures. An example of this is redressing the effects of the subordination of girls through existing gendered power relations in the family.

Pateman (1988), VanEvery (1995) and MacKinnon (1997) amongst others suggest that we must not simply see marriage as a choice, without examining the (unjust) social institutions behind it. If a woman's choice to marry is unfairly constrained by unequal family and career structures, as well as substandard social services, then her choice is not a free one. These authors draw attention to the economic necessity of marriage for many women in contemporary society, by showing that focus must be directed towards

the wider contexts of women's decision making. This view is countered by Hakim (2000) who emphasises the importance of women's individual decision-making and choices as regards work and lifestyle, with her focus on women's individual preferences as the predominant motivation for marriage.

Outcomes and effects of the feminist critique of marriage

The feminist critique of marriage has seen some success in terms of women becoming aware of the possibilities for oppression. Brook notes that 'one of the most enduring insights arising from feminist critiques is that marriage has been revealed to be not only a site of institutional kinship, but also a site of gendered power relationships' (2002:52). Perhaps the postponement of marriage amongst Australian women compared to previous generations, as shown by the increased median age at first marriage, is evidence of women's awareness of the potentially oppressive nature of marriage. There is some evidence that the feminist critique of the family has transformed women's aspirations, expectations or intentions for partnered relationships (VanEvery, 1995). This is discussed in the following literature review chapter. Significant outcomes of these hard won second-wave feminist 'struggles' mean that marriage for women is now less obligatory; divorce is easier; remarriage and cohabitation more prevalent. To this end, women are freer than ever to resist the patriarchal relations of production (Walby, 1990). As well as this, contemporary feminist work has enabled new ways of thinking about gender and marriage, arguing for renewed academic focus on the understandings of the diverse and contextual lived experiences of women in marriage according to class, race

and sexuality for example.

The implicit shortcomings of feminist critiques of marriage

Arguably the principal shortcoming of early feminist critiques of marriage, is in the construction of the woman as a passive subject, or even as an object, with little or no agency. Agency is often deliberately under-theorised in feminist work on marriage, to emphasise the structural constraints of patriarchy. Yet the positioning of the woman as a passive actor does not 'fit' well with either a social constructionist view of gender, or with popular contemporary neoliberal rhetoric on the agency of individual women (and men) such as the perspective championed by Hakim (2000). The female subject constructed by Pateman, for example, seems helpless and unable to understand the type of contract she is entering into at the time of marriage. While liberal feminist standpoints portray women as either condemned to domestic servitude, or unaware of their own subordination and to be content to service their husband (Friedan, 1963).

Where the female subject is almost universally constructed as the 'victim', this does not help to explain why marriage appears to remain attractive for so many women, nor why some women express happiness and contentment in marriage – except through the implication of 'false consciousness', the idea that women are unable, under patriarchy, to act in their own interests. There have been many attempts to 'rescue' the female subject from passive victimhood and restore agency. As Jackson (1997:346) argues, while some women are of course freer to make choices than others, 'all ... make choices

(albeit within given limits): Women are not simply passive victims ensnared into oppressive marriages'. This is a view taken to the extreme by Hakim (2000) in explaining the agency – individual choice – of women in electing to enter different kinds of marital arrangements.

Brook (2002) acknowledges the difficulties involved with feminist analysis of marriage in terms of women's oppression. She notes the tautological complication of the effects of marriage being produced by marriage. In other words, marriage oppresses women, and women marry because they are oppressed. This circular logic of oppression not only hinders the feminist push for gender equality in marriages, but also masks some women's agency in pursuing 'alternative' marital relationships, like those in VanEvery's (1995) study.

The very notion of viewing marriage as an institution can also be critiqued. From a feminist perspective, conceptualising marriage as an institution can be helpful, as it facilitates the analysis of marriage as a defended site of sexual and patriarchal relations. However, there are also pitfalls involved with viewing marriage in an institutional context. Foucault (1983) discusses at length the dangers associated with confusing the mechanisms designed to secure the preservation of an institution itself with broader political or disciplinary agendas. If marriage is studied only as an institution, the transforming and fluid nature of marriage, and the fluidity and plurality of the ways women negotiate marital relationships can be overlooked. Further, as Brook (2002) notes, in feminism, the 'distancing' mechanism of institutionalisation allows us to

criticise marriage as an institution without examining wives and their lives. This is a weakness. The institutional model of marriage is compromised if it does not accurately represent the realities and experiences of women in marriage.

Ultimately, the shortcoming in terms of effect and influence of feminist critiques of the family is demonstrated by the continued uptake of marriage as the most desirable form of partnered relationship for the majority of young women. For example, in the data analysis from the 'Young' cohort surveyed by Women's Health Australia (n = 8,853), it is reported that 85 per cent of 25 to 30 year olds desired to marry by the age of 35 (WHA, 2003). The same percentage of this cohort maintained the desire in 2006 (WHA, 2006). Further, the continued prevalence of practices like the wife taking her husband's surname, point to the maintained legacy of actions most feminists would argue are symbolic of continued oppression. The fact that domestic work, child care and marriage are theorised as sites for oppression and patriarchy adds to the difficulty for feminists in conceptualising women as anything but passive subjects with little agency. Recent productive feminist analyses of marriage for women have aimed to incorporate both a structural critique of the conditions of patriarchy and some measure of female agency, for example Brook (2002).

Despite these reservations, the 1980s paradigm shift into reflexive modernity, discussed in depth below, is in part due to the successes of feminist work. The positive effect of feminist critiques of patriarchy have been responsible, in part, for establishing popular discourses of women as potentially active, sexually free and empowered subjects. The

late 1980s neo-liberal emphasis on individual agency highlights the popular perception that as far as young women are concerned, feminism has 'completed' its task of establishing gender equality (Harris, 2004). Although it is worth noting that this equality is often more present on paper than in practice. Beck (1992) notes the double-edged nature of late modern gender relations:

> Through more equal educational opportunities and an increased awareness of their position, young women have built up expectations of more equality and partnership in professional and family life which encounter *contrary* developments in the labour market and in male behaviour. Conversely, men have practised a *rhetoric of equality*, without matching their words with deeds (Beck, 1992: 103).

In terms of productive outcomes, feminist theorising on marriage has reached something of a stalemate, in that we have not witnessed the large-scale abandonment of marriage, nor the reformation of marital relations to reflect gender equality. This is most obviously evidenced by the continued unequal division of labour in the home.

Contemporary theories on marriage and the family – a paradigm shift?

What feminist critiques of the family have contributed to is a fundamental conceptual change in the way we construct and perceive marriage and the family. Few would disagree that contemporary Western family life is increasingly pluralised and diverse. The various feminist critiques of marriage and the family have served to undermine the conception of the nuclear family unit as natural or normal, instead emphasising its position within industrial or capitalist society. The nuclear family is theorised as only

existing because of ascribed gendered roles, which typify the work-life 'way' of modern living, relying as it does on unequal gender roles in the private and public spheres.

Developments in the global economy have also driven changes in the way we construct and perceive marriage and the family. As Castells (1996) maintains, increasing diversity in family living can be understood within the processes of global restructuring and transformation. Neoliberal economics became predominant in the 1980s, together with new networks of power, capital and communication – new spaces of flows that allow for a rapid dissemination of ideas and trends. This new era, labelled by Beck, Giddens and Lash and Friedman as 'late' or 'reflexive modernity' (Lash and Friedman, 1992) is characterised by the defining features of risk, globalization, individualization, detraditionalization and reflexivity. These global transformations implicitly legitimise 'other' types of family formation, so that the traditional nuclear family is no longer the most productive or effective form of the family; particularly under deregulated markets and decreased welfare state provisions.

During the 1990s and since the year 2000, global transformations and restructuring have led most western governments to actively push for women to enter or re-enter the labour market. This has signalled increased agency for women to access increased educational and occupational opportunities, as well as 'better' or less oppressive forms of adult relationship experiences. This, according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's optimistic view (2001), signals the end of the traditional oppressive constraints on women's previously linear life trajectories which were confined to wifehood and motherhood. Neo-liberal

political rhetoric persuading women to enter the workforce is paralleled by efforts to persuade men (fathers in particular) to take up an increased proportion of domestic and childrearing duties, particularly where economic restructuring has resulted in more volatile forms of employment, and men are increasingly experiencing unemployment or underemployment. Clearly, this undermines the dominant early modern discourse of family living; a binary arrangement of male breadwinner and female homemaker. Labour market restructuring, the increased demand for skilled workers and the increased flexibility and volatility of paid work, alongside changing legislation and social policy, have resulted in shifts in the ways that marriage, intimacy and sexuality are constructed (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Giddens, 1992).

In short, there has been a paradigmatic shift in the way that western marriage and the family are theorised. These new social paradigms borrow from feminist theorising, but are not in themselves overtly feminist. Given the conditions of reflexive modernity, the family is no longer constructed as a rigid, traditional contractual form of blood or kinship ties. Instead, the family is conceptualised according to the subjective meanings associated with intimacy. Marital relationships are theorised in terms of the intimate relationship between two active subjects, rather than as a reflection of a rigid institution. Many theorists have turned their attentions to establishing 'who' and 'what' now constitutes a family. However, it seems that we are far from reaching the second-wave feminist utopian vision of the complete rejection of the institution of marriage, particularly when addressing individuals' ideal aspirations for forms of living.

The significance of Beck, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, and Giddens

In the early 1990s the work of social theorists Beck and Giddens was influential in transforming sociological perspectives on marriage and family life. They critiqued the construction of sociological thought on family living as based on static institutionalised concepts such as the nuclear family. Beck and Giddens in the 1990s introduced new conceptual elements of the family, for example the 'post-familial family', love as 'chaotic', the 'pure relationship', 'romantic' and 'confluent' typologies of love, and 'plastic sexuality' against a background of 'ontological (in)security'; these terms are discussed in the following sections. This period of theorising marked a distinct shift in the way marriage and family living are signified in sociological thinking, since these theorists' located marriage and family living at the centre of their analysis of reflexive modernity. In particular, Beck and Giddens focused on the consequences of the processes of individualization and detraditionalization for marriage and intimate relationships.

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim

Risk Society and The Normal Chaos of Love

In 1992 Ulrich Beck released 'Risk Society', a particularly useful text in addressing the issues faced by young people in reflexive modernity. For example, according to Beck, 'everything else' – work, politics, economics, inequality – must be considered when analysing marital relationships. Beck charts what he terms 'epochal changes' from modernity into reflexive modernity, and introduces the importance of 'individuation',

later termed 'individualization'. He defines individualization as 'first, the disembedding and, second the re-embedding of industrial society ways of life by new ones, in which the individual must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves' (Beck, 1994: 13). For Beck, intimate relationships in reflexive modernity are increasingly contradictory:

> On the one hand, men and women are *released* from traditional forms and ascribed roles in the search for a 'life of their own'. On the other hand, in the prevailing diluted social relationships, people are driven into bonding in the search for happiness in a partnership (Beck, 1992:103).

Here Beck hints at processes of detraditionalization, while focussing on the relevance of individualization to intimate relations and marriage. This is discussed in depth below. The principal tenet of *Risk Society* is that in increasingly individualized living, individuals become aware of the potential consequences of their decision-making in regard to partnering.

> Suddenly everything becomes uncertain, including the ways of living together, who does what, how and where, or the views of sexuality and love and their connection to marriage and the family (Beck, 1992:109).

These consequences, or risks, can be complex and contradictory for both men and for women, but also vary according to gender, highlighting the continued importance of gender as a unit of sociological analysis.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's *The Normal Chaos of Love* (1995) provided new ways for theorising intimate relationships. Building on Beck's earlier work in *Risk Society* (1992) concerning the shift from modern to late or reflexive modern living, *The Normal Chaos*

of Love focuses on the impacts of the 'surge of individuation' (Beck, 1992:87) on intimate relationships. For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, the processes of individualization and detraditionalization serve to dissolve 'traditional' family morals and undermine the nuclear family. *The Normal Chaos of Love* traces the historical journey of the family, particularly noting the impact of significant social changes such as the development of the welfare state, legislative changes, increased educational opportunities, and the development of contraception. These changes have encouraged the liberation of women from traditional gender roles. The process of individualization is central to their discussion of the family in reflexive modernity. They identify detraditionalization within the process of individualization as the principal mechanism for the shift towards the 'post-familial family', theorising that the older meanings of marriage, intimacy and love have lost their moral and traditional codes. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, women (and men) have become free social agents, unconstrained by structure. They are 'the legislators of their own way of life' (1995:5).

Anthony Giddens

Giddens (1992) argues that institutional factors of marriage now hold less substance or relevance in late modernity. Religion, family, and societal pressures provide fewer meanings for marriage than in previous decades with social attitudes to relationships becoming more relaxed. He claims that the importance of intimacy and commitment, the 'pure relationship', now far outweigh institutional pressures to marry. With this new focus on intimacy and commitment comes increased uncertainty, as marriage becomes

just one of many available and appropriate relationship options. In conditions of uncertainty marriage promises security, and may well be appealing for that reason. This supports the concept of marriage as representative of a safe and familiar institution in an increasingly individualised society. Giddens (1992) argues that in marriage a long-term life trajectory is established, enabling a stable yet flexible future to be imagined. Marriage is then clearly linked to issues of identity and intimacy, by remaining the most common form of intimate relationship.

The Transformation of Intimacy

Giddens' *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992) focuses on the process of detraditionalization, and how it has affected the nature of personal relationships and self-identity. For Giddens, contemporary change is grounded within the framework of disintegrating 'traditional' social units like gender and class. It is replaced by increased fluidity and flexibility of identity and choice. Giddens agrees with Beck and Beck-Gernsheim that individuals are now compelled to create their own unique pathways and identities; what he terms 'the reflexive project of the self'. Weeks (1998:45) poignantly describes this project as 'recognition that the task of finding an anchor for the self, a narrative which gives meaning to all our disparate potential belongings, is a task of invention and self-invention'. This epitomises the shift from the institution to meaning, in theorising contemporary marriage and intimate relationships.

Giddens champions a radical rethinking of intimate relationships, casting aside the relevance of traditional institutions and fixed social mores. Inherent in the reflexive

project of the self is the quest for what Giddens terms 'ontological security', that is 'a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual' (Giddens 1991: 243). For Giddens, the desire for ontological security fuels the reflexive project of the self, and provides the motive for individual decision-making, particularly in intimate relationships.

Giddens' 'romantic' and 'confluent' love, and the 'pure relationship'

Regarding individualization in the realm of intimacy, Giddens has written extensively on the subject of partnered relations, particularly in terms of love and romance. An initial explanation for the underlying assumptions of Giddens' (1992) 'pure relationship', and his models of 'romantic love' and 'confluent love' is required, because Giddens' 'pure relationship' has become a prominent model for explaining intimacy in individualized and detraditionalized living.

In summary, traditional 'romantic love' is dependent on 'projective identification', creating a oneness between the partners, where established gender differences serve to strengthen the relationship, because the differences between masculinities and femininities are considered to be opposite. Giddens (1991) argues that increasing female sexual autonomy has undermined the old model of 'romantic' love, giving way to 'confluent love'; an intimate relationship typified by mutual disclosure and active contingency. Confluent love is not based on gender differences, nor is sexual identity necessarily dependent on anatomy, and identity within the intimate relationship becomes another lifestyle element of personal reflexivity in the choice biography.

The assumption is a linear trajectory of societal practices from the former to the latter, as the two models of love are portrayed as opposed. The lynchpin of 'romantic love' is its 'foreverness' with the 'one and only' partner, with whom you will remain for life 'for better or for worse'. This contrasts with the active, contingent model of 'confluent love' where a relationship continues only as for as long as both partners see fit to continue it. The 'confluent love' typology assumes the 'pure relationship'.

> A pure relationship is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship can deliver. In the context of the pure relationship, trust can be mobilised only by a process of mutual disclosure (Giddens, 1991:6).

For Giddens, the 'pure relationship' has become the contemporary western prototype, where trusting intimate relationships evolve to satisfy our ontological security. The more that the 'pure relationship' with its grounding in confluent love becomes a reality, the more focus is placed on creating a 'special' relationship, as opposed to the romantic notion of finding 'the one', that is the discovery of a particular special person. Not only are individuals motivated to choose a suitable partner with whom to build a special relationship, they also are now required to choose the rules for the relationship.

Giddens' concept of the 'pure relationship' has been heavily criticised by Jamieson (1999) amongst others. Jamieson's critique highlights the continuing tension between feminist theorising and social theorising of a more general nature about marriage in late

reflexive modernity. Jamieson draws particular attention to the lack of acknowledgement of gendered power relationships in such models. The pure relationship model seems to assume that male and female viewpoints and attitudes to intimate relationships have suddenly become congruent. Weaknesses in Giddens' arguments, and Jamieson's critique of Giddens' models of love and his 'pure relationship' concept are considered in some depth in Chapter Eight of this thesis.

Individualization

The theoretical concept of individualization in the era of late modernity has been championed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Giddens (1991) as a fundamental way of explaining the trend in increased diversity in intimate relationships. The following sections trace the chronology of the individualization thesis for explaining (sociologically) contemporary intimacy and marital relationships in the era of reflexive late modernity.

The principal proposition behind individualization is that there has been a shift from following a predetermined traditional trajectory in courtship, marriage and adult life. This has encouraged the development of the ability, if not necessity, to apply freedom of choice to intimate relationships. For Giddens (1991) individualization is a result of changes in the structure of the private sphere. As a process it serves to force individuals into making their own personal decisions concerning intimate relationships, particularly around marriage and having children.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Giddens (1992), and even earlier, Berger and Kellner (1970), all note the fact that intimate relationships are key to enhancing a personal sense of self and meaning. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2001) and Giddens (1992), marriage has become a site for reassurance in this increasingly individualized and uncertain world. The more other reference points have slipped away, the more people direct their desires to give life meaning and security, towards the people they love (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). It is claimed that marriage and the creation of a family acts as a much-needed source of meaning for the individual lives of men and women.

There are many sociological interpretations of 'individualization'. For the purposes of this research, the definitions posited by Beck and Giddens are assumed because these social theorists have written most comprehensively and extensively on the subject, particularly in the realm of intimate relationships. The theoretical concept of individualization in the era of late modernity has been championed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Giddens (1991) and even Bauman (2002, 2003), amongst many others, as a fundamental way of explaining increased diversity in people's life trajectories, including intimate relationships. For Giddens (1991) individualization is a result of changes in the structure of the private sphere. As a process it serves to force individuals into making their own personal decisions concerning intimate relationships, particularly marriage and children. Identity in intimate relationships has gone from a 'given' to a 'task' (Bauman, 2002). However, most theoretical assertions about the

processes of individualization have lacked empirical support. This thesis examines various interview data against the key theoretical claims of reflexive modernity.

According to Beck and Beck Gernsheim (1995) individuals increasingly must fill in the 'blank' of love, in the construction of self-biographies. This concurs with Giddens' (1991) assertion that structural change in the private sphere pushes individuals into a position where they must *choose* preferences for relationships, marriage and children. For Beck-Gernsheim (2002), individualization results in a striving for security.

This striving for secuity is relevant to the question of why women continue to subscribe to marital discourses on two levels. Firstly, at a state level, the personal demand for an increased sense of security is argued to increase pressure on institutions in that they are expected to protect the individual through the provision of support and services. This is evident to some extent in the data in this study, where participants perceive marriage as a symbolically *familiar* traditional institution. Secondly, on a micro-sociological level, acknowledging that the state cannot feasibly protect the individual from all risk or questions or doubts, people become drawn to the esoteric, in search of reassurance and security; often in the form of magic or myth (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). As discussed in depth in Chapter Eight, discourses of destiny and some level of magical fate are inextricably linked to romance in the accounts of some young women in this study. Further, marriage is constructed by many participants as the inevitable consequence of these esoteric discourses of 'destined' love.

Individualization entails the disintegration of previously existing social forms, while at the same time each individual has new demands and constraints imposed upon them. According to the individualization thesis, people increasingly are required to design their own set (or sets) of rules, conditions and regulations, building their own 'do-it-yourself biography' (Hitzler, 1988). As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996) assert, that in order to attain social advantages, each individual must now *do* something, rather than just being born into a stringent preconditioned position or role. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim note the risk inherent in this 'do-it-yourself biography', and emphasises that under individualization, each person essentially has no choice but to make their own choices. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001:4) adapt Jean-Paul Sartre's phrase to suggest that 'people are condemned to individualization', where every last detail of life must be decided by the individual. Decision-making, according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996), has now become firmly aimed at the individual, as an individual, which correspondingly punishes traditional lifestyles and behaviours. The process of individualization demands action on the part of each individual.

Beck argues that in an age of reflexive modernity, or second modernity, individuals experience increased opportunity, but also increased risk, where freedom from previous or traditional social constraints results in increased uncertainty. This societal risk leads to a striving for security and stability in terms of identity. People are forced to put themselves at the centre of their plans and reflexively construct their social biographies. The choice to marry (or indeed the ability to find a husband) might now appear to be a reflection on a woman's personal qualities and identity, rather than structurally

reflecting established systems of meaning, such as religious beliefs, family or class background, property or occupational credentials. Thus, a single (or unmarried) status now perhaps highlights the shortcomings of an individual. Single status in females might be considered to exist as the consequence of a lack of motivation, agency or attractiveness of a particular woman. The stigma of being and living as a middle aged unmarried woman in late modernity could be perceived and interpreted as the failure of the individual woman, rather than being due to structural causes. This perception was common in the interviewee accounts in this study.

The shortcomings of individualization

One common criticism of the individualization thesis is the lack of engagement with the extensive body of feminist research on marriage and intimate relationships. Although Beck and Beck-Gernsheim acknowledge the feminist movement, and the feminist critique of the family, they construe it as outdated, a thing of the past. Individual decision-making around marriage is constructed as separate from the social circumstances of gendered power relations. Furthermore, while the concept of individualization is popular for examining intimate relationships, as a social theory of the subject it tends to overlook the classical sociological interest in analysing the relationship between agency and structure. Despite Giddens' earlier attempt to reconcile the structure/agency dichotomy with his concept of 'structuration' (1984), theorising individualization remains focused firmly on the agent.

This overlooking of the relationship between agency and social structure, and the neglect of the gendered context, tends to embed existing social structures as natural, and implies the (apparently ungendered) individual subject as entirely free to choose (Jamieson, 1999); a tenet that contradicts much important feminist work on the structure of gendered power relations. Individualization as a process seems overgeneralised, although it is heavily applied in contemporary sociological research. Yet, aside from Adkins (2002, 2003) there have been few feminist critiques of the use of the theses of reflexive modernization and individualization.

Morgan (1996), amongst many others, argues that the impact of structural changes on individuals' relationships should be matters for empirical research. Yet neither Beck nor Giddens supports their theorising with empirical evidence. As Brannen and Nilsen (2005) note, there are pitfalls in the common application of individualization as a general theory to the study of specific contexts. They stress the distinction between the 'sweeping generalisations' inherent in the individualization thesis for explaining reflexive late modern living, and the particularity of contextual empiricism across space and time. This thesis addresses that particularity.

Detraditionalization

One of the strongest theoretical claims about late modern reflexive processes has been that of 'detraditionalization', a concept employed by both Beck and Giddens to explain the process of individualization. Detraditionalization refers to the withering away of

traditional forms of culture and social life in late modernity. According to Heelas (1996:2), detraditionalization 'entails the decline of the belief in pre-given or natural order of things. Individual subjects are themselves called upon to exercise authority in the face of the disorder and contingency which is thereby generated'. In the domain of intimacy, the decline of tradition and the tendency towards individualization manifests itself in the decline of standardized models for intimate relationships. Castells (1997:136) argues that the impact of the second-wave feminist movement has been to deconstruct natural gender differences, resulting in a challenge to patriarchy, a diversification of family practices and 'a decline of traditional forms of the patriarchal family'.

Giddens (1992, 1991, 1990) focuses on how globalization drives the detraditionalization of intimacy and family, arguing that 'expert systems' now have unprecedented power, and assume the authority once held by traditional institutions to set social standards. In opposition to Foucault's (1978) claim that late modern 'expert systems' of knowledge govern the docile subject through 'regimes of truth', Giddens argues that expert systems of knowledge increase the potential for individual autonomy. For example, the vastly increased influence of mental health and therapeutic systems of public knowledge serve to enable and support the ideology of individual self-fulfilment, where ordinary people can search out personalised cures and therapies from a wide market of choices. The same type of idea of self-fulfilment also becomes the measure of intimate relationships. There is now an abundance of expert 'knowledges' about intimate relationships, which imply self-fulfilment through personalised choice. Consequently, Giddens theorises the

emergence of the ideal of the 'pure relationship' which serves to embody autonomy. As indicated above, Giddens claims the contingent, flexible 'pure relationship' has replaced the traditional romantic love relationship, which symbolized dependency and 'foreverness'.

Giddens (1992) maintains that traditional institutions now hold much less substance or relevance. Religious, family, and societal pressures provide less meaning for marriage than in previous decades, and social attitudes on relationships have become more relaxed with the rise of the welfare state. He claims that the importance of intimacy and voluntary choice embodied in the 'pure relationship' now far outweighs institutional pressures to partner according to contractual commitment.

Cherlin (2004, 2005, 2009) discusses the 'de-institutionalization' of marriage. In terms of intimate relationships, the de-institutionalization and detraditionalization essentially explain the same process. As Cherlin theorises, de-institutionalization entails 'the weakening of social norms that define people's behaviour in a social institution such as marriage' (2004: 848). For the purposes of this research project, de-institutionalization represents an integral element of the detraditionalization thesis.

Cherlin argues that changes in the division of labour in the home, increased childbearing outside of the marital relationship, increased rates of divorce and increased cohabitation have contributed to the de-institutionalization of marriage. These changes, he argues,

have shifted the meanings of marriage and expectations for marital living, and have gone some way to undermine the power of the marital relationship as *the* way of achieving full family status. Cherlin's theorising is very much in line with that of Giddens in regard to the increasing importance of personal growth and satisfaction as the new priority in intimate relationships. He concurs with Giddens' assertion that contemporary intimacy is defined by mutual disclosure, where a partner may opt to change or leave a relationship that is no longer deemed personally rewarding. Cherlin's (2004) description of contemporary intimacy echoes Giddens' 'pure relationship', where the central tenet of the de-institutionalization of marriage is the increased dominance of personal choice.

He notes that marriage trends in America remain more pronounced than other Western countries, and that the very idea of marriage is America represents a fundamental contradiction between religion and law. The formal committed nature of marriage, Cherlin (2009) argues, is juxtaposed with the discourse of individualism, focused on personal growth and emotional satisfaction. Not unlike Giddens' (1992) explanation of the dichotomy between 'romantic' and 'confluent' models of love, Cherlin (2009) theorises marriage (and the associated life-long commitment) as opposed to individualism, which essentially encourages the individual to 'move on' from an unsatisfactory relationship. This struggle is reinforced, according to Cherlin (2009), by the increased polarisation of religion and law in terms of intimate relationships.

Cherlin theorises these changes as stemming from wider trends towards desire for

emotional satisfaction, and individualism, with a central conflict emerging between the

idea of marriage as a life-long relationship and the

> But when social change produces situations outside the reach of
> establishing norms, individuals can no longer rely on shared
> understandings of how to act. Rather, they must negotiate new
> ways of acting, a process that is a potential source of conflict and
> opportunity (Cherlin, 2004: 848).

Cherlin argues that the 'place' of marriage in the life course has shifted, or at least

become more flexible. Where marriage used to be the foundation for adult and family

life, an event that marked the onset of maturity and 'settled' living, Cherlin (2004, 2005)

theorises that in late modernity, marriage increasingly occupies a place later in the life

trajectory, as a 'capstone':

> Marriage is a status one builds up to, often by living with a
> partner beforehand, by attending steady employment or starting a
> career, by putting away some savings, and even by having
> children. Marriage's place in the life course used to come before
> those investments were made, but now if often comes after
> (Cherlin, 2004: 854).

Cherlin uses the idea of marriage as a 'capstone' to illustrate both the trend to delay

marriage until later in life than in previous generations, and the 'personal' or

individualized nature of contemporary marriage. He theorises marriage as the 'result' of

personal efforts, hard work on the part of the individual, rather than 'something to which

one routinely accesses' (Cherlin, 2004: 854). Cherlin (2004, 2005) notes the difficulties

in explaining the persistence of marriage as an attractive relationship option in light of

de-institutionalization, and suggests that the insights offered by theorists of late

modernity, amongst others, fail to adequately explain the persistence of marriage.

Giddens theorises that with this new focus on intimacy and commitment comes increased uncertainty. Marriage is constructed as only one of many available and appropriate relationship options, yet it simultaneously represents a safe and familiar institution in an increasingly individualised society. In marriage, a long-term life trajectory is established, enabling a stable yet flexible future to be imagined. Marriage provides a public guarantee of identity and intimacy, remaining the most common form of intimate relationship.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim build on Giddens' argument, noting the impact of individualization, which manifests in the decrease of standardised types of intimate relationships, implying the disintegration of the 'normal' biography (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996; 2002). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's 'do-it-yourself' biographies are detraditionalized; as 'biographies are removed from the traditional precepts and certainties, from external control and general moral laws, becoming open and dependent on decision making, and are assigned as a task for each individual' (2002:5). As Heelas (1996:2) notes 'detraditionalization involves a shift of authority: from without to within'.

According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) traditions do not disappear, but instead lose their hold over individuals, and are thus less likely to be taken as given or normative, with traditional social institutions living on as 'zombie categories' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:27). As Beck notes 'to be sure, families are still to be found, but

the nuclear family has become an ever more rare institution' (Beck, 1994:8). However, this is not the case in Australia according to indications in the census data. For example, in 2006 in New South Wales, 78.6 per cent of all families with children under the age of 15 were couple families[1] (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2008b).

Intimate relationships, according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2002) and Giddens (1992), have become focused on personal fulfilment. Intimate relationships thus are initiated (and terminated) according to the ways in which they meet the needs and expectations of the individuals involved. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim subscribe to what Heelas (1996) terms the 'radical' view of detraditionalization. Thompson defines this view as follows:

> With the development of modern societies, tradition gradually declines in significance and eventually ceases to play a meaningful role in the lives of most individuals (1996:28).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996) trace the history of marriage in western societies, and argue that the institution of marriage no longer holds its place as an objective authority, thus limiting an individual's freedom. Instead they claim that marriage as an institution has become irrelevant to most individual's lives. The point here is that Beck and Beck Gernsheim, along with Thompson (1996), Bauman (1996) and Luckmann (1996) emphasise the radical 'break' between traditional and post-traditional living, that has

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[1] Many of these families might be 'blended' families, including children from previous relationships, and not traditional single marriage nuclear families, yet the model of coupled parenting clearly remains desirable.

[2] The necessity of a careful consideration of the 'traditional' in terms of marriage and intimate relationships is illuminated by Coontz's (1992) work, which systematically queries the historical accuracy of the 'traditional family values' that form the basis of much political, legal and religious debate.

[3] GLBTIQ – Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, Intersexed and Queer

[4] A 'marriage premium' is the argued 'extra' wage that married people – particularly men – command. 48

been contemporaneous with the growth of individualism or individualization. However, others such as Heelas (1996) and Luke (1996) argue in favour of a 'coexistence thesis' of detraditionalization. That is, the detraditionalization trend co-exists with a trend toward re-traditionalization, signalled, for example, by the extraordinary popularity of church weddings during the past decade. In short, both Heelas and Luke theorise that traditions as continuously constructed and reconstructed over time and space rather than withering away altogether. Traditions, or what individuals view as traditions, continue to be of relevance at a micro-level, particularly regarding family ties and rites of passage, such as christenings or 'naming ceremonies', funerals, and weddings, or to the extent that gay and lesbian couples often insist on being formally wed, for example. Traditions, thus, should be regarded as dynamic rather than latent or static 'old ways'.

The shortcomings of detraditionalization

A key critique of the detraditionalization thesis attacks the unproblematised binary distinction between traditional and post-traditional society. For example, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim postulate a radical 'break' between the traditional and the post-traditional intimate relationship. Luke (1996) critiques this view, particularly the ways that, as opposed to the model of the self in post-traditional society as fluid and free, the traditional self is portrayed as static and closed. We may therefore consider the viability of the 'coexistence' thesis of detraditionalization and retraditionalization proposed by Heelas et al (1996). Their theory of 'coexistence' is attractive because it appears too simplistic to treat the 'traditional' and the 'post-traditional' as separate, binary or linear.

Giddens similarly argues for contemporary society being seen as post-traditional, so that tradition no longer holds a place as *the* referent for lifestyle choices and the associated construction of the self.

However, 'traditions', as argued by Adams (2005) and Green (2003) are arguably embodied in everyday activities and social roles, maintained over time and space, and reworked by different and successive groups. It may be preferable to consider processes of detraditionalization, tradition-maintenance and even retraditionalization as not only reflexive but simultaneous; this is discussed with regards to data collected from informants in Chapter Eight. It is proposed in this thesis that reflexive self-identities are, inevitably and unavoidably grounded in traditions and quasi-traditions, with their associated authority. At the same time, this process involves a great deal of re-invention and reshaping of tradition[2].

The paradox of marriage in reflexive modernity

In the contemporary era of reflexive modernity, marriage, and particularly the ways marriage regulates family life, have become paradoxical. While conservative commentators, feminists and champions of the individualization thesis all construct the family as in crisis, we can readily observe an apparently continued relevance of marriage

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[2] The necessity of a careful consideration of the 'traditional' in terms of marriage and intimate relationships is illuminated by Coontz's (1992) work, which systematically queries the historical accuracy of the 'traditional family values' that form the basis of much political, legal and religious debate.

and the family unit according to census statistics in Australia and elsewhere. It may well be that during of the last two decades of rapid change, marriage and the family have been culturally positioned as 'safe' social and economic refuges from a world characterised by risk. In 1990, Bauman suggested that increasing social change and uncertainty might explain the continued centrality of the family (based on a marital relationship) in people's ideal lives. The above paradox has come to define reflexive modernity, and thus debates continue regarding the usefulness of the family unit as a conceptual analytical category (Silva and Smart, 1999).

Conclusion

For this thesis, the relevant theorising of Beck (1992, 1994), Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 1996, 2001) and Giddens (1992) seem most appropriate, in that they offer some challenging conceptual ideas and frameworks that can be evaluated in regard to explaining and describing why contemporary young women might view marriage as desirable. The notion that the desire to marry is inextricably linked to a legitimate and stable identity in an increasingly individualised society is worthy of pursuing in empirical research. Giddens' (1992) suggestion that marriage contributes to the stability of the self, to some level of ontological security for the individual, is noted as significant. This project shares Giddens' (1992) view that marriage helps to solidify a relationship, and that the declaration and process of becoming married affects the internal dynamics of the relationship. In other words, marriage is used to help construct a stable and legitimising relationship. However, to the extent that the individualization

thesis is founded on the premise of detraditionalization, this claim, which comes from both Beck and Giddens, will be challenged. There is thus potential for theoretical innovation in this field of study that this thesis hopes to address.

In summary, post-2000 theorising on marriage varies between those writers and researchers who reference feminist critiques of the family and those that reference the individualization and detraditionalization theses. Studies of both kinds are discussed in the following chapter, which reviews the relevant literature. For the most part, both theoretical standpoints imply a consequential abandonment of marriage. The feminist logic is that, if marriage is oppressive for women, then women inevitably will distance themselves from such sites of oppression. Similarly, if marriage is constructed as a 'traditional' institution, one on which increasingly less emphasis is placed as people make sense of their late modern social worlds, it would also be assumed that marital relationships would become irrelevant. Yet the vast majority of couples still marry, and most young women still aspire to marry (WHA, 2003, 2006; ABS, 2008a). This thesis appraises young women's attitudes towards marriage using data that highlights the continuing desire for marriage.

Large numbers of women still choose to marry, prompting Adele Horin (1996) to declare in the Sydney Morning Herald that this fact alone is enough to suggest that the role of the wife has become more desirable, and 'less dreary'. It further implies that marriage has undergone changes in how it is socially constructed as a relationship and institution. The thesis evaluates the veracity of the individualization thesis by examining

data from interviews and focus group discussions about relationships and marriage with 75 educated middle class women aged from 18 to 35, as a cohort to which the detraditionalization trend should theoretically apply.

The dominance of the individualization and detraditionalization theses in contemporary social theory highlights the need for explorations of Beck's (1992) claim for 'epochal changes' in intimate relationships. However, as even Beck himself concedes, these changes (beneficial as they are for women) may exist more in theory than in practice. As the new century advances, there is a need for more empirical work on intimacy, as well as the maintenance of a feminist line of enquiry into the gendered experiences of women in intimate relationships in reflexive modernity. Both Giddens (1992) and Beck (1992, 1994) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 1996, 2001) introduce important and useful concepts and ideas to explain the new forms of intimate relationships. However, those authors have not carried out empirical work on the topic of their theorising. Further, they make little attempt to address the large body of feminist theoretical and empirical work on marriage and the family. This project is designed to consider their innovative ideas about intimate relationships, which while acknowledging feminist theory, seeks to generate some new theoretical propositions based on empirical research.

The following chapter examines the current literature – studies and specific scholarly works – on marriage and intimate relationships. The literature is sourced from the Family Values movement, from feminist standpoints, and from empirical studies of the processes of individualization and detraditionalization.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

Existing Empirical Research on Western Marital Relationships

Introduction

This review of the scholarly literature that is relevant to the topic of this thesis focuses on existing empirical studies on western marriage. It looks at the methodologies employed, with reference to the theoretical and conceptual paradigms used. A brief account of statistics on the family in an Australian context is offered, leading to an examination of why marriage in contemporary Australia warrants investigation. There are various themes in the existing literature relevant to interpreting the data in this thesis. The impact of marriage on women's lives, the question of whether marriage serves as a positive or negative lifestyle for women, and the mental and physical well being of women in marriage (actual or expected) are all discussed below.

Literature from the Family Values movement, in support of marriage as the base relationship for the family, is discussed. Work from feminist authors is also an important focus of discussion, since, in a range of ways, they view marriage as perpetuating the

subordination of women. A critique of the existing literature is then presented. Finally, the theoretical debate surrounding how marriage and the family should be researched is examined, including concepts of marriage as an institution, social force and private relationship. This debate includes analyses of the concepts of individualization and detraditionalization that are championed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, and Giddens.

Marriage in Australia

There is a great deal of academic and popular literature documenting the changing social and economic circumstances of Australian families and relationships, especially young people's changing attitudes towards relationships, family formation and reproduction. The Howard Government launched the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy in 2000. The policy, aimed at strengthening marriage and family relations, represents the dominant view that, since married couples are highly likely to have children, increased marriage rates are acknowledged as the best strategy for increasing fertility rates (Birrell et al, 2004). Moreover, there was a strong legislative push to maintain the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (Marriage Act 1961, Commonwealth, in Birrell et al, 2004), although this view is highly contested by groups GLBTIQ[3] in contemporary Australia. The recently elected Rudd Government has continued to support the ideology of marriage as taking place exclusively between a man and a woman, and the normative nature of marriage as the base for the ideal working family

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[3] GLBTIQ – Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, Intersexed and Queer

has been maintained.

Yet during the last thirty years, in Australia 'there have been important changes in the way in which men and women form couple relationships' (De Vaus et al, 2003b:15). It is thus important to analyse and document marital experiences, particularly through the narratives of young people in contemporary society (Parker, 2000). The literature on marital relations in Australia is diverse and fragmented. Much of the relevant literature concentrates on explaining and describing the changing trends of marriage rates, divorce levels, and the increasing numbers of de facto relationships. The demographic literature documents many important factors that are held responsible for the changing trends of marriage in Australia (for example, Birrell et al, 2004; De Vaus et al, 2003a/2003b; Pocock, 2003). Many of these issues obviously relate to wider social, economic and demographic changes and transformations, which diminish the 'need' for young people to marry early, if at all. An important change has been women's increased participation in the labour market in the context of the achievement of more social and economic equity. This facilitates greater levels of stability and independence, thus arguably negating some of the 'need' to marry that existed amongst previous generations (Jackson, 1997). Increased secularism is also cited as a factor that decreases the need for marriage (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001). An economic justification for marrying later in life is the fact that young people in contemporary Australian society achieve financial stability and independence from their parents later in life, remaining at home for longer (Flatau et al, 2007; Rosh White, 2002). This early financial instability

has made marriage a less viable early option, and therefore less attractive for younger women.

The median age at the time of first marriage, although declining throughout the first half of the twentieth century, steadily increased during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and has continued to do so since 2000. In 2007 the mean age at time of first marriage was 30 years for males and 27 for females (ABS, 2008a). Marriages are also increasingly preceded by cohabitation (De Vaus et al, 2003a, statistics derived from HILDA, 1991/ABS, 1996). More Australians are marrying later in life, or are living in de facto relationships (De Vaus et al, 2003a). Yet despite these changes, and the fact that conjugal diversity has increased (Brook, 2002) the crude marriage rate in NSW over the last ten years has remained more or less steady:

Table: 3.1 Crude marriage rate for New South Wales (per 1,000) 1997-2006

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Crude marriage rate (per 1,000 population)	5.8	6.2	6.4	6.1	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.6	5.3	5.6

Source: ABS (2008b) cat. no. 4102.0 - Australian Social Trends NSW Summary, 1997-2006

Marriage evidently retains a highly valued status (Smock, 2004). According to Women's Health Australia (2006), the vast majority of contemporary young women desire to marry. Marriage clearly remains important for young Australian women.

The Family Values movement and the advantages of marriage for women

There is a considerable body of relevant literature from the Family Values movement both in Australia and overseas. This literature argues that marriage for young women is advantageous. Empirical and theoretical work from the Family Values movement is based on the idea that the most stable living unit of a family is established through heterosexual marital union. It is argued that increasing cohabitation, falling fertility rates, and particularly increases in divorce, 'prove' that marriage is moving in a morally negative direction (Morgan, 2000; Dennis and Erdos, 1993; Morgan, 1995). The use of descriptive statistics to indicate trends is most common in empirical studies from scholars who advocate for the family and the pairing of a male and a female parent as the most successful family unit (McIntyre, 2001; Morgan, 2000). For example, Waite (1995) suggests that married people have better health, finances, more sex, and less frequency of substance abuse amongst other factors, compared to those never married, or the divorced.

The financial stability that marriage can potentially bring to a woman's life is well documented, as is the potential for emotional security. Morgan (2000), in her publication for the London Institute for the Study of Civil Society, includes a comprehensive discussion of the benefits of marriage for women, in the context of comparisons with cohabitation. Morgan writes from the perspective that marriage is undoubtedly the most stable form of partnered relationship, especially for the raising of the next generation, and consistently undermines the 'quality' of cohabitation as a mature relationship or lifestyle choice. Morgan (2000) typifies the view that the decrease in marriage, and increase in cohabitation represents an attack on the family, attaching great importance to marriage as an institution. She claims that many feminists, as well as governments and media have created myths about marriage and cohabitation, and she argues against the idea that cohabitation can exist as an alternative and equally 'stable' form of relationship to marriage.

In her book 'Marriage Lite' (2000), Morgan claims that women who cohabit and choose not to marry are: More likely to suffer from more stress; more likely to be depressed; more likely to be unfaithful to their partners; and more likely to have children who are less likely to do well at school. She argues that when people live together without marrying the relationship quality is significantly lower. Furthermore, pre-marital cohabitation apparently increases the risk of divorce. She draws upon quantitative statistics from a range of national and regional surveys from recent decades to support her claims, attempting to prove that marriage is both undervalued, and misunderstood in

contemporary western society. This introduces an interesting concept regarding the definition of marriage, and its meanings. Morgan views marriage as much more than a public and legal declaration of private commitment, arguing that marriage is 'a social institution whose successes or failures have far reaching effects on the whole of society' (2000: 87). Morgan views marriage as a social good, an institution that should be preserved for the benefit of society.

There is much research that suggests marriage can be a strategic life advantage for young women, both materially and economically. Breusch and Gray's (2004) study on the impact of marriage upon wage differentials and marriage 'premiums'[4] of men and women, provides examples of advantages in marriage for women. The authors in this case show that marriage premiums do exist for both men and women. There are two main points of interest in this case. Firstly, the method of research behind the findings should be considered; it is not valid to simply argue from the figures that married women are economically better off without attempting to find out why this might be so. The authors claim that a married man's productivity at work is increased as a result of the traditional division of labour between husband and wife. The husband is freed from the majority of household labour, thus making it possible for him to specialise in his work, work more productively, and sometimes take on more hours. Even with an arguable decrease in the gendered specialisation of household tasks, where gendered divisions of labour matter less, the findings maintain a premium for married men and

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[4] A 'marriage premium' is the argued 'extra' wage that married people – particularly men – command.

women. The study concludes that the wife benefits from this scenario by gaining access to her husband's increased income.

This example demonstrates the importance of being aware of the subjective nature of identifying 'benefits' for women in marriage from apparent statistical correlations. It is dangerous to presume that marriage is 'better' because it apparently entails a higher marital income, while overlooking the gender and power relations within everyday married relationships. A second point worthy of mention in this particular case study is the fact that marriage and cohabitation were viewed as being the same. Breusch and Gray assert that the marriage premiums for cohabiters or married men and women are both favourable. There is no separation of marriage and cohabitation as relationship forms here, and the data points to economic benefits for people living together, irrespective of supposed lifestyle choice. So while living with a partner – married or not – seems to increase marriage premiums, it is the marital relationship that has become the focus of the findings. The example illustrates that more distinction between married and cohabiting couples must be made before 'marriage' – as such – can be professed to signal economic benefits for women.

Meanings of the institution of marriage

It is important to investigate the meanings that young women ascribe to marriage. One of the few empirical studies to do this was conducted by The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) (Parker, 2000). This study categorises the reasons that participants gave for entering into marriage, or avoiding it. The Institute stresses that theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpin all the research undertaken in its name. However, in this case study AIFS researchers failed to include, in published articles, any detailed description of methodologies or theories used. A further point is the mandate that the AIFS holds on marriage. Marriage is treated very much as a valuable institution, and that interpretive perspective is clearly supported throughout all Institute research documents. 'Research which aims to strengthen and support marriage as an institution will always be central to the Institute's work' (AIFS, 2005).

Parker's (2000) AIFS supported Marital Perspectives Study included qualitative data on the meanings of marriage for couples in long-term marital or de facto relationships. We may note Parker's standpoint in support of marriage as an institution and as the most appropriate way of maintaining family life. She documents the features of successful marriage, according to the narratives of participants, citing emotional stability, companionship and commitment as the strongest factors. She further explains the presence of the symbolism, social context and place of marriage in the lifetimes of the participants. She theorises marriage as natural, celebrated, and the 'normal thing to do'. Parker's research does include a wide literature review, and is not necessarily 'pro'

marriage, yet remains an example of empirical work conducted under a mandate in support of marriage as an institution.

The shortcomings of Family Values research

Results from empirical data analysis that show marriage is simply 'better' for women in specific areas such as finance or health, should not be taken at face value. It is widely agreed (Bernard, 1982; Breusch and Gray, 2004; Waite, 1995) that the Family Values movement relies on studies that impute causality, to support their claims that marriage and the nuclear family is 'best'. As Waite (1995) acknowledges, the reasons for marriage being advantageous for women are highly contested. Marriage almost certainly cannot be solely credited with 'causing' these advantages for women, as people who enjoy better health, finances and stability are statistically more likely to marry in any case. Further, as many feminist authors argue, these 'benefits' for women, can also entail significant disadvantages, such as a lack of autonomy or career choice. Some research indicates that unmarried people are lonelier than those cohabiting or in marital relationships (Morgan, 2000). But is this because of the benefits of marriage, or because people who marry are less lonely and more sociable, thus more likely to marry in the first place? Clearly this problem of interpretation is difficult to resolve, however it serves to demonstrate the difficulties involved with assessing the validity of empirical data claims in reference to relationships.

The Family Values literature tends to fuel the moral panic that has surrounded the transformation of the family in Australian society. McIntyre (2001) for example, argues that the traditional gender-role differentiated family is the most effective way to bring up a new generation. He maintains that people have not really begun to realise the urgency of supporting the traditional family, as the most cost-effective way of bringing up the next generation of citizens. He draws upon a range of statistics from 'US official departmental figures', to demonstrate that a considerable proportion of youth suicides and runaways come from fatherless families. His research lacks methodological rigour and, by his own admission, exists to reinvest importance in the 'normal and natural' nuclear family in America. It is important to acknowledge the exaggeration of the moral panic around family and partnering patterns. Clearly significant changes are taking place, however a great amount of continuity also remains. The vast majority of people in Australia form a relationship at some stage in their lives, and marriage continues to be by far the most common form of adult partnership. The demands of the GLBTIQ community to have their partnerships recognised as 'marriages' is testament to the appeal of marriage as an institution associated with well-being.

The feminist movement and the disadvantages of marriage for women

Feminist authors argue that the 'marriage premium' primarily benefits men, and is gained through the oppression of women. In feminist work the material benefits of marriage as opposed to de facto or cohabiting relationships is highly contested. Research

suggesting that it is in women's material (economic) interests to marry has been questioned. Schwartz and Rutter (1998) in their research into sex within marital relationships compared to sex for cohabiting couples, singles and same sex couples, concluded that men benefit from marriage in sexual terms to a greater extent than women. They argue that marriage supports the sexual double standard. They note that amongst the married couples they studied, marriage served to reinforce traditional gendered norms and conventions for sex. The authors concluded that everyday actions are reinforced by the surrounding social structure, and that this structure tends to sustain marriage as the most gendered relationship in terms of sex, as well as for other everyday tasks such as paid work and domestic duties. Their findings suggest that, institutionally and legally, marriage remains a sexual contract (Pateman, 1988) representative of women's oppression.

From his qualitative Melbourne Marriage Survey of wives and husbands, Dempsey (2001) reports that women indicated a much greater dissatisfaction with their marital relationship than did men; in terms of fairness in the divisions of housework, childcare, and opportunities for leisure. The married women in his sample showed distinct awareness of marital inequities, and expressed considerable desire for change. This study, among others (for example, Mansfield and Collard, 1998; Pocock, 2003), demonstrates a higher level and frequency of women's dissatisfaction with marriage compared to men.

There has been much research regarding the distribution of domestic tasks in the home, particularly unpaid labour, suggesting that women in marital relationships take on a greater share of unpaid domestic responsibility than those in other forms of relationship. Pocock's (2003) study on women's home and working lives, and Baxter's (2001, 2005) analyses of household labour in marriage, stress the impact of the distribution of household work on marital relationships, noting that what happens in the house, although apparently trivial, can be critical in a marriage. Pocock (2003) suggests that, as wives on average do twice as much work at home than their husbands, household management is a significant issue for most women. Many empirical studies have concluded that non-marital relationships are more egalitarian in terms of domestic duties (Shelton and John, 1993; South and Sptize, 1994; MacMahon, 1999, Dempsey, 2001). Baxter (2001) argues that this is due to the fact that housework is not just about doing household tasks, but about the symbolic enactment of gender, a process of living as a 'wife', obviously most common within marriage.

Feminist authors have attempted to draw attention to marriage as not simply an agreement between a husband and wife, but a three sided arrangement including the influence and power of the state, since the state continues to legally define what a marriage is. However, the feminist critique of marriage has had little effect on improving the institution of marriage for women in terms of gender equality; although issues such as women escaping from domestic violence, women's economic independence, and male input into childrearing have all changed to varying extents. In fact, rising divorce rates and marital breakdown may have served to strengthen the institution of marriage as

an ideal. A paradox arguably exists in that rising divorce rates mean that the institution of marriage has more meaning than ever. Increasingly aware of the dangers and likelihood of marital breakdown, women are considering marriage more carefully, and attaching more importance to the sanctity of the institution (Pocock, 2003).

What the feminist movement has done, according to Dench (1996), is breed cynicism and despair about marriage as an institution. Dench highlights persisting gender inequalities, and argues that an approach that attempts to promote identical attitudes and motivations within marital relationships has been much less effective than expected. A more effective tactic, he suggests, is to update and refine conventional sexual relations. Yet Schwartz and Rutter (1998:231) note the difficulties of constructing marriage in new and transformed ways: 'Even when individuals seek to experience marriage as something other than a social institution, the rest of the world still insists on responding to married people in the conventional manner'. These conventions include the assumption that a wife will adopt her husband's name, and the culturally powerful symbolism of the bride (Driscoll, 2002). The exception to conventions represented by VanEvery's (1995) study is notable. VanEvery documents her study of women in Britain who actively attempt in their everyday lives to counter the dominance of patriarchal norms. Her research interest was in exploring how women have translated the feminist critique of the family into practice, and her study documents some successful examples, although very limited in scope. The ways in which the young women in my study imagine their married lives is of particular interest in relation to VanEvery's study because so few imagined married life beyond traditional conventions.

Why do women continue to choose marriage?

If we accept the feminist argument that marital relationships are oppressing women, why are women still actively pursuing marriage? Bittman and Pixley (1997) pose the rhetorical question 'who would want marriage (or cohabitation) if it is only about male sexual access, or even mutual access, and acrimonious disputes over male demands for domestic servicing?' (1997: 234). Obviously no woman would desire such a case. However, this questioning raises an important topic for discussion. The feminist critique of marriage and the family seems to have been largely ineffective, because marriage seems to remain as popular as ever. Obviously there is something in the representation and meanings of marriage according to young women that requires scrutiny. We need to know more about what they expect and aspire to in marriage. The contemporary realities of marriage and cohabitation clearly do not conform to either the Family Values or feminist typologies present in most empirical work to date. There are many ideas and theories offered in the existing scholarly literature that attempt to explain why people marry, and what marriage stands for on both a macro- and micro-sociological level. For example, Burns (1989) suggests that there are various categories of reasons why Australian women want to marry, including: Security; identity; personality support; having children; preferential attachment; normative pressure; status; and romanticism, amongst many other reasons. These factors will be considered briefly below, then considered relative to the analysis of data in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

Marriage as entry into adulthood

Marriage has been traditionally acknowledged as representative of a person's entry into adulthood. Nadelson and Notman (1981) depict marriage as the transition into adulthood from the original family. This factor is questionable in contemporary society, considering the many relationship, career and lifestyle options available to young women. Marriage appears to no longer be the 'master event' that allows or determines sexual activity or childbearing (Aronson, 2008; Coontz, 2005). Furstenberg et al (2004) stress that many adults in late modernity do not associate marriage with achieving adult status. Aronson (2008) and Edin and Kefalas (2005) assert that feminism has initiated a redefinition of marriage as considerably less necessary than in previous generations. Aronson's (2008) longitudinal study of American students highlighted other indicators of adult status, such as financial independence and becoming a parent, far outweighing the significance of marriage: 'the women in this study emphasized the importance of establishing their own identities, regardless of relationship status' (2008: 74).

Mansfield and Collard (1988) found that part of the attraction of marriage as a transition to adulthood was the opportunity to limit choice and make a commitment, not just to a partner but to a way of living, through 'settling down' in a stable family life. The ideas and meanings of 'settling down', however, appear to have become less attractive for women as an early option. This is evident in the ABS statistics (2008a, 2008b) that show that Australian women are postponing marriage until later in their adult lives. This perhaps indicates a reluctance to 'settle down', or perhaps not. Some feminist authors

suggest that slightly declining marriage rates may be a result of the recognition amongst young women and men that marrying is synonymous with 'settling down' and a loss of personal freedom or personal autonomy. Chandler (1991), Jackson (1997) and VanEvery (1995) have examined the idea that 'togetherness' and 'unity' are central features of modern marriage, however rarely they are achieved in practice. The attractiveness (or lack thereof) of marriage linked to 'settling down' will be discussed at length in Chapter Six.

Marriage and cohabitation

A comparison between marriage and cohabitation is commonly found within empirical marriage research, particularly in studies supporting marriage. Yet many couples experience both. 'Indirect' marriages, those marriages preceded by cohabitation, have become normative (De Vaus, 2004). It seems unsurprising that marriage is assessed positively in relation to cohabitation in terms of success rates of relationship survival, long-term well-being and child-bearing; however these comparisons are worthy of scrutiny. As outlined above, most empirical studies on marriage and its meanings occur in the context of a comparison with non-marital unions, despite the fact that the most common pattern in Australia is now for couples to live together for varying periods of time before deciding to marry. Despite this, 'indirect marriages', those that involve pre-marital cohabitation, were claimed in studies during the 1990s to be more prone to divorce and to have a lower survival rate (Axinn and Thornton, 1992, 2000; Berrington

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and Diamond, 1999). This was attributed to the practice of non-marital cohabitation itself, drawing attention to the moral agenda of such studies.

There exists a moral panic that pre-marital cohabitation is detrimental to marital stability, despite the equally popular belief that cohabitation as a preparation for marital life 'makes sense' (Bracher et al, 1993; Lillard et al, 1995; Smock, 2004). This moral panic, based primarily on data on marriage dissolution and cohabitation rates, postulates that the frequency of divorce for couples who live together prior to marrying is greater than that for couples who did not cohabit. While there is some evidence for this trend in America (Amato et al, 2007), these conclusions have been challenged by De Vaus et al (2004), Hewitt et al (2005) and Lillard et al (1995), who have used empirical data to show that pre-marital cohabitation has little effect on the chances of marital survival. Other variables are found to be relevant, such as those who cohabit having less conventional attitudes towards marriage. Further, Kiernan notes what she terms 'a noticeable difference' between America and Europe in discourse on cohabitation and marriage:

> If I was to put the difference somewhat baldly, it would be that in European countries, the policy and political discussions are less to do with "what is best, cohabitation or marriage?" and more about issues concerning how best to support families, particularly in their endeavours to raise children regardless of the marital status of their parents (Keirnan, 2004: 980).

Kiernan's observation highlights the relevance of legal, political and moral discourse in analyses of cohabitation and marriage. These differences, along with a distinct lack of a standardized definition of cohabitation, make analysis of cohabiting couples *compared*

to married couples problematic.

Debate about the effects of cohabitation on the success and stability of marriage are sure to continue, particularly as cohabitation continues to be commonplace in Australian society. Significantly, cohabitation appears not to mark a rejection of the institution of marriage in Australia. The percentage of those in long-term de facto relationships remains small, and most cohabiting couples will marry at some stage in their relationship. Cohabitation, therefore, really represents an alternative to early marriage. It is a form of 'trial' marriage that constitutes part of the contemporary courtship process. Long-term cohabiting relationships appear to be much the same as marital ones (Brook, 2002), so cohabitation should therefore not be considered as indicating serious resistance to marriage. However, Jamieson et al note that the cohabiting couples they studied in Scotland stressed the committed nature of their relationships. Their empirical research highlights the 'weakening sense of any added value of marriage' (2002: 356). It should be noted, though, that while participants in the study did not necessarily view marriage as 'more', they also emphasised the significance of the differences between marriage and cohabitation. These participants showed an awareness of the social legitimacy of the marital relationship, indicating that perhaps they viewed cohabitation as a 'trial' marriage.

Duncan et al (2005: 384) have used empirical research in Britain to investigate what they term the 'common law marriage myth', the mistaken assumption that a cohabiting

couple achieves the same rights as their married counterparts by living together for a period of time. They found that although this belief was widespread across age and social class groups, the main reason offered for desire to get married was a public declaration of commitment. Further, an important reason for avoiding marriage cited by their respondents (a minority) was disillusion with the institution. Thus, Duncan et al provide evidence for both cohabitation as 'before' marriage, and cohabitation as an alternative to marriage. Importantly, they dismiss both an ignorance of the law, and a lack of commitment, as explanations for increasing cohabitation in Britain.

Another problem with existing studies is the common practice of grouping marriage and cohabitation as one single category. If marriage is to be researched in terms of its meaning and symbolic and practical value, it must be viewed as separate from other forms of partnered relationship. The evidence should be noted, however, that de facto and cohabiting relationships do appear to hold many of the same gender inequalities and power relations of marital relations. Women encounter much the same disadvantage in 'marriage like' relationships, which raises the question of whether de facto relationships should be considered as a form of resistance to marriage or as greatly similar (Brook, 2002).

Marriage and children

Considerable work has focused on the links between marriage and child-bearing or rearing, the role of the presence of children in determining divorce, and the impacts of marriage and divorce on children's well being. Jamieson et al noted in their study of partnership plans for young Scottish men and women the continued support for the notion that marriage is 'better' for children (2002: 367). Sayer and Bianchi (2000) link child-bearing within marital relationships with increased commitment, while others (see Ono, 1998; Manting, 1994; Waite and Lillard, 1991) assert that the presence of children lessens the likelihood of divorce. Many authors have highlighted the continued cultural relevance of sole maternal responsibility for children following relationship dissolution (Hancock, 2002; Cherlin, 1992; Kelly, 2006; Lamb, 2004; Pleck and Masciadralli, 2004).

These powerful discourses of good mothering, linked with discourses of childhood stability in married family units, underline a potential motivation for the continuing desire of many young women to marry. In short, a woman should desire to be married, since marriage facilitates a successful and secure environment for child-rearing. This popular discourse is acknowledged by the low income women in Edin and Kefalas' (2005) study. While these women put motherhood before marriage, and offer a variety of meanings for marriage, they are well aware of discourses of good mothering.

Marriage as risk avoidance

Considerable attention has been paid to what can be broadly described as 'well being' inside and outside marital relationships, as has been shown above. A key theme that emerged in research for this thesis is how marriage is perceived by participants to guarantee security and well being, and as a measure of avoiding risk or ontological insecurity, particularly where marriage is linked to avoiding loneliness in later life. Peters and Liefbroer (1997) used empirical research from The Netherlands to assert that loneliness is decreased by having a partner, while Essex and Nam (1987) from the basis of their Wisconsin, US survey data, argue that 'the spinster' – the middle to old aged unmarried woman – is not as prevalent in demographic terms as popular discourse would suggest. However, empirical work by Brody (1990), Pinquart (2003) and Koropeckyj-Cox (1998) suggest that it is not marriage in itself which decreases loneliness in old age, but the presence of children. The idea that marriage and children are inextricably linked will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

Empirical work on marriage and individualization and detraditionalization

Undoubtedly, in keeping with similar developments in other western countries, the progress of individualization in Australian society has contributed to marriage being no longer considered the only acceptable serious relationship option. But as a socially-

rewarded arrangement, marriage creates order, stability and consistency for the individual, a safe position from which to make mature life choices, and to make sense of surroundings and life. With the perception of strengthened relationship commitment gained through marriage, stability in everyday life is perceived as more likely, combined with the decreased anxiety of no longer having to find a partner. Marriage may no longer be the core experience of women's lives, however, for most women it compares favourably with alternative relationship and lifestyle choices in terms of comfort, security, and companionship (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001).

The familiarity of marriage, through continuous exposure to marital relationships, as opposed to the alternatives, is cited as a significant justification for the decision to marry. In order to accurately show how young women negotiate marital regulations and norms, we must theorise these women as agents who produce a wide variety of behaviours and intentions based upon a range of experiences. Thus topics for discussion during interviews in this study were focused upon personal narratives, where participants were encouraged to discuss their personal experiences and opinions.

Holmes (2004), in her study of distance relationships, and Jamieson (1999) found evidence of processes of individualization and detraditionalization in the accounts of some women, particularly young women without responsibilities. Yet the dominance of discourses that position 'good mothering' as central to a woman's identity were equally strong. The latter finding undermines the assertions by Beck and Giddens that women

are free agents within the individualizing discourses of late modernity. Further, Jamieson has offered a thorough critique of Giddens' 'pure relationship', particularly highlighting the continuation of romantic discourses in women's aspirations for marriage and family.

The findings from in-depth interviews with transnational families in Britain (Smart and Shipman, 2004) and focus groups with young people in Norway and Britain (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005) are further notable examples that attest to the integration of the individualization and detraditionalization theses when considering attitudes towards marriage and family ideals. Both of these studies critique the 'grand theoretical' bent of individualization and detraditionalization, highlighting much more complex realities in contemporary couple relationships than those implied by Beck and Giddens. Significantly, they emphasise the 'risks' involved with the popular discourse of the young woman as an individual who can (and should) 'have' or 'do it all' (Harris, 2004). Heard (2008) provides an Australian context by analysing partnering patterns in 2006 Census data. She offers evidence to suggest that marriage trends, particularly those might which indicate processes of de-institutionalization and detraditionalization, are tempered by other variables. Her findings suggest that socio-economic indicators such as educational attainment and income are present, 'complicating the broad-brush picture of marriage "receding everywhere"' (Heard, 2008: 33). Sweeney (2002) offers further insight in her quantitative longitudinal study in America. Her findings highlight the relevance of the 'characteristics' of women who marry, particularly in relation to income, and perhaps contradict the broad assertions of the individualization and

detraditionalization theses. Her study suggests that as women's earnings improve (signifying greater independence and education) the likelihood of marrying in fact increased. While women's position in the marriage market might improve as result of improved earnings (Sweeney, 2004), the likelihood that they will enter into a marital union remains high.

Conclusion

The existing scholarly literature on marriage can be crudely categorised into two main positions. While the theoretical 'division' between Family Values and feminism is not a simple one, it serves to expose the ways that empirical studies often apply value and meaning to marriage prior to research. On the one hand there is the Family Values movement, where researchers are in favour of marriage as the core of the successful (nuclear) family. On the other hand there is the feminist movement, aimed at undermining the dominance of the nuclear family, or gaining equality for women in the home. This thesis project for the most part dismisses the Family Values movement as offering an unproductive moral standpoint. The interpretive perspective in this study favours the feminist stance in that the contemporary institution of marriage contributes to the subordination and oppression of women. Feminist empirical work has established that for women in marriage, many disadvantages remain. Therefore the problematic for this thesis lies in assessing the persistence of marriage as a goal for young women, and

investigating why many young women perceive only apparent advantages in marriage.

It is acknowledged however, that within the feminist school of thought, there exists a range of opinions as to what marriage means for women, and how to move forward. This project acknowledges the feminist argument that women's subordination in marriage is linked to wider class and power structures, which disadvantage women. However, as mentioned above, the various feminist critiques of marriage and the family have reached somewhat of a stalemate, in the sense that they fail to contribute productively to explanations about why contemporary young women, who have heard the feminist arguments against marriage, still choose to get married.

The definition of marriage, and the way it is viewed, perceived and interpreted, varies greatly between case studies of the actual phenomenon and relevant theoretical propositions. Marriage, although viewed as a stable and static institution by most (Borneman, 1996), is too often defined for the purposes of a particular political or social strategy. In other words, the meanings of marriage differ, depending on the standpoint of the author. Furthermore, few influential theorists have taken into consideration the definitions and meanings attached to marriage by actual people, especially young men and women. It is vital that the narratives of young women are included in any studies of marriage, because although marriage organises social relationships in various fundamental ways, it is neither regulated nor experienced in any necessarily uniform fashion. The plural nature of contemporary marriage is indicated by Brook (2002). That

study emphasised the necessity of redefining marriage so that it derives from the meaningful practices of people. From that standpoint we can assess why women marry, and what marriage means to young women in contemporary Australian society.

In short, the institution of marriage, despite high divorce rates, continues to exist as the most powerful and widely acknowledged social contract (Ingraham, 1999). Contemporary marriage is many things for many people (Brook, 2002). The everyday experiences of living in a marriage or other long-term relationship appear to provide a wider variety of meanings for women than they did before the feminist critique of the 1970s. This would suggest that marriage needs reconceptualising. The parameters of marriage, just as they have evolved from being synonymous with companionate love to romantic love, now encompass more social and emotional factors, to the extent that marriage's institutional importance has decreased greatly, while social and cultural meanings have proliferated. Nevertheless, marriage remains a key form of social organisation, with its customs and rules interfacing with almost every sphere of social interaction (VanEvery, 1995). The next chapter discusses the methodologies employed for this research project. The remaining chapters of the thesis focus on exploring the meanings of marriage, particularly in terms of its social legitimacy, for young women and analyse marriage as an attractive relationship option for these young women, as well as their aspirations and expectations for married living. This thesis aims to contribute to debates as to why young women continue to marry even though the institutional importance of marriage has decreased greatly and marriage continues to play a role in the oppression and subordination of women in contemporary society.

Chapter Four

Methodologies

Introduction

The research questions for this study are focussed on the meaning(s) of marriage for young women, and why marriage represents an attractive form of intimate relationship. The task is to uncover the ways women position marriage as an intimate relationship in their life trajectories, and how they construct marriage as desirable (or undesirable), ideal (or not ideal), or normative. It is also important to illuminate participants' narratives of their imagined or experienced marital relationship in terms of everyday living. In order to address the research questions outlined in Chapter One, appropriate methodologies have had to be considered. This chapter discusses the methodology of the study, and examines relevant theories on how research should be undertaken. It also gives a detailed description and analysis of the research process employed. The chapter describes the multiple method approach utilized in the study, drawing from feminist epistemologies (Grbich, 2007) and outlines the research aims and questions. A detailed discussion of the research design is included, followed by a review of the sampling strategies, ethical considerations and limitations of the research. Finally, an analysis of reflexivity and the position of the researcher is offered.

Research Design

The research design is an open qualitative enquiry which used a purposive sample of young women aged 18 to 35 years. This age group was chosen to represent women considered to be near the age of first marriage in Australia. The research design reflects both the aims and questions described in Chapter One, and the epistemologies appropriate to the study (Grbich, 2007; Rice and Ezzy, 1999). The trend in the existing literature is to assume marriage as a distinct and static institution (Borneman, 1996), or conversely, to narrowly define marriage prior to empirical research. This trend emphasises the need to redefine marriage according to the testimonies of the participants, in order to develop theories that attempt to explain why young women in the Newcastle and Lower Hunter region choose to marry. It was essential that the descriptive research was both sound and thorough, thus permitting attempts to explain the emerging patterns to be reliable and valid (Bryman, 2001; Neuman, 2003).

A purposive sampling strategy was selected to allow resources to be focused on the chosen subject population. Financial and time constraints prohibited the use of random sampling techniques. Adopting a purposive strategy meant that a particular population, young women in specific relationship situations, could be targeted. Taking a multiple method approach, the three research methods were: Firstly, a survey; secondly, one-to-one semi-structured interviews; and thirdly, focus group discussions. All were conducted by the researcher. These methods were combined to complement each other, noting the strategy of triangulation (Neuman, 2003; Silverman, 2005). As Silverman points out, multiple methods have become a symbol of methodological rigour, particularly in

feminist research, but by no means guarantee 'validity' – this is discussed further below.

The survey established various baseline data for analysis, which illustrated potential themes for further study. The focus groups elicited shared ideas and expectations of marriage. Interviews consisted of broadly themed questions, which invited the interviewees to reflect on their own attitudes to marriage and talk about their personal hopes and expectations for married life. The trends which emerged from these three empirical data sources were related to demographic trends in contemporary marriage, using recent Australian Bureau of Statistics figures and relevant research from the Hunter Valley Research Foundation. Women as individuals were the units of analysis; the demographic characteristics of each participant were noted, such as their age, ethnicity and religious affiliation.

The flexible research design allowed for the discovery of different or new dimensions or concepts as the study proceeded. The study is inductive in the sense that the conclusions and theories generated were based on the observations gathered from the primary data. These methods and the mode of analysis chosen are broadly in line with a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, see also Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Charmaz, 2000). This research employs a constructionist epistemology. Crotty (1998:8-9) suggests that 'meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world'. The project was designed with the acknowledgement that within any social context, people construct meaning in a variety of ways. The project is designed to privilege the views and perceptions of the participants. The constructionist

perspective of the research recognises the role of the researcher in composing the story reported, rather than it simply unfolding before an objective observer (Charmaz, 2000). This constructionist perspective can be used to complement grounded theory methods (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Brannen (2005) points to the various questions a researcher must consider at the initial stage of research design, often not leading to a single method, but to a complex of methods:

> 'Do we want to test a hypothesis and/or generate new hypotheses?' 'Do we want to explore what people think about a particular social phenomenon and how those perceptions link to other perspectives and informant characteristics?' 'Do we want to use one field method to find a particular group and to use a different field method to study a subset of that group?' (Brannen, 2005:176)

It is not a given that the different methods chosen will produce data that will corroborate each other, as is implied by the strategy of triangulation. Morgan (1998, cited in Bryman, 2001) suggests that data from a range of methods may be corroborative, elaborative, complementary or contradictory.

Following Bryman (2001), it is noted here that the value attached to each method by the researcher, as well as the timing of the employment of each method, impacts upon the ways by which qualitative and quantitative data are linked. In the case of this project, the qualitative component was designed to form the principal method, while the preceding quantitative component was implemented to gain insight into general emergent patterns and to derive themes for focus in the subsequent qualitative

interviews. In this sense, the quantitative and qualitative data potentially could be corroborative or contradictory[5]. The qualitative methods implemented in this research are thus not designed to corroborate initial quantitative findings *per se,* rather the quantitative element is designed to contextualise the interview study, particularly through identifying relevant themes to include in the interview schedule, as well as pointing to particular participants relevant for further study.

In essence, the quantitative and qualitative components of the research were designed to address different research questions and problems. The survey was designed to address the research questions of whether and why marriage is desired and desirable, as well as to provide superficial 'pointers' to the meaning(s) of marriage. Further, the survey incorporated questions which would locate marriage within the participant's life trajectory, for example by gaining data on desired age for marriage. The interviews and focus groups were designed to enable more in-depth understandings of the meaning(s) of marriage and marital living for participants, by facilitating discussion based on participants' experiences and aspirations. In line with the empirical research design advocated by Brannen (2005), the qualitative phase is informed by the quantitative phase, where the quantitative data provides helpful contexts for the following qualitative enquiry.

The temporal shift from quantitative to qualitative method followed a conceptual shift,

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[5] The contradictions in attitudinal responses in surveys and interviews are discussed in Chapter Five. For example, the general survey patterns reflected discourses of 'doing' 'good mothering', which contrasted somewhat with more detailed accounts of lived experiences or aspirations.

from addressing the initial research questions exploring the demographics and basic attitudes of participants, to a focus on the much richer and in-depth accounts of participants' meanings and constructions of marriage. This involved probing into interesting or complex survey responses. Thus, the two data sets collected from the surveys, informal interviews and focus group discussions are not analysed with the purpose of being corroborative. In fact, the data analysed proved to be largely complementary, but the development of a research design that would allow (even embrace) contradictory views was important (Neuman, 2003).

The inductive nature of the research warranted a flexible design framework, where participants could voice their ambivalence, or directly contradict themselves. This was evidenced in the differences in responses given in the surveys, as compared to the richer narratives offered during interviews. These differences were highlighted during analysis of the data. Analysis of descriptive statistics from surveys, and content and discourse analysis of interview transcripts, enabled the complexities of contextualised comments and attitudes to be emphasised. Such complexities might have been glossed over or lost during any attempts to establish strict triangulation. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and analysis, beyond attempts to corroborate or prove validity through triangulation, can be used to uncover different types of insight into the topic (Brannen, 2005; Silverman, 2005).

Grounded theory

The positivist versus social constructionist arguments regarding the reliability and validity of various qualitative methods and analysis has been well documented (Bryman, 2001). The continuous and constant evaluation and re-evaluation of methodological practices and techniques is important during a project, as is the developing of an awareness of the researcher's position compared to the participants, and how the researcher's background might affect these practices and results. The use of elements of a grounded theory approach invokes reassessment of methods and analysis at various stages of data collection. This is not only vital for attaching importance to the views of the subject population, but also aids the awareness of reflexivity.

Following Glaser and Strauss (1967), elements of a grounded theory approach were adapted that fitted with the inductive nature of the project. The use of grounded theory methods has been acknowledged, so as to allow the ongoing analysis of new insights from the data itself. The grounded theory approach advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) gives preference to the participants under study, and not to predetermined theories or assumptions. The issue of prior theory, particularly the feminist standpoint of this project is addressed below. The topic of this research is well suited to exploratory investigation, since the primary objective is to uncover the meanings and values young women attach to marriage, as well as the building of new theory to suggest why young women make certain relationship decisions. This rests on the generation of insight and theory from the data collected, rather than the testing of predetermined hypotheses. Thus, adapting a grounded theory approach appeared to be most appropriate.

The research was separated into distinct stages, where the content and focus of the second stage of data collection was determined by the outcomes and analysis of the first set of collected data. The analysis of data followed the strategies and techniques put forward by Glaser and Strauss (1967). As Corbin and Strauss note: 'In grounded theory, the analysis begins as soon as the first bit of data is collected' (1990:6). The grounded theory approach is not based on feminist methodological ideas. However feminist researchers (such as Reissman, 1994) strongly support the notion of respondent oriented direction. The grounded theory approach complements this philosophy, in that the course of the research is predominantly determined by the direction that the views and opinions of the participants' take in terms of content. Thus, the adoption of a grounded theory approach reflects the feminist notion that the direction of research should be determined by the voices of the researched, rather than by the pre-existing assumptions made by the researcher. Further, the methods chosen, and particularly the strategies used within each method, reflected the feedback of the participants as to how they would like their participation to continue. The methodological progression of the research was thus dependent on the continued participation of the women who volunteered.

In line with constructivist grounded theory methodologies, it was important that the project was designed as exploratory, without the influence of preconceived views or hypotheses. In practice, a 'pure' grounded theory approach may well be impossible. A researcher does not exist in a vacuum, removed from any awareness of existing theoretical or empirical work on marriage and the family. In reality, by the time data is collected, Human Research Ethics clearance must have already been obtained from the

governing body in question, which inevitably involves attention to existing literature. A researcher is thus inevitably exposed to various theoretical perspectives related to the research topic. In this case, the adoption of a feminist standpoint towards marriage and the family, informs the research design insofar as the study focuses on women, as well as the chosen methods of data collection.

In this project, following Blumer (1969), 'sensitising concepts' were used when constructing survey questions and potential topics for discussion during interviews. These concepts, referred to by Layder (1998:101) as 'background concepts', are a set of general research interests, important at the beginning of a research project for the development of ideas. This project acknowledges that the generation of new theory or insight from data is part of a continuous process of analysis which combines these new 'from the ground, up' insights with an awareness of existing theoretical work. The employment of existing theories, thus both influences, and is influenced by, the new evidence generated from empirical data collection.

Qualitative feminist research and informal interviewing

The methodological standpoint for this research project is in line with feminist epistemologies. Catherine Riessman's work on feminist methodologies suggests that in formulating a research framework, 'beliefs about the nature of social reality and how we are to know it, shape the method we choose, which questions we ask, and what counts as knowledge' (Reissman, 1994: xii). The central notion of feminist philosophy is that of

the situated knower, which stresses the significance of situated knowledge. This approach can reflect the particular perspectives of the women who participated, and is vital to this research project. A principal feature of the approach is reflexivity; that is the acknowledgement by the researcher that she is a part of the generation of knowledge, intimately involved in the processes of data collection and analysis, nor simply a reporter of information from the outside. Subjectivity is thus inherent in the research, as a valid orientation for good research (Litton Fox and McBride Murray, 2000).

Given the subject matter of the research project, the methodology facilitates an understanding of the impact of gender relations and divisions on social life (Brunskell, 1998). Moreover, the methods chosen here reflect the importance of researching and representing women's experiences. The combination of methods can indicate how women view their own lives, attaching importance to ways of thinking and knowing which have been devalued as so-called 'feminine'. Shaw and Gould (2001) argue that feminist research should benefit women in general, and the researcher should show empathy for those being researched. This study accordingly aims to give greater visibility to the subjective experiences of young women. Qualitative methods are often advocated by feminist scholars, and this emphasis on qualitative data collection is replicated in this study. Further, many other characteristics of feminist approaches to research are also adopted for this project, such as the use of informal interview techniques; these characteristics are described in more detail below. The wide variety of methods used by feminist researchers is acknowledged, and is reflected in the choice of a multiple method approach in this case. The standpoint adopted here notes the political

nature of all social research, as well as the argument that there are multiple forms of valid knowledge.

Incorporating feminist methodologies

Feminist methodology advocates the involvement of the researcher in data collection, in opposition to the aloofness of the objectivist researcher. It is argued that no researcher can undertake research outside of his or her set of values, and that there is no sociological research method in existence that ensures the production of knowledge independent from values (Brunskell, 1998). A range of research techniques are therefore adopted in this project that aim to increase awareness of the positionality of the researcher and participants, and how these relationships affect the data sets collected.

There is not a particular research method that is 'feminist'. Feminism is a perspective, an epistemology and ontology (Stanley, 1990). Feminist perspectives utilise a range of methods that are guided by feminist theory. A 'feminist' research project is not defined by the methods used as such, rather by the epistemological framework within which these chosen methods are located, and the ways by which these methods are employed and deployed. Research based on feminist perspectives focuses on the importance of studying particular contextualised social behaviour, and frequently references and analyses the researcher's position and location within the research process (Reinharz, 1992).

In line with Oakley (1981), value is placed in the subjective experiences of participants; rather than aiming for traditional methodological 'objectivity'. Further, the use of the term 'participant' rather than 'informant' is used to further distance the research from the traditionally 'masculine' paradigm of positivism, with its associated hierarchical interviewer-interviewee power relation.

Although the methods chosen for this research project are not specifically feminist in themselves, the framework of an intensive qualitative study is commonly used by feminist researchers. Further, the techniques and strategies employed in this study reflect feminist methodological and epistemological values. These methods attempt to lessen the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity, as well as between passionate and dispassionate knowledge. The combined methods serve to undermine the traditional positivist research ethic and its stress on linear one-way processes to find 'scientific' or 'objective' 'truth'.

The ideas within the methods chosen reflect the feminist goals of emphasising the contradictions and complexities that researchers constantly come across. Feminist goals include giving greater visibility to the subjective experience of women and increasing the involvement of the respondent in the research process. Thus a preference exists for an unstructured and open-ended format, and for building a trusting social relationship. Further, the approaches taken for data collection draw on the 'feminine' skills of being open, receptive and understanding; tactics often adopted by feminist researchers, but which can be argued to be important characteristics of any competent qualitative

research endeavour (Bryman, 2001). Feminist researchers do not value the objective or detached; they interact and collaborate with the people they study. This characteristic was adopted in the use and format style of the interviews and focus groups.

Qualitative methodology was chosen in order to explore the individual construction of meanings of marriage by young women in a range of relationship statuses. Qualitative methodologies are most useful in uncovering these individual meanings, because they do not overlook context or overgeneralise data based on individual narratives (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research does not aim to be statistically representative, but to provide insights which may be theoretically generalised or productively applied to the analysis of similar or contrasting situations. The purpose is to provide a rich account of the lived experiences and behaviours of the researched (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Qualitative methodologies are useful for constructivist research, because of the interest in uncovering experiences from the standpoint of those living them (Charmaz, 2000). In this research project it was vital to go beyond surface information about women's decision-making in intimate relationships and general attitudes, to analyse the diverse meanings participants ascribed to the marital relationship and the way these women constructed marriage in their life trajectories. The exploratory nature of the project also favoured qualitative methods, as there exists little empirical work on how women position marriage. As indicated earlier, existing work on the role of marriage tends to use either meta-theory (see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Giddens, 1991, 1992) or broad descriptive statistics (for example De Vaus et al, 2003). The qualitative

methodologies employed by researchers such as Brannen and Nilsen (2005) have provided a good epistemological foundation for the specific focus on meanings of marriage in this research project.

Qualitative research is acknowledged to be at times a messy, incoherent and disordered process; yet one that enables the experiences of the participants to be represented in much more depth than quantitative methodologies. This is due to a focus on participant-led conversation, which attaches importance to the concepts and perspectives of the participants, rather than those pre-determined by the researcher. Patterns of participants' behaviours could be ascertained using qualitative methodologies, revealing their meanings of marriage, as well as their intentions and expectations. Interpretations of the understandings of the contextual lived experiences of participants' intimate relationships and their aspirations for future relationships can then be developed. Although this study does not claim to be representative of the attitudes and experiences of all Australian young women, the data collected and presented is I believe, rich in depth and scope. It implies some important discourses of partnering that inform the social practices of the current generation of women approaching the age of marriage.

Sampling

Data collection

The research consisted of three phases of data collection. Procedures for recruitment, consent and for the confidentiality provisions were all approved by the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee[6]. Subsequently, a survey was distributed to young women who volunteered to take part in the research in June and July 2005. As well as closed questions designed to yield quantitative data as outlined above, the survey also contained various open-ended questions. By September 2005, a total of 227 surveys had been returned[7], and participants who had volunteered for interviews were contacted. Once the survey was completed, the second phase consisted of 74 semi-structured interviews and three focus group discussions which took place between October 2005 and February 2006. The fine detail of interview schedules and focus group discussion were developed once the surveys had been analysed. The third phase of data collection, during June 2006, consisted of a second interview with 18 participants, to uncover further in-depth information with more focussed lines of questioning following preliminary analysis of interview and focus group transcripts in phase two.

The project was conducted with Australian residents from Newcastle and surrounding areas. Young women formed the sample, and they came from various socio-economic, ethnic and relationship backgrounds. They provided a rich source of personal histories and experiences. Women between the ages of 18 to 35 years were invited to participate as this age bracket encompassed those at potential first marriage age, particularly those

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[6] Ethics number: H-051-0605, Approved: 15/06/05.
[7] A total of 500 surveys were distributed, resulting in a response rate of 45.4%.

who were in relationships, and planning or thinking about the future of their relationship. The research was designed to be open to both heterosexual and homosexual relationships[8]. The participant groups were selected so as to represent the full age range of young people currently involved in various kinds of committed relationships.

The participant group was split into three age cohorts to aid analysis:

1. 18-22 years

2. 23-28 years

3. 29-35 years

The cut off points for age cohorts were designed to approximate various stages in young women's lives, with the youngest age bracket encompassing the usual age range for concluding secondary to tertiary education. The mid-twenties cohort was understood to signify a time for decision-making in terms of career trajectory, while the older cohort was considered to represent 'appropriate' ages for 'settling down' and child-bearing. Within these age cohorts three further categories were identified:

1. married or engaged women

2. women currently in relationships (cohabiting or not cohabiting with a partner)

3. women not currently in relationships

Phase one – Survey

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[8] Despite this, only heterosexual young women volunteered.

The research design included a self-completed survey[9], which took approximately twenty minutes to complete and included background information such as age, postcode and annual income, as well as more personal details such as relationship status. The survey also included general 'belief' questions on marriage, and invited participants to share their personal views on what marriage means to them. The inclusion of these open questions was intended to facilitate the development and focus of discussion topics for the interviews and focus groups. The anonymous survey was to be returned by mail.

Recruiting the participants – first attempt

The original sampling strategy for the survey consisted of the placement of advertisements in the community newspapers of the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie municipalities. The University of Newcastle Media Unit took an interest in the study, and offered to help with the advertising for participants. A phone interview on the research topic was arranged with the local ABC radio station. This was quickly followed by coverage of the study on the local television news. I was initially reluctant to become involved with this media coverage, as I had reservations about the lack of editorial control I would have, but agreed considering the ease with which my study would be advertised to potential participants.

My reservations were warranted – the study was portrayed in the news stories as being focussed on weddings, and thus within two days of the media coverage, over 150 women (mostly within the desired age cohort and geographical area) had volunteered to

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[9] See Appendix One

participate. All but two of these women were engaged to be married, and were eager to talk about their impending weddings. As the research aim was to provide some level of reasonable distribution of the sample over various relationship statuses, and to uncover the meanings of marriage, rather than the experiences of weddings (an interesting topic in itself), it was decided that in response to this considerable overrepresentation of engaged women who had not received an accurate picture of the research, an alternative sampling strategy would be formulated. Ten of those who volunteered were recruited, while the remainder were contacted to thank them for their interest.

Recruiting the participants – second attempt

I formulated a second sampling strategy focused on advertising the study in public spaces where young women congregate. An advertising flyer was distributed to young women at the University of Newcastle (particularly at the library and the student union outlets), to young women at the local TAFE (technical) colleges, to young female workers at the major Newcastle hospitals and City Council offices, as well as other workplaces, and community and shopping venues where young women gather. The flyer was also attached to an email, along with an information statement, and distributed through the researcher's existing social networks. Existing contacts were asked to forward the information to 18-35 year old women in the region with whom they were friends, to further advertise the study. Distribution was also effected by putting the flyer on notice boards, by placing copies on tables (where permitted) and by handing flyers to female passers-by.

In order to recruit engaged or soon-to-be-engaged women, flyers and posters were distributed through co-operating retail outlets that were relevant to this study, such as bridal shops and florists. Using the local telephone directory and Yellow Pages, a list of all relevant retail outlets in the Newcastle area was compiled. All outlets were contacted and asked to co-operate with the project. Only those outlets that agreed were given surveys to distribute to their customers who fitted the desired sample characteristics. Those interested contacted the author to register their interest in participating. The survey was then sent out or given to those who registered their interest in participation.

The choice of this purposive sampling technique reflected the awareness of the potential low response rate for mail-based questionnaires. The distribution strategy employed ensured anonymity, so as to increase the likelihood of honest responses; this is particularly relevant in this case, as Ruane (2005) acknowledges, people tend to self-report in a favourable light, 'overreporting' good things while 'underreporting' negatives. A potential pitfall of recruitment through mail surveys is the 'distance' or anonymity of the researcher in the process; the 'faceless' researcher. Potential participants might be put off volunteering for the study because of a lack of familiarity with the research project or the researcher, particularly considering the context of the topic, where personal details of 'private' intimate relationships might be discussed. For this reason, employing a 'modified snowballing' technique appeared useful, and proved successful, in that most participants recruited at least one other young woman, while some recruited women from their friendship groups and work colleagues. One participant recruited fourteen of her friends to participate, commenting in the 'further

comments' section in her survey that the topic had been 'fun' to talk about with her friends. The experience of snowballing here of course entailed bias, which could have implications for results, particularly through the overrepresentation of participants with certain income, education, or other attributes. While this bias was noted, the sampling strategy was not designed to yield representative or generalisable results, rather gain access to a cohort suitable for a small samlple qualitative research frame.

Reasonable distribution of participants over the three age cohorts was attained. On collection of the desired number (200) of completed surveys, the running total of participants from each cohort was calculated, and further surveys were distributed specifically targeting any age cohort that was underrepresented. 227 surveys were returned from the 500 distributed, a relatively high response rate which can probably be attributed to the snowballing strategy employed. This provided a sample large enough to analyse and to describe trends and patterns in responses, in order to provide data that could be descriptively linked and related to baseline data on national and regional trends from sources described above. The survey data were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics available with the computer package SPSS Version 15. The sample size of 227 was large enough to give insight into interesting emergent themes and lines of questioning (to be followed up during interviews) as well as to obtain meaningful data that acted to confirm the dominant themes which emerged in the later stages of research (De Vaus, 1991). Data from the survey is linked to regional and national level statistics using descriptive techniques in Chapter Five.

Prior to distribution, the survey was piloted with ten of the researchers' existing contacts

who fitted the target sample, and oral feedback was sought (Patten, 2001). Survey questions were clearly worded, with everyday neutral language. They were designed to be simple to understand in meaning, and free of ambiguity (Ruane, 2005). The survey flowed logically in themes, and began with 'pleasant' questions, such as 'Do you wish to marry?' which were quick and easy to answer in order to gain the interest and trust of the respondent. Demographic questions were included at the conclusion of the survey rather than the beginning to avoid initially appearing invasive or dull. For the majority of closed questions, Likert scales with five options using matrix formatting were used to generate overall trends and patterns of participants' attitudes. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the use of Likert scales was deemed most appropriate due to the ease of communicating interval properties to participants. This meant that the interval responses could be scaled to permit analysis of trends in emotions or attitudes towards particular variables. Open questions[10] were included in order to allow participants to include information they felt was relevant or important, particularly in regard to their emotions towards marriage. Content analysis of these responses, using the computer package NVivo, highlighted themes to include in the interview and focus group discussion schedule.

Surveys have been criticised for being incapable of gaining information about meaningful aspects of social action. They measure and evaluate reported actions without

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[10] Open ended questions were included only for the purpose of highlighting important themes and topics for discussion during interviews and focus groups. Open survey responses consisted mainly of comments on the survey itself, parts of the survey respondents found interesting, or communication to the researcher about further participation. As such these responses did not give considerable insight worthy of repeating verbatim in the thesis. Open ended questions were completed by 30% of participants, where responses ranged from a few words, to five paragraphs.

taking into account the context in which these opinions or actions might occur. Further, the researcher cannot control the conditions under which a mail survey is completed. Moreover, survey research is often equated with positivist, sterile and rigid forms of scientific research, which arguably shows little creative thinking or imagination, and which conflict with feminist epistemologies. These criticisms are noted. However, the inclusion of a survey in the initial stage of data collection is justified by the practical usefulness of obtaining initial information on the attributes of participants, as well as uncovering themes to be researched during the later stages of qualitative enquiry. In this case thematic similarities and patterns in responses were used as starting points for interview and focus group discussion. The survey was successful in ensuring a diverse range of interview participants for purposive sampling.

Phase two – Interviews and focus group discussions

> Interviewing is like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets (Oakley, 1981: 31).

The participants for the second phase of data collection; those in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, were recruited from those who completed surveys. Each participant, at the end of the survey, was invited to register their interest in participating in further research. Of the participants, 185 registered this interest; and 75 of those who participated in the survey were invited to take part in further qualitative research. There were approximately 25 from each of the three age cohorts. Selection of who to invite was done on the basis of the three categories of interest: married or

engaged women, women currently in relationships (those cohabiting and those not cohabiting with their partner), and women not currently in relationships. So for each age cohort, there were approximately eight participants in each category. Participants' survey responses were also purposively considered – for example, participants might be chosen if their views on marriage could be categorised as 'unconventional', or if they had answered all the survey questions.

One interest in this project was exploring young women's narratives that described their personal journeys into young adulthood, and how they felt their experiences affected their decision-making and views about marriage. In-depth interviews concerned with the personal ideas and opinions of young women towards marriage allowed some rich histories to emerge, which were related to both survey and focus group discussion themes.

The interviews and focus group discussions were held either in a classroom on campus, or at a convenient pre-negotiated public space, such as a local café. Priority was given to environments which were relatively neutral and familiar for all participants, and as private as possible, so conversations would not be overheard (Morgan, 1997). The interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded.

Interviews

Interviews give individual participants the opportunity to put forward their unique and

personal views (Seidman, 1998), complemented by focus group discussion, thus intensifying the researchers' understanding of the topic. Qualitative interviewing is regarded by Kvale (1996) as a type of guided conversation, where the researcher's role is to 'hear the meaning' (Rubin and Rubin (1995: 7) of what the interviewee conveys.

The semi-structured interviews took place in circumstances convenient to the interviewee and lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. An interview schedule was developed to include topics for discussion that were suggested by the initial research questions, and the themes that emerged from preliminary analysis of the survey data. These topics were:

1. Experiences of marriage and marital relationships in childhood

2. Relationship experience and discussion of current relationship status

3. Desire (or not) to marry, and why

4. Relationship aspirations for the future.

Focus groups

Three focus groups, each with seven participants[11], were recruited. Participants who had volunteered to take part in focus groups were contacted by telephone or email, and asked to attend at a particular time to a particular place and talk with others for about one hour. Focus groups are acknowledged by Bloor et al (2001) as the method of choice for the documentation of group norms and understandings. Focus group discussions were considered to be a useful method for this project, as they can obtain multiple

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[11] Two participants, Caroline and Jodie, were unable to attend the focus group, and were later interviewed. The third focus group consisted of five participants.

perspectives regarding the same topic. Group interaction was sought through the focus group discussions in order to subsequently analyse and understand the underlying meanings young women attach to marriage (Bloor et al, 2001). The use of focus groups as a method for qualitative data collection is arguably the most effective way of uncovering 'the range of ideas or feelings that people have about something' because 'a group possesses the capacity to become more than the sum of its parts' (Krueger and Casey, 2000: 24). Focus groups allow participants to talk openly with each other. Moreover, focus group research permits insights 'into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation' (Gibbs, 1997). The group situation acts to reduce the influence of the interviewer over the participants, thus tilting the balance of power in favour of the participants (Kitzinger, 1994). This empowerment serves to validate the participants' views, and reflects a feminist perspective in qualitative data collection.

Focus groups allow access to research participants who may find one-on-one, face-to-face interaction unnerving or intimidating (Madriz, 2003). Focus groups provide a safe environment where ideas and beliefs can be shared. The participants for each focus group were selected by relationship status. Although age group cohorts and crude attitudes for or against marriage were taken into consideration, it was considered more relevant to group each set of participants by relationship status, as this factor has a greater relevance to the research questions. Participants in each discussion group were deliberately segregated into groups based upon their relationship status to enable some level of homogeneity based on their experiences (Fern, 2001).

For practical purposes, particularly time constraints, separating participants by relationship status and age was favoured so as to concentrate on a narrower selection of topics of discussion. Moreover, group homogeneity is desirable, as the purpose of the research project is to develop theories to explain shared opinions on the subject of marriage for young women. Focus groups aim to replicate everyday experiences for young women, and therefore emphasis is placed on the collectivist and communal nature of women's lives. Facilitated by the researcher, who requested participants talk about their personal experiences and aspirations, the young women discussed their attitudes, plans and opinions on relationships with each other, and the focus group discussions were designed to simulate the informal scenario of young women's social interaction.

Focus groups are considered to be not as useful as other methods in some situations, such as the reporting of individual behaviour or opinions. As a reaction to this potential limitation, in-depth informal interviews were undertaken as the principle qualitative method, and as a way to deepen understanding of individual as well as group views (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Phase three – follow up interviews

Following preliminary analysis of interview and focus group transcripts, themes and topics for further research were identified, and 20 participants were identified as useful

for further research, that would take place in the form of a second in-depth interview. These participants were targeted based on the content of their original narratives, according to the themes that emerged, and the depth and detail each participant included. A total of 18 of these 20 participants agreed, and took part in a second interview. The third phase of data collection took the form of a second round of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. In line with the grounded theory approach adopted for this project, questions and topics for discussion in phase three emerged from the data collected in the previous two phases. These themes included:

1. Romance and marriage ideas from childhood and adolescence

2. Adulthood, settling down

3. Identity, (individual) decision making and choices

4. Everyday marital roles: Aspirations, expectations and intentions

5. Aging and growing old.

Limitations of the research design

The purposive sampling strategy employed means that the sample distribution might be affected in various ways. Firstly, the location of flyers and posters only targets women who frequent the areas where these were distributed. Secondly, participants who responded to flyers that advertised a study on marriage, may logically be presumed to have an interest in marriage, particularly in getting married, thus the sample may to some extent reflect the attitudes of women in favour of marriage. Decisions regarding

the composition of participants for interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were not 'random', but purposively selected by the researcher, dependent on availability. These factors obviously affected the sample to some extent, and if the research was undertaken again, more consideration of the potential impacts of this strategy would be included.

Data analysis

Quantitative survey data were entered into an SPSS Version 15 spreadsheet to generate descriptive statistics. All interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed into NVivo qualitative data analysis software, with each participant identified by a pseudonym. Data from the open-ended survey questions was also entered. All qualitative data was coded and classified according to key issues, themes, events and words. The purpose of coding the data was to systematically label and categorise thematic sections of the transcripts, in order to help structure the analysis. The codes, themes and 'nodes' were those that arose from the data collected, and were not predetermined by the researcher. Summary descriptive statistics from the survey data and outcomes of statistical analysis were also entered into NVivo and used to establish categories and thematic links between different components of the data. Coding and classification in NVivo helped to build ideas and theories from the data collected.

Inferential conclusions were drawn from the trends and patterns that emerged from the data, so as to explain the reasons for young women's actions and opinions on marriage.

Findings were derived from the rich sources of analysed transcript data, as well as from the links drawn between primary quantitative survey data, and the existing public statistics available. Theories and concepts from within the existing literature were compared to those constructed from the project data. The initial research questions surrounding the meanings of marriage for participants, as well as how and why marriage is constructed as an attractive option for adult living, and the rich accounts of aspired, expected or experienced marital living were considered throughout the processes of data collection and analysis. These questions were then addressed by returning to the particular data collected that was relevant to that question.

Open, axial and selective coding

The three phases of grounded theory coding, open, axial and selective, were employed in line with Corbin and Strauss (1990). Firstly, open coding was employed, locating emergent themes patterns in the data for analysis. This open coding identified overall phenomena which were labelled and categorised, for further and more focussed data collection and analysis. Following open coding, more intensive content and discourse analysis was employed, bearing in mind these initial codes, and reading for emphasis as well as silences and omissions. Axial coding was used to establish relationships between open coded categories, and then to highlight and understand the relationships between the participants' assertions under each open code. Finally, selective coding was used as a method of validation for established patterns, themes and arguments. The axial and open coded categories were reworked several times in order to systematically refine

and reformulate categories, subcategories, and the relationship between each code, to enable findings to be confirmed and discussed.

Some criticisms of the use of grounded theory methods in the analysis of qualitative data were acknowledged, particularly the way that the above coding methods can 'fracture' the data, potentially undermining the richness of the individual participants' narratives (Mattingly and Garro, 2000: Riessman, 1993). An awareness of this critique permitted continuous assessment and reassessment of coding practices, with a focus on maintaining the value in each of the rich individual voices and descriptions.

Validity, reliability and reflexive research

Various techniques were employed to evaluate the validity and reliability of data collected, particularly throughout data analysis. All interviews and focus groups were led by the student researcher, who transcribed and coded the data in its entirety, in order to maintain parity in transcription and coding styles. Brief (de-identified) biographies of each participant were recorded, to aid coding and analysis. A concise written report, showing major findings in the form of trends in attitudes towards marriage, was distributed to a sample of participants for participant validation (Bloor, 1978). Their feedback was sought and recorded, providing a method of validation of the findings. Participants were asked to complete a feedback form, where their responses provide insight into participant views on how well their opinions have been represented. Criticism of context validity established through participant feedback was noted

however. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that 'we cannot assume that anyone is a privileged commentator on his or her own actions, in the sense that the truth of their account is guaranteed' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 229). Participants may not remember sufficient detail from their interview, or they may be inclined to deny less attractive elements of their attitudes or behaviour. Mason (1996) argues that no single participant can have a true insight into the attitudes or experiences of all other participants. Finally, participant validation is acknowledged to be insufficient as a lone validation method, because it is impacted on by the power relations inherent in the research relationship. Nevertheless, the review process does enhance thoroughness and sensitivity in analysis, thus increasing validity. Other techniques were also employed to ensure the validity of the findings in this study.

Research questions and problems were continuously reassessed as processes of data collection and analysis were undertaken. Searching for evidence to disconfirm assertions developed from patterns in the data, enabled coding and assertions to be reworked and refined. Following Seale's (1999) five pointers for evaluating data validity, examples were searched for within the data set that seemed to refute themes and assertions that had been developed. Cases were compared throughout the process of analysis, and in line with Seale (1999), deviant cases or examples were searched for. This analysis led to the further reworking of codes. Outlier cases were given value and attention, and are discussed in the following data chapters. Wherever possible, 'thick' (Leedy, 1997) or 'low inference' (Seale, 1999) descriptions are included, to contextualise the participants' verbatim accounts.

While adopting Seale's strategies for evaluating validity, this project challenges the 'expert' tone present in Seale's assertions. Seale criticises the focus on interviewer self-disclosure present in much feminist work for example, preferring the standpoint of a more 'scientific' researcher. Strategies employed to evaluate the validity of analysis in this research project were utilised as a form of methodological rigour, rather than used to 'prove' that findings are absolute and 'correct' representations of the participants' discursive constructions of marriage.

The position of the researcher

An important feminist principle in social research is the attention paid to links between epistemology and practice in terms of the research relationship. Being reflexive and aware of your position as a researcher is emphasised in feminist enquiry. Reflexivity is a focal theme in feminist discussions of research (Hertz, 1996). Reay describes reflexivity as 'the continued consideration of the ways in which the researcher's own social identity and values affect the data gathered and the social world produced' (Reay 1996: 60).

Oakley (1981) famously advocated researchers 'coming clean' about any agenda they may have, as well as disclosing their position to participants in order to build trust. Cotterill and Letherby (1993: 71) assert that the inclusion of the researcher's own subjectivity and positionality 'helps break down the power relationship between

researcher and researched'. Participants are not 'objects' of knowledge, instead they are viewed as active agents, capable of constructing and reconstructing accounts of their lived experiences and realities. In line with Oakley, the participants were told as much about the purposes of this project as possible, and as the researcher, I remained aware of Oakley's arguments in favour of answering any questions posed by the participants as openly and honestly as possible. Many of the interviews, due to the time constraints of the participants, were undertaken in informal settings. These circumstances did not lend themselves to 'proper interviewing', for example one participant's 14 month-old toddler sat on my knee throughout the interview, as she breast fed her new-born baby. In a further example, other participants have maintained contact with me via email, essentially offering 'updates' on their relationships, by informing me of engagements, setting a wedding date, or informing me of a relationship breakdown. A few participants have requested updates on the research, inquiring as to the progress of my findings and thesis. These types of participant behaviour imply the openness which I was keen to encourage, in order to maintain a non-hierarchical power relation between interviewer and interviewee throughout the research process.

I was often asked questions by the participants who assumed that I was an expert in the field. Questions such as 'what is the current divorce rate in Australia?', 'how long are you together before you're de facto?', and 'how much does an average wedding cost?' were frequent. I undertook to answer these questions to the best of my knowledge, and as briefly as possible, while stressing the sources of my information, and that my answers were simply based on my experience and knowledge and were not necessarily

correct. Adopting a strategy on how to answer questions posed by participants regarding my own views and experiences on marriage and relationships, I found much more challenging.

In this research project, my position as an insider or outsider (Merton, 1972) was difficult to establish and the clarification of my position during interviews was initially problematic. As an international student, not an Australian permanent resident or citizen, I would not have been eligible to participate in this research project. This was the first aspect that distanced me from the research cohort. Secondly, my 'outsider' status was reinforced by my sexuality – as a lesbian I cannot marry, nor can I enter into a legally recognised civil partnership in Australia. Yet at the same time, I am a woman within the targeted age group, and through personal experiences and those of friends, am immersed in marital discourses and the emotions attached to love and intimate relationships. I remain surrounded by the normative discourses of marriage. Many of my friends have married, or will soon marry. I have also been exposed to the heteronormative practices experienced by almost all young girls, for example the knight/prince charming figure in fairy tales. In accordance with the epistemologies and methodologies favoured in feminist research, I was very aware that I should give something of myself during the interviews if I was to expect access to participants' accounts of private and intimate parts of their lives. This interviewer self-disclosure is vital in qualitative research based on feminist principles in order to build rapport, and access the rich personal narratives of participants.

Thus, approaching the time of the first interviews, I prepared a number of considered responses to questions surrounding my own views on marriage, in case they were posed by the participants. These responses were brief and measured, so as not to lead the discussion away from the project aims, and maintain focus on the views of the participant. I was wary of the natural urge to value self-knowledge, but wanted to be open and honest with the women that I would be talking with. Therefore I resolved that if asked questions by the participants, I would briefly discuss my personal experiences, then I would remind both myself and the participants of the key aims of the research. I planned that if asked questions, I would suggest that we talk more about subjects such as gay marriage after the interview, so as to appear willing to discuss any topic, without deviating too far from the interview schedule.

In practice, my position during interviews became more blurred than I had imagined. During the first interview the participant asked me if I wanted to marry. I responded briefly, saying I had not given it much thought, and asked her to elaborate on a point she had made a couple of minutes earlier. She persevered, asking 'do you have a boyfriend? Would you marry him?' I concisely explained my sexuality, which prompted a long discussion about the politics of gay marriage. Despite my repeated attempts to steer the conversation back to her experiences and aspirations, she consistently grounded her responses in a more political frame, frequently referring back to the gay marriage debate. It was difficult to maintain conversation focussed on the participant's constructions of marriage, something which I wanted to avoid in subsequent interviews.

Only two of the participants questioned my sexuality during interviews, while the participants for the most part assumed my 'insider' status, and treated me as 'one of them' (a heterosexual young woman trying to negotiate ideals for the life course and fit everything in, including a husband). I was surprised at how rarely I was actually asked to disclose my own marital status. This perhaps was due to the participants observing that I was not wearing a wedding or engagement ring on the appropriate finger. As a woman within the project age cohort, my 'insider' status was for the most part assumed – evidenced by participants' frequent use of phrases like 'for women like us', or 'I'm sure you've felt the same'. The majority of participants assumed I was in much the same situation as them, trying to negotiate the onset of career and family life as best I could.

My assumed 'insider' status in early interviews invoked much thought and deliberation on my position as a researcher. I wanted to remain open and transparent to the participants, and avoid the ethical dilemmas involved with 'hiding' my outsider status. Yet at the same time, I was reluctant to interrupt the ease of flow of the interview conversations. I resolved to answer any questions surrounding my own relationship status as openly as I could without including opinions that could 'lead' or 'bias' the remainder of the interview. I decided not to correct participants who assumed my insider status (and my heterosexuality), by responding honestly to any questions, but using gender neutral terms when referring to my partner. The ethical dilemmas involved are noted and after much thought, I resolved that I would disclose my sexuality and personal experiences only if specifically asked a question where I would have to explicitly lie for example, 'do you want to marry your boyfriend?'. I did not want to interrupt the flow of

the interview with a detailed discussion of my sexuality or of gay marriage as this was outside the parameters of the study.

Poindexter (2003), discussing interviews in the field of social work, suggests that interviewer self-disclosure can attract undue attention towards the interviewer. The strategy I adopted, 'doing similarity' (Abell et al, 2006), or 'doing' being an insider, in this project, built rapport and enabled and encouraged further discussion and participant self-disclosure. The debate continues in regard to the extent to which the insider-outsider researcher position (Merton, 1972), and the similarities or differences between the researcher and the researched, can influence the research relationship (Song and Parker, 1995).

Openness and reflexivity are essential parts of feminist research principles and I remain uncomfortable with the ethics of my strategy of adopting the role of insider-heterosexual young woman, as was assumed by the vast majority of participants. Although I never explicitly lied when responding to a question, I feel at times I lied by omission. I was prepared to give something of myself during my interviews, yet despite my discomfort, I believe the flow of the interviews would have been interrupted by my complete honesty, to the detriment of the comfortable interview environment I had worked hard to create, and the rapport I had sought to build. In short, to answer the project research questions, I needed to keep the focus on the participants, not on the researcher.

It is acknowledged that race and class, as well as gender and sexuality, can influence the

dynamic of research relationships (Song and Parker, 1995; Abell et al, 2006). Thus, power differentials are to some extent inevitable. While they cannot be avoided, they should be critically reflected upon as part of the research experience, in conjunction with attempts to build rapport and enable reciprocity and equality. It is imperative in feminist research to include the position of the researcher in analysis (Oakley, 1981), and in accordance with feminist perspectives on qualitative research processes, it is important to note the researcher's position in effecting data collection and analysis (Stanley and Wise, 1993). During the processes of data analysis, the epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions, as well as personal experiences and emotions of the researcher act to impact on the way the researcher reads and makes sense of the data (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). The ways I read and interpret data are according to my position as a middle class, white, lesbian, who can readily sympathise with women who remain unmarried and the social stigmas they may face.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the conceptual framework for the study and discussed the relevant epistemological and theoretical approaches to mixed method and qualitative research. A detailed description of the processes of data collection and analysis was included, following the previously established research aims and questions. Ethical considerations were considered, as were the limitations of the research. Much attention was paid to the value of reflexivity, and being aware of the position of the researcher.

I am extremely grateful to all of the women who participated in the research, particularly those interviewees who offered their valuable time to provide me with their unique accounts. A summary of interview participants is offered in the following chapter, along with a detailed description of the surveyed cohort. The following chapter 'sets the scene' and offers a description of the Newcastle and Lower Hunter region, as well as a discussion of the demographic characteristics of the cohort.

Chapter Five

Setting the Scene

Introduction

This chapter describes the demographic characteristics of the sample of 225 young women who were surveyed, and outlines the descriptive statistics and trends from the survey data, linking these findings with NSW- and Australia-wide trends taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Women's Health Australia. The survey was designed to illuminate the important elements of marriage for participants, and the meanings they attach to marriage. First, the demographics of Newcastle and Lower Hunter Region are described. The relevance of variables within the sample, particularly age, educational attainment, income and relationship status are outlined. 'Typologies' of interview and focus group participants are identified and discussed according to their attitudes towards marriage and marital living. Data from the semi-structured interviews as well as long answers from surveys are included to give further insight into these attitudes.

Where qualitative accounts are included from this point on, the following defining terms describe a participant's relationship status:

- 'Single' = not currently in a relationship

- 'Relationship' = currently in a non-cohabiting relationship

- 'Cohabiting' = currently cohabiting with partner, sharing a bedroom, not legally registered as de facto

- 'De facto' = legally registered de facto cohabiting (not those who may be legally de facto according to longevity of relationship, but are not aware of this legal status)

- 'Engaged' = engaged to be married (all cohabiting in this study)

- 'Married' = legally married

Important Note: Unless otherwise stated, it should be assumed that single participants have never married. For other participants, it should be assumed they are engaged or married to their first husband. Previously married participants are specifically described for example; (Janine, 34, married to second husband; Stacy, 29, married, separated).

Newcastle and the Lower Hunter region of New South Wales

Newcastle, the second largest city in New South Wales, is 162 km north of Sydney and has a population of approximately 150,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008c). The Lower Hunter region in which Newcastle is situated has a total population of close to 500,000. Newcastle has a noticeably youthful population compared to many other Australian cities with 30 percent of the population in the region aged between 15 and 34 (ABS, 2008c). Newcastle served as a penal station following European settlement, and

remains the largest working coal port in the world. An archetypal coal and steel city, it has a strong tradition of, and pride in, its labour history and trade unionism. Unlike Wollongong (a twin industrial city to the south of Sydney, which attracted a large multicultural workforce in the 1960s) Newcastle has remained a predominantly white 'Anglo' city, with a dominant working class culture. In 2006, approximately 85 per cent of the Newcastle regional population was born in Australia, compared with 69 per cent for the state of NSW (Hunter Valley Research Foundation [HVRF], 2008). This regional insularity and industrial background, with so many old established communities and families, may partly explain some aspects of the traditional gender role conservatism uncovered in this study.

According to the 2006 Australian Census, 53.4 per cent of people aged 15 and over in the Newcastle region had post-school qualifications (ABS, 2008c). In 2006, marriage remained the most common form of household relationship in the region. 39.9 per cent of residents of the Hunter region were in registered marriages, compared with 39.7 per cent for NSW, and 39.2 per cent for Australia. The proportion of residents in the region that were classified as being in de facto relationships was 6.7 per cent for 2006 (HVRF, 2008), while lone parents represented 6.7 per cent of the population for the Hunter region, compared with 6.1 per cent and 6.8 per cent for NSW and Australia respectively (HVRF, 2008). These basic demographics are included here to provide a context for the region studied, where the Newcastle and Lower Hunter region, in terms of family statistics, can be viewed as relatively typical of the state of NSW, and of Australia as a

whole.

Characteristics of the survey sample

This section outlines the demographics of the sample surveyed[12]. The table below outlines the number of participants in each age cohort, by relationship status. Just over one third of the participants in the 29 to 35 age cohort were married, compared to less than a tenth of those in the 18-22 cohort, three quarters of whom were either currently in a (non-cohabiting) relationship, or not currently in a relationship.

5.1.1 Relationship status by age group

			Age Group			
			18-22	23-28	29-35	Total
Relationship Status	Married	Count	7	17	26	50
		% within Age Group	9.3%	22.7%	34.7%	22.2%
	Engaged	Count	4	9	10	23
		% within Age Group	5.3%	12.0%	13.3%	10.2%
	Formally Recognised De facto	Count	1	0	6	7
		% within Age Group	1.3%	.0%	8.0%	3.1%
	Unmarried - Cohabiting	Count	4	18	13	35
		% within Age Group	5.3%	24.0%	17.3%	15.6%

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[12] Where participants opted not to answer particular questions, responses were entered into SPSS as missing data.

Unmarried - Currently in a relationship	Count	27	14	12	53
	% within Age Group	36.0%	18.7%	16.0%	23.6%
Not currently in a relationship	Count	32	17	8	57
	% within Age Group	42.7%	22.7%	10.7%	25.3%
Total	Count	75	75	75	225
	% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The survey sample can be described in broad terms as white and middle class. Participants were asked to write their 'ethnicity'. All but nine of 225 participants described their ethnicity as 'White', 'Anglo', or 'Australian'. Participants were asked to give details of their educational attainment, individual and household income, as well as their postal district. With regard to socio-economic status, 80 per cent of participant incomes fell between $300 and $800 per week, with combined household incomes raising this figure in most cases. Respondents were asked to describe the quality of their life and their standard of living. All but four of the participants offered descriptions of their standard of living as 'good' or 'comfortable'. Table 5.1.2 shows the distribution of educational attainment across the surveyed participant cohort according to age groups. The majority of participants had achieved Year 12 or higher, with only 3.6 per cent of participants having no formal qualifications – implying they left school at around the age of 14.

5.1.2 Education level achieved by age groups

			Age Group			
			18-22	23-28	29-35	Total
Education Level Achieved	No Formal Qualification	Count	6	2	0	8
		% within Age Group	8.0%	2.7%	.0%	3.6%
	Year 10 or equivalent	Count	16	4	12	32
		% within Age Group	21.3%	5.3%	16.0%	14.2%
	Year 12 or equivalent	Count	37	23	19	79
		% within Age Group	49.3%	30.7%	25.3%	35.1%
	Trade/Apprenticeship	Count	0	1	1	2
		% within Age Group	.0%	1.3%	1.3%	.9%
	Certificate/Diploma	Count	7	18	21	46
		% within Age Group	9.3%	24.0%	28.0%	20.4%
	University degree	Count	8	22	19	49
		% within Age Group	10.7%	29.3%	25.3%	21.8%
	Higher University degree	Count	1	5	3	9
		% within Age Group	1.3%	6.7%	4.0%	4.0%
Total		Count	75	75	75	225
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The educational characteristics of the youngest cohort are markedly different from the two older categories. The youngest cohort, while seemlingly 'less' educated, for the most part remain in education. Many were in the process of completing University

degrees, and in time their educational characteristics would fall in line with those of the older participants. It was for this reason that employment status was overlooked as a demographic indicator, as many of the young women involved had either not yet reached their expected employment circumstances, or their employment circumstances were in a transitional phase (for example working part time temporarily whilst studying).

It can be assumed that the cohort of participants surveyed (and thus those interviewed) is at least relatively well educated and for the most part quite comfortable financially. This indicates middle class socio-economic status.

Intention to marry

The vast majority of participants, across all three age cohorts (83.1 per cent of the total) indicated some desire or intention to marry. Of those currently in relationships, 58 per cent of 18 to 22 year olds wished to marry their current partner; while this desire increased to 70 per cent and 75 per cent for the 23 to 28 and 29 to 35 cohorts respectively.

5.2 Intention to marry by age group

			Age Group			Total
			18-22	23-28	29-35	
Intention to Marry	Yes	Count	67	64	56	187
		% within Age Group	89.3%	85.3%	74.7%	83.1%
	No	Count	2	3	9	14
		% within Age Group	2.7%	4.0%	12.0%	6.2%
	Don't know	Count	6	8	10	24
		% within Age Group	8.0%	10.7%	13.3%	10.7%
Total		Count	75	75	75	225
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Attitudes towards marriage

Participants were asked to tick 'yes' to a range of options signifying situations desirable for marriage – in essence, 'Which of the following things do you desire before getting married'? These are listed below:

- Earning enough money to live comfortably
- Being out of debt
- Owning a home
- Having a good job
- Having a full time job
- Owning a car
- Be in love
- Having enough money to afford a decent wedding

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- Being in a relationship with a partner before marriage, for a specified period of time
- Living together harmoniously
- Being with my soul mate
- Having children
- Being a certain age

Overwhelmingly, 'Being in Love', and 'Being with my soul mate' were the most frequently cited positive responses, with all but two participants answering 'yes'. 'Being a certain age' and 'Being in a relationship with a partner for a specified period of time' were the third and fourth most frequently positively cited options. Factors describing material or financial goals, particularly being able to afford things, were the least popular. Perhaps this question could be read as misleading, in that participants might shy away from responding in ways that might make them seem materialistic or 'shallow'; nevertheless, the discourse of romance can clearly be seen. The implications of these survey responses are discussed in more depth in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight; particularly in terms of the prevalence of romantic discourses and marriage.

The survey participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements on marriage, beginning with personal statements, followed by broader statements about women in general. The following tables and explanations highlight some of the common attitudes towards marriage which then became the focus for in-depth interview topics.

Being married means more to me than living together

The table below shows attitudes to marriage compared to living together, separated by age group.

5.3.1 Being married means more to me than living together, by age group

			Age Group			
			18-22	23-28	29-35	Total
Being married means more than living together	Strongly Agree	Count	58	41	31	130
		% within Age Group	77.3%	55.4%	41.3%	58.0%
	Agree	Count	11	18	23	52
		% within Age Group	14.7%	24.3%	30.7%	23.2%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Count	3	5	10	18
		% within Age Group	4.0%	6.8%	13.3%	8.0%
	Disagree	Count	2	2	7	11
		% within Age Group	2.7%	2.7%	9.3%	4.9%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	1	8	4	13
		% within Age Group	1.3%	10.8%	5.3%	5.8%
Total		Count	75	74	75	224
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The vast majority of participants (81.2 per cent) either strongly agreed or agreed with the

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statement, implying the 'extra' something which marriage lends to a relationship. There is a slight correlation with age noticeable here – the younger cohort was more inclined to strongly agree with the statement.

Being married means more to me than having a successful career

Participants' responses to this statement were mixed, with a slight majority agreeing that being married is more important than having a successful career; with the youngest cohort slightly more inclined to agree or strongly agree with the statement.

5.3.2 Being married means more to me than having a successful career, by age group

			Age Group			
			18-22	23-28	29-35	Total
Being married means more to me than having a successful career	Strongly Agree	Count	23	14	14	51
		% within Age Group	30.7%	18.9%	18.9%	22.9%
	Agree	Count	21	13	23	57
		% within Age Group	28.0%	17.6%	31.1%	25.6%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Count	15	21	18	54
		% within Age Group	20.0%	28.4%	24.3%	24.2%
	Disagree	Count	10	14	11	35
		% within Age Group	13.3%	18.9%	14.9%	15.7%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	6	12	8	26
		% within Age Group	8.0%	16.2%	10.8%	11.7%
Total		Count	75	74	74	223
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

I think I will be/am more successful as a married woman

The table below shows that most participants disagreed with this statement. The issue of lived experience or identity (or perceived identity) as a married woman is taken up in Chapter Seven in greater detail, where participants' personal accounts contrast with the responses here. Discursive constructions of married status and success in the interviews implied that quite a few participants actually believe they will in fact be more successful, certainly more secure and happy, once married.

5.3.3 I think I will be/am more successful as a married woman, by age group

			Age Group			
			18-22	23-28	29-35	Total
I think I will be/am more successful as a married woman	Strongly Agree	Count	6	7	6	19
		% within Age Group	8.0%	9.5%	8.0%	8.5%
	Agree	Count	9	12	14	35
		% within Age Group	12.0%	16.2%	18.7%	15.6%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Count	29	18	20	67
		% within Age Group	38.7%	24.3%	26.7%	29.9%
	Disagree	Count	21	18	22	61
		% within Age Group	28.0%	24.3%	29.3%	27.2%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	10	19	13	42
		% within Age Group	13.3%	25.7%	17.3%	18.8%
Total		Count	75	74	75	224
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

I would only have children if I was married/getting married

This statement provided interesting insight into the participants' attitudes towards marriage and having children. With just over half of participants agreeing with the statement, it might be implied that attitudes towards child-bearing are more liberalised, and a range of parenting options might be deemed appropriate. This idea is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six, where interview data suggest that the statistics in the table below might represent attitudes towards *other* women, rather than something about the participants themselves.

In their accounts, the participants' future child-bearing was framed as absolutely located within the marital relationship. So while it is apparently appropriate for other women to have children outside of marriage, at a personal level most participants actually agree in principle with the statement 'I would only have children if I was married/getting married'. It is also possible that the survey question could be read as a vindication of abortion – implying taking an accidental pregnancy to full term only if married. If this was the case then it is not surprising that many disagreed with it.

5.3.4 I would only have children if I was married/getting married, by age group

			Age Group			
			18-22	23-28	29-35	Total
I would only have children if I was married/getting married	Strongly Agree	Count	25	24	15	64
		% within Age Group	33.8%	32.4%	20.3%	28.8%
	Agree	Count	16	16	18	50
		% within Age Group	21.6%	21.6%	24.3%	22.5%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Count	10	14	10	34
		% within Age Group	13.5%	18.9%	13.5%	15.3%
	Disagree	Count	14	13	21	48
		% within Age Group	18.9%	17.6%	28.4%	21.6%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	9	7	10	26
		% within Age Group	12.2%	9.5%	13.5%	11.7%
Total		Count	74	74	74	222
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

My childhood experience of relationships has shaped my views on marriage

77.5 per cent of participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. An important component of the in-depth interviews was the discussion of the participants' personal experiences of marriage during their childhood, particularly in terms of their perceptions of the parent's relationship. Again, there was some consistency across age cohorts.

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5.3.5 My childhood experience of relationships has shaped my views on marriage, by age group

			Age Group			Total
			18-22	23-28	29-35	18-22
Childhood Experience	Strongly Agree	Count	37	34	25	96
		% within Age Group	49.3%	46.6%	33.3%	43.0%
	Agree	Count	26	25	26	77
		% within Age Group	34.7%	34.2%	34.7%	34.5%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Count	10	8	13	31
		% within Age Group	13.3%	11.0%	17.3%	13.9%
	Disagree	Count	1	4	9	14
		% within Age Group	1.3%	5.5%	12.0%	6.3%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	1	2	2	5
		% within Age Group	1.3%	2.7%	2.7%	2.2%
Total		Count	75	73	75	223
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Marriage is important for women in Australia today

Respondents were asked to give their attitude towards more general statements, for example 'marriage is important for women in Australia today'. Interestingly, despite the overwhelming desire across the participant group to personally marry, the majority of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, suggesting that although

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they personally feel strongly about marriage, they did not think other Australian women, or women in general felt marriage was important. Again, there was little relevance of age in response to this statement.

5.3.6 Marriage is important for women in Australia today, by age group

			Age Group			
			18-22	23-28	29-35	Total
Marriage is important for women in Australia today	Strongly Agree	Count	5	11	10	26
		% within Age Group	6.8%	15.1%	13.5%	11.8%
	Agree	Count	25	22	26	73
		% within Age Group	33.8%	30.1%	35.1%	33.0%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Count	30	32	31	93
		% within Age Group	40.5%	43.8%	41.9%	42.1%
	Disagree	Count	13	7	4	24
		% within Age Group	17.6%	9.6%	5.4%	10.9%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	1	1	3	5
		% within Age Group	1.4%	1.4%	4.1%	2.3%
Total		Count	74	73	74	221
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Marriage is less important today than it was 25 years ago

Participants were asked how they felt about the statement 'Marriage is less important today than it was 25 years ago', to examine the pervasiveness of the discourse of detraditionalization. 68.9 per cent of participants (with parity across age cohorts) either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement; highlighting the awareness (if perhaps not personal belief) that marriage is perceived as less important than in the previous generation.

5.3.7 Marriage is less important today than it was 25 years ago, by age group

			Age Group			
			18-22	23-28	29-35	Total
Marriage is less important today than it was 25 years ago	Strongly Agree	Count	15	18	18	51
		% within Age Group	20.3%	24.3%	24.3%	23.0%
	Agree	Count	41	34	27	102
		% within Age Group	55.4%	45.9%	36.5%	45.9%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Count	11	10	19	40
		% within Age Group	14.9%	13.5%	25.7%	18.0%
	Disagree	Count	6	9	6	21
		% within Age Group	8.1%	12.2%	8.1%	9.5%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	1	3	4	8
		% within Age Group	1.4%	4.1%	5.4%	3.6%
Total		Count	74	74	74	222
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Analysis of demographic variables

The following sections provide evidence of the relevance of a range of demographic variables in the participants' attitudes towards marriage. The impacts of age, relationship status, income, and educational achievement are discussed.

The relevance of age

A participant's age did not impact upon attitudes towards marriage to the extent that was anticipated in framing the study. As can be seen from the cross-tabulations above, there were few noteworthy differences in terms of attitudes between age cohorts, particularly in terms of associating children with marriage, and in the factors cited as important to have in place prior to marrying. In fact, for the most part, there was parity across age cohorts. For those in relationships, there was an association between age and intention to marry their current partner – perhaps somewhat predictably, the older participants in relationships more frequently intended to marry their current partner, probably signifying the 'serious' status of relationships at an older age compared to the more casual or experimental relationships at a younger age. When asked 'When would you ideally like to marry?', age was important, showing a positive correlation between age and desired time before marriage – older participants more frequently desired to marry sooner, as seen in the table below.

5.4 When would you ideally like to marry? By age group

			Age Group			
			18-22	23-28	29-35	Total
When would you ideally like to marry?	Within next six months	Count	0	2	1	3
		% within Age Group	.0%	2.9%	1.6%	1.4%
	Within next year	Count	1	4	12	17
		% within Age Group	1.3%	5.7%	18.8%	8.1%
	Within 2 years	Count	7	4	18	29
		% within Age Group	9.3%	5.7%	28.1%	13.9%
	Within 3 years	Count	4	14	15	33
		% within Age Group	5.3%	20.0%	23.4%	15.8%
	Within 4 years	Count	2	18	5	25
		% within Age Group	2.7%	25.7%	7.8%	12.0%
	Within 5 years	Count	26	18	3	47
		% within Age Group	34.7%	25.7%	4.7%	22.5%
	Within 6-10 years	Count	30	9	0	39
		% within Age Group	40.0%	12.9%	.0%	18.7%
	When is not important	Count	5	1	10	16
		% within Age Group	6.7%	1.4%	15.6%	7.7%
Total		Count	75	70	64	209
		% within Age Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The relevance of current relationship status

As with age, a participant's current relationship status held little implication or impact on their attitudes towards marriage. Obviously those participants who were married, engaged, de facto, cohabiting or in a relationship positioned their lived experiences slightly differently to those single participants who offered imagined accounts of relationships; just as those married participants were able to give real rather than imagined perspectives on married life. Yet beyond this, there were no statistically significant findings based on current relationship status in terms of attitudes towards marriage, or factors perceived to be important in marriage.

The relevance of income and educational achievement

Educational achievements, and/or high income, also were not important indicators of attitudes towards marriage. There was no association between education or income and factors cited as important in marriage. Those who were categorised as highly educated, as well as those few women who commanded high incomes, focussed on predominantly romantic and emotional reasons for marriage, in line with the rest of the participant group.

The relevance of childhood experience

The vast majority of participants made reference in the interviews to their childhood experience in shaping their views on marriage – these experiences, particularly for those

who desire marriage, are touched upon and referenced throughout Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

Typologies of women's meanings of marriage – qualitative and quantitative

Four broad categories or typologies of women (first and second phase interview, and focus group participants, n = 75) were formulated, based on the participant's survey and interview responses, in order to establish general patterns of attitudes towards the place of marriage in their life trajectory. Participants' verbatim accounts are taken from interviews and focus group discussions. The main tenets of each typology are detailed below.

'Romantics'

These women (14 per cent) were characterised by having very strong aspirations to marry based on discourses of romance, fate and destiny. They frequently associated childhood experiences and upbringing with tales and behaviours linked to romantic ideals, frequently citing having a 'soul mate' as an important goal, and associating marriage with 'together foreverness'.

'Traditionalists'

There were also 'traditionalists' (16 per cent), including six participants who explicitly claimed traditional values based on their religious beliefs. They seemed to perpetuate the traditional legacy of marriage as a normalised institution, as 'natural' and the 'thing you do'. These participants showed enthusiasm for marriage, and believed it is 'right', but more importantly expected and anticipated it 'happening' to them. The 'traditionalists' all indicated marriage as 'the natural thing to do'.

> It's the thing to do in a way…like my parents are married, everyone else's parents are married (Bec, 21, single).

> It's the norm, it's just what happens (Chloe, 26, relationship).

Marriage was thus constructed as inevitable in a person's lifetime, not as a choice or option.

> I've always wanted to grow up, go to university, get married and have children. So far, I'm still growing up and I'm at uni, so sometime in the future I'll get married and have kids; I've always wanted to. It's just what you do, you know (Sarah, 28, relationship).

'Hopefuls'

The majority of participants (68 per cent) were in the 'hopefuls' category. These women did not imply marriage as a particular goal to be achieved, but rather expressed hope that

at some point in the future marriage would occur for them, and that it would be successful. Their desire to marry was less overt than that of the 'romantics' or traditionalists, but a latent desire to marry was evident. These were participants who in surveys expressed a desire to marry, but offered a range of 'ambivalent' responses as to the reasons why. Further, these participants showed a lack of conviction or confidence that they 'would certainly' get married – not because they were not sure that they wanted to marry, but because they were not sure if anyone would ever want to marry them.

> It's not something I want to think about too much now. In the future I'd love to be married (Jade, 20, single).

> No…but…there's like, parents do like pressure you, despite what we say, and um, I dunno, it's just, sort of a commitment thing…like its more than just saying it, it's an action (Margaret, 30, married).

Even some participants who opposed marriage during the interview were in the 'hopefuls' category. Although they rejected various elements of marriage, from gender inequality to religion and tradition, some of these participants showed at least ambivalence towards marriage in their narratives; at most a distinct hope that they would find a scenario where a mediated form of marriage suited to their beliefs, could eventuate for them. The hesitancy and lack of conviction in these participants' opposition to marriage emphasised the influence of marital discourse for young women.

> I guess I feel strongly about not getting married…because I think

> people rush into it, and the divorce rate at the moment just shows
> that it doesn't really work….I guess if I found the right guy…I
> wouldn't rule it out (Natalie, 20, relationship).

Camilla, who says she does not desire marriage, was also in this category. She was 'willing to marry'.

> I don't see why people do it…but my partner, he really really
> wants to, and it's important to him and his family…so yeah I
> don't mind getting married at all (Camilla, 29, engaged).

'Non-conformists'

Of the small proportion of women who did not desire to marry (eight participants) an important theme was the aspiration not to conform to what they perceived as societal and institutional norms.

Some participants, like Toni and Lauren, rejected marriage according to its grounding as an institution in religion.

> I don't believe in marriage because I don't feel the need to
> confirm my love for a life partner on paper or in front of a
> religious person (Toni, 30, cohabiting).

> I am not religious therefore I see marriage as a very expensive
> piece of paper that has absolutely no impact on how much I love

and want to be with my partner (Lauren, 26, cohabiting).

These participants positioned themselves as non-religious, and through identifying marriage as a fundamentally religious institution, rejected its relevance in their lives. Others, although recognising the religious element of marriage, focussed their discomfort on other ideas of marriage, particularly the material characteristics associated with the event of the wedding, such as the marriage certificate and wedding rings, and the popular symbolism associated with it.

> I believe that living together unmarried but totally committed to each other is the same, and I don't need a certificate or expensive ring on my finger to prove how much I love someone, or my willingness to stay with them forever (Jen, 29, relationship).

> I don't think it's necessary to have a ring, marriage certificate, ceremony and reception to say I love you and want to spend the rest of my life by your side. Also, the whole purpose I feel has become obsolete and materialistic in this day. Non-religious people get married just for the attention, presents and so on (Polly, 22, relationship).

Jen and Polly were strongly opposed to the culturally reinforced idea that the process of becoming married added weight or legitimacy to a relationship. These few exceptions were notable in contrast to the vast majority of participants, who viewed marital relationships as being something 'more' than cohabiting. These distinctive 'outlier' cases in the data set serve to highlight the centrality of marital discourse for women.

A common perception of marriage amongst participants who did not desire to marry was the emphasis on marriage as old fashioned, out-dated, and irrelevant to their intimate relationships. Further, they showed an awareness and resentment of the prevailing authority of marriage, and the way it continues, as an institution, to be marketed and popularly perceived as the superior form of adult relationship. Louise and Vanessa drew attention to the dominant conception of marriage as being synonymous with stability and security. They expressed how their everyday behaviours and attitudes were actively going against 'norms'.

> I want my relationship to be strong enough…[to] stand alone, by itself as good and successful. I want to be happy in my relationship, and feel content, not need marriage or a flash wedding to show them (friends and family) how much I love my man. I shouldn't need to get married to have a good long term thing (Louise, 35, relationship).

> I don't want to ever get down that road when you stay together 'cos you're married. It's not something I want to need or rely on. If my relationship gets so bad that I don't want to be with Greg any more, then we'll break up. I think people need marriage, for comfort. I don't need that, well I don't want to need that, you know? (Vanessa, 27, cohabiting).

While Katie reiterated the sentiments of Louise and Vanessa, she positioned herself in a more economically-minded and (as she argues) more rational standpoint.

> With some women you get this…like they need to get married to prove their husband loves them and is committed. I think there's other good things you can do to know you're committed to a person than have a wedding. It doesn't make sense, you spend all your money on a big wedding when you could put it towards

your future, like a house or something (Katie, 23, relationship).

Katie does not see herself becoming a wife, due to the strong association she perceives between marriage and weddings. She repudiates weddings, therefore, in her mind, she must also repudiate marriage.

The essential theme for 'non-conformists' was questioning what marriage offers in comparison to a long-term non-marital relationship. Only one participant expressed a desire to be single in middle age, indicating that the participant group as a whole hoped to be in some form of relationship, preferably 'serious' or 'committed', by their forties at the latest, and ideally from the mid to late twenties, and that these relationships would be 'marriage like' in terms of lifestyle. There was little evidence of desire to not conform to conventional coupled living. The non-conformists instead positioned themselves as unconventional because of their desire not to formally marry, rather than due to a desire to engage in alternative forms of living.

These participants are labelled 'non-conformists' due to their awareness that they are, as Jen puts it, 'swimming against the tide'. The dominance of the perceived norm of desiring to be married, have a wedding, and be a wife, was present throughout their narratives. Further, these 'non conformists' stressed the effort it takes to not be married.

> I have to tell people…they're on my back about it, you know?
> It's like it's my job to convince them that there's nothing wrong

[with her relationship] and that, you know, it's cool (Vanessa, 27, cohabiting).

The fact that they see themselves 'swimming against the tide' highlights the force of the dominant discourse. This finding goes against expectations if we believe the view that young people are rejecting marriage.

In the section below I briefly outline the qualitative accounts of seven of the participants, who were brought up by two unmarried biological parents. These 'outlier' cases are of particular interest when analysing the relevance of childhood experiences and familiarity with the marital relationship. I examine the case of these seven participants, brought up by two unmarried (biological parents), with particular attention paid to their alternative or 'non conformist' perspectives on marriage, as a result of childhood experience of a parental non-marital relationship. Although the qualitative accounts discussed below are from a very small sample of women, they highlight the relevance of childhood experience and generational reproduction in attitudes towards marriage, illuminated by survey responses, and supported in interview data.

Participants brought up by two unmarried (biological) parents.

Seven of the participants had been brought up by parents who were not, and had never been, married. The narratives of these women, particularly in relation to the perceived

pressures on women to marry, are worthy of discussion.

When asked what it was like to grow up with non-married parents, Haley (20, relationship) says she 'doesn't see a difference between my parents not married and my friends' parents being married'. Liz also emphasised her feeling of normality:

> Nobody really cared. I mean people didn't even necessarily know [that her parents were not married]. (Liz, 24, relationship)

However, Vanessa discussed her difficulty in finding a meaning for marriage:

> I find it really difficult to put a meaning on marriage…because a lot of people say it's about commitment but then I think, well my parents are committed to each other anyway…I've certainly never wanted the whole big wedding day, expensive dress, princess thing, no way (Vanessa, 27, cohabiting).

Jen highlights the common view amongst these participants, that marriage is not necessarily synonymous with longevity. She says her father was put off marriage as a teenager by the 'bad break up' of his parents, but has gone on to have a very successful and long relationship with her mother:

> They thought it was a waste of money to get married. They decided to go on a holiday instead…they've been together for 35 years (Jen, 29, relationship).

Liz shares this view, emphasizing her awareness of divorce rates:

> A lot of their friends have been married and ended up divorced…and mine [parents] have always said, well, you know, it goes to show that being married doesn't guarantee anything (Liz, 24, relationship).

> Their relationship is just like a marriage. They have all their assets together and their kids together…If they separated it would be just as bad as if they were married (Polly, 22, relationship).

Vanessa spoke at length about the difficulties and complications involved with having unmarried parents, for example having to justify her parents' relationship as a child to other children. She said she continuously experienced other people making assumptions about the seriousness of parents' relationship, as well as being questioned often about the status of her parents in relation to her and her brothers:

> Going through school, people just thought dad must be my step dad 'cos we didn't have his last name. (Vanessa, 27, cohabiting)

These narratives introduce the question of what constitutes a marriage, and challenge the conventional marital discourse of marriage as legally sanctioned. However, it is also important to note the similarities in the participants' narratives between their unmarried parents' relationship, and other marital relationships they are familiar with.

> They're married….they don't have the piece of paper, but, you know, they're married. (Polly, 22, relationship)

The fact that these participants were at pains to highlight the parallels between their parents' relationship and their perception of married life emphasizes the maintenance of conventional forms of living. They emphasise that these unmarried relationships are about being, as Burgoyne (1991:251) suggests, 'just like a married couple'. Despite eschewing marriage, these relationships of the participants' parents may well have remained conventionally gendered in, for example, the division of domestic labour.

Conclusion

The broad trends uncovered through descriptive statistical analysis of the survey data indicated very little importance of age, educational attainment, income and relationship status, for participants' attitudes towards marriage. The vast majority of participant responses highlighted the importance of emotional factors, particularly love and romance, beyond any other considerations.

The following three chapters include further discussion on many of the trends highlighted here. The data in the following chapters comes from the subjective personal narratives gathered during semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, with those participants who, to varying degrees, desired to marry. Apart from particular cases, variables such as age, educational attainment and relationship status will not be considered further – these variables, as established above, for this study, do not hold

relevance worthy of further analysis. This is not to say that a woman's age, relationship status or background does not impact on her attitudes towards marriage. Rather, the data is analysed according to particular themes and attitudes towards marriage, where the participants' narratives did not vary specifically according to their age, relationship status, education or income. If these variables are not mentioned, it is because there were no discernable differences in attitudes or experiences based on them. For the reader's information, and as has been included in this chapter, participants' age and relationship status are given below each quote from their interviews.

For the convenience of the reader in the following chapters, a table (See Appendix 2) provides a summary of the 75 young women who participated in the interviews. The table contains information gathered from both survey and interview responses. Missing data means participants opted not to disclose information.

Chapter Six

Participants' Meanings of Marriage through the Life Trajectory

Introduction

To detail the multiple meanings of marriage for the participants in this project, this chapter draws on the content and discourse analysis of interviews and focus group discussion. Particular attention is paid to the varying ways young women position themselves within their friendship and family communities. In this positioning marriage is associated with commitment, security, children and status.

Giddens (1992) proposes that institutional factors now hold less substance or relevance in relationships in late modernity. Religion, family, or societal pressures provide less meaning for marriage than in previous decades, and social attitudes on relationships have become more relaxed. He claims that the importance of intimacy and commitment, the 'pure relationship', now far outweigh institutional pressures. This encourages the concept of marriage as representative of a safe and familiar institution in an increasingly

individualised society (Giddens 1992). Marriage is clearly linked to issues of identity, intimacy, and ontological security, by remaining the most reassuringly common form of intimate relationship. This chapter examines the place of marriage, and the meanings participants attach to marriage during their life course; in particular the way that marriage holds a specific position in discursive constructions of the appropriate and desirable life course.

Youth

Childhood experience

There is significant evidence of participants' awareness of marriage from an early age. The influence of childhood experience was acknowledged in some form by all participants, with many stressing the strong impact of conscious and unconscious experiences of marriage from an early age. All participants show awareness of the impact of their parent's relationship circumstances, and acknowledge the effects on their own views of marriage. This mirrors the results of White's (2003) empirical study, which emphasises the impact of childhood experience. Marriage certainly survives as the preference for long-term relationship lifestyles amongst participants in this case, and exists as a choice of committed relationship that is not only mainstream and popular, but personally familiar to individuals.

Three quarters of interview and focus group participants were brought up by two married parents. This has an impact on the views of participants in that marriage is the norm for the participant group in terms of experiences of adult relationships, which in line with Hewitt et al (2005) and Heaton and Blake (1999) suggests that young people raised in environments where marriage is normative and gender roles within marriage are more traditional, they are more likely to desire marriage themselves. Ashley (24, single) notes that as well as her own, all her friends' parents were married when she was little, and, like Jane (19, single), this meant that marriage 'was the natural thing' and 'what people do'. Melissa (20, cohabiting) further emphasises marriage as normalised during childhood due to the prevalence of marital relationships in her local community. She notes that when she was aged around five, her best friend's parents separated. She found it very difficult to understand, because up until then, she had 'assumed that grown-ups had to be married'. Marriage is romanticised and idealised, longed for by participants during their childhood as something in the distant future that they very much should desire. Discourses of femininity are strongly prevalent in narratives of what participants were taught to believe 'grown-up' women do. For Kirsten (35, relationship) the earliest memory of this came from her grandmother reading her fairytale stories, and then explaining that a woman's life was made 'whole and complete' by having a husband.

Marriage as both an institution and a relationship is constructed as something important, to be loyal to. Many participants discuss their 'belief' or 'faith' in marriage, particularly those who, as children or adolescents, experienced extremely successful or unsuccessful

marital relationships of parents. Nicole's (23, relationship) parents divorced when she was 12, but she retains distinct memories from that time of both her parents stressing the importance of marriage, despite their own marriage breaking down.

Processes of generational reproduction of gender discourses are evident throughout the discursive constructions of childhood offered during interviews, where traditional ideas of what it means for a woman to be a 'wife' are introduced and maintained. Although these ideas varied across the participant group, the constant idealised 'goal' of one day becoming a wife exists in narratives which document both explicit and implicit accounts of childhood experiences.

The following section details the desirable features associated with marriage by participants, going some way towards interpreting the meaning(s) of marriage for this contemporary cohort. These desirable characteristics are inherently linked to romanticised imaginings of marriage stemming from childhood, and highlight the ways in which participants mediate the legacy of traditional thinking towards what marriage symbolises.

Love, commitment, stability and security

> It's an internal desire to be truly loved. And there is no greater
> representation of love than marriage (Sally, 28, single).

The predominant theme emerging from the participants' narratives is the deep-rooted desire for love and commitment. Further, many participants' narratives included an understanding of committed, loving and romantic relationships as natural and normal. Commitment, love and romance are identified throughout the narratives as natural and positive life aspirations, if not triumphant achievements.

Love is identified as a major inner anchor for the self, and marriage remains the dominant method for declaring this love (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). As Nicole (23, relationship) says, 'Finding someone I love and could spend time with would make my life fulfilled'. All but one of the participants cited having a life partner, or a stable monogamous relationship, as an important life experience. This might take the form of marriage, de facto, cohabitation, or alternative relationship. Rebecca (22, cohabiting) stresses the desire to share everything in her life with a companion, while Barbara (20, relationship) and Sascha (30, cohabiting) both desire a companion with whom to spend a long period of time.

This 'quest' for romance and a loving, committed conjugal relationship seems inherently linked to marriage, as the dominant traditional and symbolic practice of commitment and love (Driscoll, 2002, Thompson, 1984). Marriage represents the classic performative statement (Austin, 1962), and exists as the ultimate demonstration of love and commitment for many participants.

> I think that marriage is about proving that you really love the person, and you really want to be with them for the rest of your life (Skye, 26, relationship).

The most common justification explicitly offered by participants for wanting to marry is the imagined commitment marriage brings to a relationship. Finding a partner to love and commit to, and to have a partner willing to commit to them, is clearly an important issue for young women. Moreover, for participants like Nina and Gillian, the performative act of becoming married ascertains, reinforces and cements the existing level of perceived commitment to the relationship. Nina (29, relationship) positions marrying as performative in that for her it brings 'extra commitment'. While stressing that she would not marry her partner unless she believed he was '110 per cent committed to me and our relationship', she attaches meaning to the act of getting married as a performative utterance of commitment, where by becoming married she (and hopefully her husband) are embodied as markedly committed, which she finds desirable and reassuring. Many participants share this view, that the performative aspect of the marriage ceremony adds meaning and security to a relationship. Gillian (24, engaged) for example, suggests that in marrying, 'you're closer, you feel like it's so much more stable'.

Nina and Gillian attach meaning to marriage as a socially legitimate contract, which serves to formalise the existing commitment they feel in their relationships. So the act of formalising the relationship through marriage does not necessarily provide or enable more commitment. However, the performance of formally marrying does reinforce the belief that the relationship is totally committed by publicly demonstrating their love and commitment, and by investing money in a wedding (Driscoll, 1998).

For Deb, marriage provides the formal recognition of the emotional commitment she desires, where the action of agreeing to marry reassures her about the stability of the relationship.

> Once I was married, I could relax…like, I knew we were committed (Deb, 33, married).

This appears to support Giddens' (1992) claim that in late modernity the attachment to a husband acts as a facilitator of independence for women. This alludes to the paradox that marriage is used as a means of achieving a measure of autonomy for women. The idea of facilitation of independence is echoed in this data through the narratives of participants like Deb, where an element of relief upon marrying (and therefore making the ultimate commitment) was often identified by participants, lessening the time, energy and anxiety that were previously directed at finding 'someone to grow old with', enabling a more 'stable' (relaxed) existence. Marriage, therefore, potentially helps to create a form of

social order for the individual, where a woman's life can be experienced as 'making sense' (Giddens, 1992). Further, the discourse of marriage enabling greater autonomy for women is often reflected, in that participants position marriage as a platform from which to achieve other life goals. Marriage in this way acts to legitimise femininity as identity and 'qualify' women as competent mature individuals: this is discussed in depth in Chapter Seven. A further implication is that young women experience levels of tension and anxiety until they find a husband or life companion.

Marriage as 'more'

Of the women who expressed a desire to marry (83 per cent of the total), 94 per cent stressed the 'extra something' marriage brings to a relationship. This opinion of marriage as 'more', is based upon the participants' view that love and commitment are the most important elements they look for in a long term relationship. This also reiterates the meaning of marrying as performative (Austin, 1962), with the utterance of phrases like 'I do' and being declared 'husband and wife' retaining cultural importance.

> I believe marriage is a unique type of relationship; a more committed relationship status, because the couple declare publicly their love and commitment to each other for life (Prue, 24, single).

Marriage for these participants holds both tangible and intangible extras for an intimate relationship. The signing of a contract and the public declaration of marriage were frequently cited as creating a more stable union, as Cherie (33, single) says, 'marriage is more locked together by the law'. By directly referencing marriage as an institution rooted in the law, Cherie emphasises the power of the institution in terms of giving credence to emotions and feelings demonstrated in the relationship. For both Cherie and Eliza (31, single) who stress the promise to stay with your partner, the law underwrites the heterosexual love contract of formal marriage (Smart, 1984; Brook, 2007). The view amongst participants who desire to marry is that marriage means a greater commitment to be faithful to, and stay with, your partner, than de facto or cohabitating partnerships, given the perceived added difficulty of severing the marital relationship.

> I think for me it's the security of knowing that both of you aren't going anywhere, at least there's some statement that you're not going anywhere (Jessica, 23, engaged).

Marital dissolution

Many imply that by formally marrying, they would be more inclined to work through marital problems, in order to maintain the relationship as they promised. There exists a common conception that it would be much easier to 'break up' or 'walk away' from a non-marital relationship. This supports existing research (for example White, 2003) arguing that marriage is constructed as binding, as the most permanent and committed relationship option, one which partners are publicly and socially obliged to remain in for

life. Dissolving a marriage is identified as more difficult, legally and emotionally, than separating from a de facto other relationship.

> You're not so likely to just up and leave each other on a whim…you'd think about it more (Cherie, 33, single).

Looking at the interview data overall, the 'complications' involved with the separation of assets as well as the bureaucratic tasks (and their costs) which must be completed in order to divorce are often nominated as major obstacles to dissolving a marital relationship. As Gillian (24, engaged) highlights, divorce is constructed as a time and energy-consuming process, 'harder to get out of with all the shit you have to go through to get a divorce', and as Karen (19, single) asserts, when unmarried, 'it is easier to just walk away'.

Emotional energy is also believed to be much greater in the dissolving of marital relationships, linked to a greater level of commitment. Where marriage is symbolic of public commitment and performance, particularly for those who view the wedding ceremony as meaningful, divorce is recognised as failure. As Sharon (31, married) admits, 'you promised in front of everyone you love to stay with him, 'til death do us part''. Divorce should therefore be avoided unless a socially legitimate justification exists. These reasons include a husband being unfaithful, domestic violence, and a 'loveless' marriage.

Sharon's comments highlight the symbolic relevance of marriage both as an institution and as a performative statement, where meaning is attached to the social and legal obligations to remain together. It would seem that although traditional ideas about marriage as an unbreakable life partnership have eroded, and divorce has become an everyday occurrence, a belief in the promise to remain together remains significant. Sharon's comment above emphasises the social pressure to honour the contractual agreement made in marriage. In reminding herself of her vows when 'things aren't great', she attaches meaning to the commitment associated with traditional marriage, in contrast to the late modern model of the 'confluent', 'pure relationship' proposed by Giddens (1992), where a partner remains in a relationship only as long as it is personally beneficial. More meaning is attached here to marriage as tradition and institution. This is far from resembling Giddens' model of contemporary intimate relationships.

Sharon wants to remain in her marriage 'through thick and thin', in order to honour the traditional promise and performative statement she made. Eliza (31, single) shares Sharon's opinion of the importance of the promise made in marrying. She also acknowledges the 'for life' quality of marriage commitment, 'despite any problems you might have'. Throughout these narratives there is evidence of the pervasive discourse of marriage as a significant life obligation, as well as considerable nostalgia for a traditional notion of marital fidelity.

When discussing divorce, the romantic love discourse was prevalent. Despite considerable acknowledgement of current high divorce rates, 76 per cent of interview and focus group participants who desire marriage share the belief that their own marriage will definitely survive the inevitable tests and hurdles, with a distinct 'it won't happen to me' perspective running throughout the participant group. While Jade (20, single) acknowledges that 'lots of divorces happen', she stresses the importance of wedding vows: 'once those are made, I won't ever get divorced'. Jade's standpoint is shared by Gemma (18, cohabiting) who notes that marriage is 'for life', and interestingly, that she does not 'believe' in divorce. The romantic love discourse is evidenced by the strong implication that marriage will last forever, and that, although considerable effort must be made to remain married, as Gemma says, 'somehow it'll work'.

A range of comments implied that the institution of marriage itself cannot be blamed for divorce rates or marital breakdown. It is not the meaning of marriage, or marital life per se that contributes to divorce, but individual spouses. Instead of attaching blame to the structure of the institution, divorce is believed to be due to a lack of foresight (rushing into a marriage), a lack of effort by the spouses once married, or is put down to fate. Some participants are aware of the dangers and likelihood of marital breakdown, resulting in their desire to consider marriage 'more carefully', and attaching even more importance to the sanctity of the institution (Pocock, 2003). Divorce was often imagined

as something that just 'happens' to people because of fate or destiny, so it does not trouble the ideal of marriage as a legitimating achievement for women.

There was a conventional and somewhat idealised common standpoint on divorce. However, this 'it won't happen to me' belief runs simultaneously parallel with an acknowledged and distinct set of conditions and contingencies for 'appropriate divorce'. In line with popular discourse, a husband's infidelity, or domestic violence, are both viewed as appropriate grounds for divorce, as Jane (19, single) says, 'if he hit me, or cheated on me I'd leave him just like that'. Some participants go further, asserting that if the marital relationship does not 'work' in an emotional sense, it is appropriate to divorce. The notion that over time people's personalities may change, and that emotional incompatibility is potentially possible is raised by Natalie (20, relationship) who says 'people do change, and you never know what's going to happen'. Louise (35, relationship), says she would 'rather get divorced than stay in an unhappy marriage'. So we see evidence here of the contradiction between the hopes and ideals of for-life marriage as 'til death us do part', and the somewhat detraditionalized socially acceptable justifications and eventualities that enable divorce to logically occur – without troubling the ideals of marriage. Of course, whether these assertions are just idealized attitudes or have the potential to be realistically carried out in practice is more difficult to uncover.

Thus, although ideas about marrying and divorcing vary among participants, belief and faith in marriage in principle remains dominant and powerful. This is in line with

Pocock (2003) who suggests that, somewhat counter-intuitively, increased rates of divorce increase the importance and meaning attached to marriage. As Morgan points out, this also supports the early functionalist view of Talcott Parsons (1956) who argued that 'higher divorce rates do not necessarily indicate a flight from the institution of marriage but may, paradoxically, reflect the high expectations that individuals have of marital relations' (Morgan, 1975:27). This pattern may also apply in contemporary society.

Marriage and Children

Marriage as a socially and institutionally recognised relationship, part of a traditional linear life trajectory associated with security and commitment, holds strong appeal for young women who desire to have children.

> Before having children I would prefer to have the commitment
> of being married (Hannah, 21, relationship).

Marriage is located as the natural and 'best' way to bring up children, where the ideology of 'the good mother' is ever present. The marital relationship, associated here with security, commitment and stability, lends itself to dominant constructions of appropriate parenting. Ashley (24, unmarried – not currently in a relationship) talks of the 'irresponsible' nature of parents who have children without having 'security' and a

'stable income', both characteristics she explicitly associates with marriage. Janet concurs,

> I don't know what would be worse…not having kids or [not having] a husband…but then you can't have the kids without the husband so I want a husband more! (Janet – 26, relationship).

Janet's comments underline the legacy of the normative discourse of marriage as heterosexual and enabling the nuclear family, which is assumed to be the natural or most suitable model for having and raising children. This notion that 'you can't have the kids without the husband' also highlights the anxiety felt by women throughout the participant group about being a single mother. These views may imply a distinct awareness or perception of single motherhood as a stigmatised subject position for women.

The notion that it is more difficult to get out of a marital relationship is ever present. This is linked to the construction of marriage as a firmer agreement to jointly bring up children, grounded in the assumption that two heterosexual biological parents of the child are the ideal (Morgan, 2000). Marriage therefore, is constructed as taking responsibility for the children, through formalising the relationship.

> I would hate to be *just* in a relationship but not married with a man, and then us break up. I'd hate to put the kids through that. I want something a little bit more…secure (Tess, 27, relationship).

Cathy (29, single) asserts that raising children alone would be very difficult, and along with many others, implicitly acknowledges that it is almost always women who become single parents following relationship breakdown (Hancock, 2002). There is much evidence in the literature to support this perception, confirming that a considerable proportion (perhaps as many as half) of children will lose their father following relationship breakdown (Cherlin, 1992; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). The legal and cultural traditions of the mother assuming sole parental responsibility following relationship breakdown have been slow to change (Kelly, 2006; Lamb, 2004; Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004). In short, single motherhood is positioned by participants as extremely undesirable. This is in line with Jamieson (1998:48), who notes that the prevailing 'pathologizing of single mothers as intrinsically unfit parents…reasserts the importance of fathers'. This was particularly so amongst those participants who inextricably link the marital relationship with the 'locking in' of the husband/father to family responsibilities. Thus the curbing of the man's capacity to leave the parental dyad is an implicit advantage for women of the binding 'sexual contract' (Pateman, 1988) of marriage relevant to the bearing and raising of children, where marriage serves to ensure the economic and emotional provision for children. This also encodes the conviction – unfortunately grounded in statistical fact - that men are much more likely to 'walk away' from the family, and not take responsibility for their children, than women.

There is also an awareness of the belief that the presence of children serves to cement a marital relationship. This is supported by some research (Ono, 1998; Manting, 1994;

Waite and Lillard, 1991) which asserts that childless marital couples are up to twice as likely to divorce as those with children. Where the birth of children within a marital relationship is believed to indicate increased commitment and stability (Sayer and Bianchi, 2000), it is plausible in this case that participants, desiring a husband for life, and anxious about divorce, position marriage and children as complementary and mutually reinforcing the security of the family.

Although many stressed they would not judge others who had children out of wedlock (reinforced by responses in the survey), they expressed a strong desire to have the perceived moral, stable and committed marital relationship before children were considered. Many, like Gemma (18, unmarried – cohabiting) would 'rather' have children once married.

> I just think it's the right thing to do (Gemma, 18, – cohabiting).

Interestingly, although marriage is certainly the ideal and normative form of relationship for having children, there are negative associations attached to women who marry when pregnant or marry, as Lisa (29, unmarried – cohabiting) suggests, 'just for the sake of the children'. Marriage, although projected as ideal for having children, is viewed as a decision that should be based on love between partners, not as Melissa (20, cohabiting) notes, 'for appearances'. This highlights the somewhat detraditionalized idea that it is perhaps 'better' for a woman to be a single parent rather than marry an unsuitable partner simply because of his paternity. Pre-marital childbirth is acknowledged to

increase pressure to marry, in turn increasing the likelihood of divorce (Hewitt et al, 2005).

Polly (22, relationship) further dismisses women who marry 'just because kids are involved', suggesting that if women bow to 'old fashioned' cultural or religious pressures, their marriage is not as credible as one based purely on love. This also rings true for Nicole (23, relationship), who draws attention to, as she puts it, the 'embarrassing' idea of visibly pregnant brides. For Nicole, the wedding day should be when a woman is looking her best, and moreover should not be undermined by other people's potential cynicism regarding the reasons for marrying. The symbol of the visibly pregnant bride opposes idealised discourses of femininity, 'good mothering' and the competent mature woman, and is frowned upon explicitly by just over half of the interviewees, and implied by many more.

It is clear from the above evidence that marriage retains central importance for the young women interviewed. The performative act of getting married is used as a mechanism or tool for the construction of a relationship which symbolises commitment, stability and permanence within the life course, an idealised relationship environment for the bearing and raising of children, where nostalgia for the 'traditional' and conventional institution of marriage is present.

Although 'family values' style attitudes permeate narratives to a great degree, there was also some evidence of detraditionalization, in attitudes at least, towards raising children in alternative relationship environments. Regardless of some divergence though, the ideals remain traditional. Marriage is located by participants as holding a highly significant place in the female life trajectory. Yet the realities of marriage breakdown were evident also. Even the desirable qualities marriage brings to a 'love' relationship carried a number of contingencies. The following section discusses pre-marital 'tests', and the role marriage plays in the transition into adulthood and settling down.

Pre-marital 'tests'

> How could you marry someone and think yes I want to spend my whole life with them before you've done other things? Before you've lived with them, gone away together, before you've gone through big humungous fights? (Rachel, 28, married).

There is strong evidence in this study to suggest that women 'test' their intimate relationship before (or even sometimes by) entering a marriage. These 'rational' actions are in contrast to the imagined ideal of 'the one', and the connotations of perfection, 'foreverness', and destiny. Why, we might ask, does one need to test a relationship with a partner brought to you by fate, with whom you are destined to be forever?

The most relevant pre-marital 'test' implied by participants is that of pre-marital cohabitation, which is most often identified as a precursor to marriage, not as an alternative. 'Indirect' marriages have become normative (De Vaus, 2004) with around 72 per cent of couples living together before marriage. This statistic is certainly reflected in this qualitative data set. Not only is pre-marital cohabitation constructed as desirable, it is identified as a necessary step in the relationship (and life) trajectory for many interview participants.

> Of course I'd move in with them first! (Angela, 19, relationship).

Lisa (29, relationship) describes pre-marital cohabitation as a 'hugely important' 'good test' in terms of ensuring compatibility between partners, while Haley (20, relationship) views marrying prior to cohabiting as naïve and foolish. Pre-marital cohabitation is identified by participants such as Rachel (28, married) as a 'rational' or 'strategically intelligent' action. As Billie (18, relationship) suggests, pre-marital cohabitation ensures 'you're not just setting yourself up for a big fall', or, according to Rowena (32 – married) 'asking for trouble'. In short, pre-marital cohabitation is perceived as a training ground for marital living. Choosing to marry is situated as *the* decision to make in terms of adult relationships, and is thus imagined as a decision which needs to be taken very seriously. As Barbara (20, relationship) notes, 'with marriage it's different, it's not just another relationship, you have to think it through and not be clouded by romance'. This is an interesting comment about the place of romance. Barbara's standpoint is shared by many, who while attaching importance to the romantic love complex by alluding to

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romance, fate and destiny, position the choice of marriage partner as a 'rational' decision that should be reached through careful consideration. As Jessica (23, engaged) says, 'it could be the biggest decision you ever have to make, that's why I took a while to weigh up the situation with Mike'.

This is a very important late modern trend in marriage selection, and emphasises participants' desire to 'practice' married life through living together before committing to the marriage itself (Manting, 1996). This 'common sense' view of pre-marital cohabitation is somewhat undermined by some findings in empirical research, which suggest that contrary to the 'common sense' views that participants have of pre-marital cohabitation as a relationship test, statistics indicate that couples who have cohabited prior to marriage are equally, or more likely, to experience subsequent relationship breakdown and divorce (Sarantakos, 1994; De Vaus et al, 2003a). A possible determining factor could be that those who enter into pre-marital cohabitation have a greater union length than those who cohabit only once married, obscuring important variables behind the crude statistics (DeMaris and Rao, 1992). According to Hewitt et al (2005), the most plausible explanation for this is a 'selectional effect', where people who cohabit are less conventional in their beliefs and thus have less commitment to marriage; this makes them more open to divorce (Lillard et al, 1995). This is linked to the notion that those who refuse to cohabit prior to marriage are considered to be much more 'traditional' in their thinking toward relationships, so will be more reluctant to divorce. Characteristics that lead people to resist cohabitation may therefore also directly be a factor in resisting

divorce (Bruderl et al, 1999) which may explain the statistical difference. This is the case with the six interview participants who cite religious beliefs as vital to their decision making.

However, participants who are not religious remain focussed on the more conventional ideals of marriage for life, while actively pursuing pre-marital cohabitation as a perceived method of ensuring everyday relationship stability. Essentially, 'indirect' marriages have become commonplace for many types of women and men and as a result, differences in the rates of marital dissolution and marital stability between direct and indirect marriages have diminished (De Vaus et al, 2003b). Pre-marital cohabitation appears to make less difference now than before to the chance of a marriage surviving (De Vaus et al, 2003b).

Adulthood and 'settling down'

Marriage is constructed in the majority of accounts as the cornerstone of adult living. Discursive constructions of 'settling down' can be separated into two fields: emotional settling, and everyday responsibilities. The ideal of emotional settling remains appealing to all participants. 'Settling down' is strongly associated by participants with stability and security, linking back to desires for love, commitment and growing old with a partner. In this context, 'settling down' invokes feelings of comfort, and is associated

with the onset of middle age (around 35-40). Yet 'settling down' is simultaneously positioned as 'constrictive' and 'suffocating' for anyone younger than middle age, synonymous with being tied down or stuck in a rut. 'Settling down' as synonymous with marriage was frequently discussed by participants, with a dichotomy in meaning arising between positive and negative connotations of the term.

Just over a quarter of participants (19 of 75) perceive 'settling down' to be desirable, particularly in relation to emotional stability and security. Linked to the perceived commitment imbued by the marital relationship, 'settling down' is constructed as a tool for enabling and maintaining ontological security (Giddens, 1992), and avoiding loneliness as a significant life 'risk' (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Heidi (22, engaged) 'can't wait to settle down, just settle into living, and children, and growing old together'. As Heidi implies, ontological security is enabled through the committed companionship that marriage brings, particularly in terms of everyday living. In discussing her desire for routine in living arrangements, as well as the security she associates with the traditional nuclear family, 'having the house, the kids, the car, the dog…'. Heidi emphasises the attractiveness of 'settling down' in the life trajectory. 'Settling down' is also located as positive in terms of achieving adult status and being perceived as a legitimate and authentic woman. 'Settling down' is linked with maturity and living what is popularly viewed to be a 'proper adult' life. For Jade (20, single), 'settling down' is appealing as she believes she will be taken more seriously by family, friends and colleagues once she has the responsibilities she

associates with adult living, namely 'getting a mortgage, health insurance, and saving money for having kids'. The relevance of marriage to participants in terms of their perceived positions in their micro-communities as 'mature' or 'legitimate' women is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

In popular discourse marriage and 'settling down' are inextricably linked. On the negative side, there are associations of it being possibly dreary and connoting a lack of independence, especially for people under the age of 30 (Jamieson et al, 2003). Marriage remains almost universally desirable, but for most participants the meanings of marriage are mediated and manipulated in their ideal construction so as to avoid traditional pitfalls of marital settling down, namely routine, monotony and responsibilities that act as a threat to autonomy and independence.

> I don't like the idea of getting into a routine where everything's
> the same old…day in day out. The idea of being in a rut isn't very
> desirable (Sascha, 30, cohabiting).

For Keely (24, relationship), marriage and the associated commitment - children and responsibilities - entails a loss of freedom, where it is no longer possible to 'do what you want when you want'. Previous studies (including Jackson, 1997; Lees, 1993; Sharpe 1994; and Mansfield and Collard, 1988) have identified ambivalence regarding marriage in terms of its association with 'settling down'. This ambivalence is certainly evident for participants in this study. Ambivalence here stems from conflicting imaginings of the appeal, or lack thereof, of 'settling down'. Crudely, discursive constructions of 'settling

down' in this research can be separated into positive ideals for emotional stability and achieving legitimate adult status, and negatively as entailing a loss of independence or freedom or becoming 'stuck in a rut', most commonly articulated in terms of chronological benchmarks of life quality.

> The security of settling down is appealing, yeah…but I want to do a lot of other things first (Hannah, 21, relationship).

Since 'settling down' involves maturity and routine, at a deeper level the struggle between freedom and stability is invoked. For most participants, and in line with the findings of Jamieson et al (2003) 'settling down' is something to postpone, to imagine in the future, something that 'happens when you are older' (Elizabeth, 20, single). For Elizabeth and Hannah, settling down will come later in their imagined life trajectories. This reflects ABS trends that indicate women are now postponing marriage until later in their adult lives (ABS, 2008a), and child-bearing until even later.

In contrast to the arguments of Mansfield and Collard (1988), settling down for some participants is separated from marriage as such. Participants such as Skye contest the idea that marriage results in inevitable routine.

> Settling down does appeal, but I also want to keep doing new things…and I think you can do that when you're married too…just means you have someone to share in all the new things with you (Skye, 26, relationship).

Participants like Naomi (27, married) and Amy (34, married), while acknowledging the association between marriage and 'settling down', do not position their relationships as being any more 'settled' than they were prior to marriage. Amy and her husband have chosen to continue to rent a property, and while they both work and plan to have children in the future, are actively opposed to 'settling' into a routine whilst they still consider themselves to be 'young'. Current priorities of travel and 'enjoying life' conflict with pressures from family to live as a more traditional married couple, 'get real' and 'get into real estate'; 'Right now the idea of being stuck with a huge home loan is old and boring' (Amy, 34, married). Yet Amy's identity as a married woman depicts certain ideas to her micro-community. She is aware, for example of the expectations which have seemingly fallen automatically into place upon marrying, namely buying a house and planning children. The decision not to immediately follow this perceived 'normal' linear trajectory of events following marriage marginalises her in terms of her legitimate identity as a married woman. This is discussed in more depth in Chapter Seven.

In summary, while 'pre-marital tests', particularly cohabitation, have become commonplace and desirable, the role marriage plays in terms of everyday living is somewhat contested in terms of how it is linked to notions of 'settling down'. Overall, 'settling down' - buying a home, children and falling into a routine - remains implicitly attractive to all, as long as it can be postponed until the right time in a marriage. Within

this shifting paradigm of desirable everyday adult living, marriage retains central focus, particularly in terms of 'being' a married woman during middle age. The following section discusses the place of marriage in identity construction during middle and old age.

Middle age to old age

> It is less material foundation and love than the fear of being alone that holds marriages and the family together. What threatens or is feared beyond marriage and the family is perhaps the most stable foundation of marriage, despite all the crises and conflicts: loneliness (Beck 1992:114).

Middle age

A consistent theme across age and relationship status cohorts, of those who wanted to marry, was the desirability of living eventually as a married woman. Being a wife is negatively contrasted with being single, particularly approaching middle age.

When discussing middle-aged and unmarried women, the vast majority of participants did not differentiate between being married and being in a relationship, implying that if a middle aged woman is in a relationship, she is assumed to be married. This assumption implicitly locates the practices of cohabitation and non-cohabiting sexual relationships to a young age period, up to around the age of 35. So strong was the naturalised idea of marriage as *the* mature relationship that many participants discussed the dichotomy between middle-aged married women, and middle-aged single women, without consideration of middle-aged women in 'alternative' forms of relationships. The stigma of a 40 year old unmarried woman, for example, being labelled a lesbian, old maid or spinster, was prevalent. The married woman is imagined as the most competent and able older female. The married woman is therefore central to discourses of appropriate femininity for motherhood, middle and old age, while alternative labelling connotes deviance and negativity.

There exists the assumption that an unmarried woman 'cannot find a husband', or is an 'old maid' or a lesbian. Negative labels like 'spinster' or 'old maid' imply the woman in question has failed to achieve the perceived universal goal of securing a lifelong committed partner. The unpartnered older lesbian is also a stigmatised position. An older woman in a long-term lesbian committed partnership – which looks and behaves very much like a marriage - is likely to be seen as less of a 'failure', even in the heterosexual community, than a single older lesbian. The assumption that marriage is the only form of serious relationship in adult life demonstrates the naturalness the institutional elements of

marriage still capture in contemporary culture, as well as the desire to do what is socially 'normal' (Smock, 2004).

In line with Giddens (1992), the data from interviewees suggest a definite anticipation of the inevitability of marriage (see also Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Beck-Gernsheim 2002). What exactly that marriage will entail, or when it will happen, varies across the participant group. Moreover, the implication that an unmarried woman in middle age cannot find a husband and has thus 'underachieved' in terms of social legitimacy, is identified as a reflection of her 'difficult' personality or looks. This constructs a correlation between a woman's marital status in middle age, and her perceived level of attractiveness. As Kerryn (21, relationship) says, 'if you're middle aged and don't have a husband...well it doesn't look good', while Naomi (27, married) highlights the patriarchal aspect of this stigmatisation: 'As my husband says, if a woman hasn't found herself someone by then, she's not worth finding'.

While the vast majority of participants express a desire to marry, a stringent set of circumstances emerges to frame how the goal of finding a husband can be achieved. For Jane, it is acceptable to strongly desire a husband, but there is a strict framework in which this desire can manifest. Marrying, and thus securing a husband, is constructed as a reward, a bonus for effort put into a long term relationship, where an element of relief is felt upon marrying. Deb (33, married) made the same point. Further, this relationship should follow a particular trajectory in order to comply with the romantic discourse

prevalent throughout discursive constructions of intimate relationships. In brief, the relationship should begin as casual, fun, and gradually become more serious. As the relationship progresses, the serious committed partnership develops, along with the negotiation of 'pre-marital tests'. Engagement and marriage then follow.

> You want to find the one guy and then marriage comes later (Jane, 19, single).

In this sense the 'appropriate' relationship trajectory constructed by participants reflects Giddens' (1992) 'pure relationship', in that it should be effortlessly consensual. However, it then develops into the more or less traditional institution of formal marriage.

The strength of this appropriate relationship trajectory as a discourse of legitimate social practice serves to marginalise alternative trajectories or non-marital relationship practices, resulting in the stigmatisation of other women who do not conform. The so-called 'bunny-boiler' woman who is setting out to 'trap' a potential husband is a good example of this, in that it is inappropriate to set out to ruthlessly obtain a husband. The pejorative term 'bunny-boiler' entered the common lexicon following the release of the 1987 film *Fatal Attraction*. It describes desperate and obsessive female behaviour - a spurned woman's refusal or inability to accept the casual nature of a sexual encounter with a married man that ends in acts of violent revenge. The origin of the term is derived from a scene in the film where a scorned woman (played by Glenn Close), seeking revenge for a lack of commitment from an ex-lover (played by Michael Douglas), boils his daughter's pet rabbit in a pot. The term was used by some interviewees, who may not have seen the original film, to refer to a woman who obsessively, possessively,

desperately and/or jealously desires a male partner. As Jodie (23, single) says, 'I'm not like one of those stalker women, you know, the psycho bunny boilers'. The emphasis is on the woman's covert pursuit and targeting of a particular male with the intention of securing a committed and monogamous relationship.

According to the logic of the trajectory, a woman should be casually looking for a date or boyfriend, who may or may not eventually become 'husband material' later in the life narrative. Thus, participants go to considerable lengths to distance themselves from 'other' women they perceive as deviant, where 'trapping a man' is not compatible with discourses of appropriate femininity. The notion of 'trapping a man' is indicated by Jane to be underhand and immoral, but also serves as a reflection on the woman's desperation to formally marry, not simply to find and remain with a partner.

> God I don't want to be one of those women who…all they want to
> do is get a husband…I mean, like, it's a bit desperate isn't it
> (Jane, 19, single).

There are many other examples of this stigmatisation of 'other' women present in participants' narratives of relationships, including women who marry too quickly (have not been in the relationship for 'long enough'), women who marry too young (under 24), women who marry because of a pregnancy, women who marry because they want the experience of 'settling' and do not think they could find a 'better' husband, and women who marry in order to have sex with their husband because they do not believe in having sex before marriage. These negative categorizations of other marrying women construct

a stringent framework for the appropriate relationship trajectory that reflects the dominance of the romantic discourse of marriage in everyday life, in popular culture and media.

It is notable though, that many of the participants interviewed stressed their discomfort at prevailing stereotypes and stigmas around marriage.

> Other people might think that women of a certain age should be married, but I think that's stupid. It's hard not to judge people…
> I'd like to think I wouldn't prejudge women (Matilda, 30, engaged).

Matilda discusses her awareness of the stigma associated with being an unmarried middle aged woman. Her narrative highlights the degree of censoring in terms of having appropriate opinions of middle-aged unmarried women. Matilda is aware that it would not be considered 'nice' to judge other women. However the temptation to do so is ever present, as it serves to imply one's own moral superiority over other women. This discomfort with, and awareness of, the stigmatisation of unmarried middle-aged women does not necessarily lead to any less judgement of 'others'. Melissa, for example, adamantly assured the interviewer that she personally does not feel this way, however was aware of what 'most people' thought:

> I wouldn't think that, no way. Like if I had a (female) colleague who was like forty something and wasn't wearing a ring or something, I, like I wouldn't reckon she was gay or bad or desperate or anything (Melissa, 20, cohabiting).

Here, despite expressing her discomfort with the viewpoint, by linking the terms 'gay', 'bad', and 'desperate', Melissa strongly implies that being single (where the married or single dichotomy applies) is a negative element of a woman's life and that married (and heterosexual) women are in some way morally superior. There was a considerable degree of self-censoring in terms of participants' opinions of 'other' women. For example, Amanda (21, single) comments on her reluctance to be judgemental towards other women, whilst admitting that she would probably share the opinion of, in her words, 'most people', in making the assumption that middle-aged unmarried women were 'dodgy, couldn't get a man or couldn't keep a man'.

Despite verbalising their strong desire not to judge others, there remains a strong impetus, across the board, to play out the perceived role of the married woman. It is seen to be an achievement to a certain extent, but more so, to provide exemption from failure and judgement by family, friends or colleagues. Even those participants who showed ambivalence towards marriage, or indeed were opposed to it either as a relationship form or as an institution, were aware of the stigma associated with being an unmarried middle-aged woman. Thus, whilst marriage is not directly perceived explicitly as an achievement, it exists as a measure to avoid the stigma of underachievement within the gendered discourse of 'becoming' a woman as a lifelong task (de Beauvoir 1949/1997). This censoring of remarks about 'other' stigmatised

women is evidence for the existence of a strongly shaping moral discourse of gender rather than simply a range of private, individual opinions about unmarried older women.

Old age – growing old alone?

The positive desire for companionship and love runs parallel with the negative emotions of anxiety and fear about not finding a suitable partner ('the one'), and thus growing old alone. As Rebecca (22, cohabiting) says, 'I want to get married because I don't want to be alone for the later years of my life. Again the assumption that one is either married or single (and alone) is evident in Rebecca's comments.

> I get scared that I won't [find 'the one'] and I'll be lonely...Especially when you're older; old people, they're more lonely, they have less of a social life, and they stay in more, I think it would be horrible if you didn't have someone (Sam, 19, single).

As these quotes show, in what participants view as an increasingly individualised society, there is considerable anxiety regarding what old age will entail. Marriage in this sense serves as a strategy to enable the sharing of problems with a husband, as well as financial and emotional support. Nicole (23, relationship) desires someone to share her life with, and pointedly remarks, 'no one wants to die alone'. Marriage was identified by all participants who said they desired to marry as a mechanism to prevent loneliness in old age, through the means of securing a lifelong partner to help fulfil basic needs.

The impact of marital status as a determinant of levels of loneliness is well established in the literature, for example the empirical work by Peters and Liefbroer (1997), who assert that older people with partners are less lonely than those without partners. However, there is also a considerable body of work investigating issues of loneliness for the aged which suggests the realities do not absolutely reflect the myth of old people as synonymous with isolation and thus loneliness. For example, Essex and Nam (1987:93) suggest that although loneliness is an issue for middle to older aged women, it is 'not as pervasive as the folk myth would lead us to believe'. Further, some studies suggest that it is in fact the marital relationship that causes much of the loneliness for older married women, where strategies to combat this loneliness and increase reported happiness, focus on the importance of friendship and younger generation family members, not the marital relationship itself (Pinquart, 2003).

The link between marriage and children further compounds this perspective, as children are imagined as being willing and able to look after and potentially support their parents during their old age.

> Like, it's not *why* I wanna have kids, but you know? My family, we, the kids, look out for mum and dad now…it's gonna be cool having our kids when me and my husband are getting on [older] (Natasha, 35, married).

The importance of familial resources, particularly social support from adult children, is well documented (Brody, 1990; Pinquart, 2003), while Koropeckyj-Cox (1998) found that childless women are more vulnerable to loneliness and depression in old age.

Perhaps predictably, despite awareness of substandard welfare provisions for aged people, participants' perception of growing old with a partner are extremely romanticised and idealised. There is no mention, for example, of differential mortality, which plausibly puts elderly women into increased isolation and loneliness after the death of their partner/husband. These factors combine to imply that the anxiety felt by many participants about growing old alone may not be 'solved' by marriage as such. The anxiety linked to growing old alone could be a reflection of a more general need for ontological insecurity, combined with the desire for the conventional romantic type relationship.

Conclusion

Marriage or a version of the marital relationship seems still to be the main way young women seek reassurance in terms of their 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1992) in the life course, even though independence, autonomy and wage-earning are now components of the contemporary discourse of adulthood. The appeal of marriage lies in both its familiarity as a relationship and an institution, as well as its existence as a socially

acknowledged and legitimate form of relationship.   Marriage is certainly perceived to decrease uncertainty in the life trajectory (Brines and Joyner, 1999).

An important aspect of the individualization thesis is that freedom from pre-modern or traditional social ties leads to increased uncertainty. This is evident in the narratives of interviewees. Individualisation as enhanced insecurity manifests itself in the various and multiple anxieties expressed by the women, especially not finding a suitable husband, and the fear of growing old alone. There was some evidence of detraditionalization. No longer is religion an important or even relevant reason to marry for these young women. However, the traditional stigma of the 'spinster' survives. Anxiety about entering middle aged as an unmarried woman, or being considered a disreputable or incompetent older woman remains very much prevalent. Yet there is no doubt that marriage does not mean exactly the same thing for these young women as it did for their mothers. Their accounts support Cherlin's (2004) suggestion that marriage is shifting from a marker of conformity to a marker of prestige (855).   The next chapter explores participants' constructions of marriage as socially legitimate, and examines the meanings attached to being a 'wife'.

Chapter Seven

Legitimacy, Authenticity and Competence:
Marriage as a Socially Acknowledged Relationship

Introduction

This chapter will explore the identity construction of being a 'wife', as a facilitator of legitimacy and competence, and as a method of establishing ontological security (Giddens, 1992). Marriage in this context symbolises self-identity as a competent and legitimate woman. Particular attention will be paid to how marriage and presenting the self as a 'wife' fits into the young women's lives and aspirations. The focus here is on the participants' subjective accounts of the ways in which they experience normative assumptions regarding marriage in their life course, at a time in history where young women have increased opportunities and choices about how to organize their life trajectories, yet simultaneously are exposed to traditional ideals of marriage and motherhood.

Marriage may no longer be the core experience of women's lives, however for most it compares favourably with alternative relationship and lifestyle choices in terms of comfort, security, and companionship (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). The institution of marriage, despite high divorce rates, continues to exist as the most powerful and widely acknowledged social contract (Ingraham, 1999). Marriage remains a key form of

social organisation, with its customs and rules interfacing with almost every sphere of social interaction (VanEvery, 1995). The feminist liberation struggle has arguably remained superficial. Although the deep structures of women's lives have not changed, attitudes and rules for legitimising behaviour have (Dench, 1996). The feminist critiques of marriage, while not achieving institutional gender equality, have to an extent transformed attitudes towards women's economic independence and male involvement in child-rearing.

In this research, most participants desire to marry, so as to establish their preferred identity as a competent and legitimate feminine woman. Butler (1990:141) theorises that gender is not something that one is, but that one 'does', following De Beauvoir's (1949:1) assertion that 'one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman'. There is considerable evidence here that the social construction of femininity is performed most definitively by being (or getting) married. This chapter examines the ways that marriage is perceived as an indicator of legitimacy, authenticity and competence for the discourse of femininity. Marriage is used by the participants in their presentation of self-identity to ensure (or at least aid) the establishment of ontological security.

'First comes love, then comes marriage...' – Appropriate life trajectories

Beck argues that in an age of reflexive modernity, or second modernity, individuals experience increased opportunity, but also increased risk, where freedom from previous or traditional social constraints results in increased uncertainty. Giddens (1992:28-29) agrees that in a reflexive modern age, lives are vulnerable to increased 'ontological insecurity', where there are 'an indefinite range of potential courses of action...open to individuals'. This leads to a striving for security and stability in terms of identity. People are forced to put themselves at the centre of their plans and reflexively construct their social biographies. The choice to marry (or indeed the ability to find and keep a husband) is now taken to be a reflection of a woman's personal identity and social legitimacy, rather than a reflection of religious beliefs, for example. As the previous chapter established, single (or unmarried) status is understood to signal a lack of motivation, agency or attractiveness of the individual woman.

Marriage, therefore, creates a form of social order for the female individual, where a woman's life can be experienced as 'making sense', and a 'certain' future can be established (Giddens, 1992). As Bawin-Legros (2004: 250) remarks, 'marriage and couple solidarity remain the best guarantees against precariousness'. 'Ontological security' is accomplished from feelings of stability and continuity in the life trajectory (Giddens, 1992). The young women in this study stressed the uniqueness of their situations, and their careful decision making. They were keenly aware of the personal decisions they must make to dictate their life trajectory. The fact that there are a range of

potentially social acceptable relationship, family, and work options for women now, appeared to create a sense of anxiety rather than liberation, as they sought to establish a legitimate feminine identity.

There is considerable empirical evidence to suggest that most women who are not married, or who have never married, do *want* to marry (Bock, 2000; Frazier, Arikan, Benson, Losoff and Maurer, 1996; Sharp and Ganong, 2007). Most never-married women have either not yet married, or have passively 'missed' the perceived 'window' for marriage in terms of age, in that they hold (or held) the expectation of becoming married, but have not, for some reason, found a suitable partner. In terms of the expectations of those interviewed, this certainly rang true. The younger women all expected to be married. They can be characterised as optimistically 'waiting' for a suitable husband.

I definitely reckon I will [get married] (Jane, 19, single).

Narratives from those in the younger cohort frequently include language that implies certainty about future marriage. The word 'definitely' was used by 20 of the 25 of the younger participants to describe their attitude towards marriage, and whether they will marry. They are happy to 'wait and see' what the future holds in terms of lifestyle and career, yet this apparent flexibility is juxtaposed with the necessity of having a husband. So they wonder for example, what their husband's personality will be like, how many children they will have, whether they will have children at all, how their career will develop, whether they will travel, and where they will live, but they do not wonder if

they will marry. Potential future lifestyle options are imagined and idealised, and there are a range of acceptable options. The one constant is that they will become married, and that will happen before they reach middle age. They do not mind when they will get married, although ideally it would be around the age of 26, and certainly before 35.

The timing of transitions - Missing the 'window'?

Those in the older cohort are much more open to the idea that they may not find a suitable husband, if they are not yet married, and their attitudes towards this are more pessimistic. They frame their desire for marriage as a 'hope' rather than a definite expectation. This is largely because their 'ideal' age for marriage is either their current age, or younger. They are all too aware of the pressure of time. If they are not currently in a relationship with a suitable future marriage partner, then finding a husband (and finding that husband the 'proper' way – see Chapter Six), before their biological capacity for child-bearing passes, is a matter of urgency.

Many of these older, never-married participants spoke candidly about how their views on marriage have changed since their teenage years and early twenties, particularly in relation to the optimism they once held. Cathy (29, single) and Eliza (31, single) have both 'let go' of dreams of getting married (although they still desire marriage), while Kirsten (35, relationship) told of how her parents 'had started spending my wedding fund'.

As women age and the time available for child-bearing decreases, the expectation for marriage and child-bearing is sometimes reconsidered or pushed back (Bock, 2000; Sharp and Ganong, 2007). Women may reconsider their expectation for child-bearing due to the absence of a husband or potential husband, or they may reconsider the importance or relevance in their life trajectory of both marriage and children. The pressure of the pervasive normative discourse of marriage and motherhood for women perhaps subsides as women age and are forced to consider (and reconsider) the life trajectory without a husband or children.

The timing of the transition into marriage features implicitly throughout interviewee accounts of life aspirations and family life. Marrying before the age of 24 is implied as immature – women who want to marry that early should not be settling down so soon – the marriage will never work. They should be out enjoying life, forging a career, travelling, and not be tied down. For Amanda (21, single) and Rowena (32, married), women who marry before the age of 24 have not yet had time to 'become who they are', while Sascha (30, cohabiting) says that 'you're not old enough to make that decision'. These opinions are typical, and imply that maturity is gained only once a woman is in her mid twenties. The mid to late twenties signifies the perceived ideal time for marriage, emphasising the link between marriage and maturity, as well as the importance and weight of the decision to marry; again emphasising the perception of marriage as 'for life'.

> It's for the rest of your life, you got to take time to be sure
> (Gillian, 24, engaged).

But the window of opportunity for women to marry at an 'appropriate' age is small. The median desired age for marrying amongst participants (from survey and interview data) was 27. Yet reaching the age of 30 is constructed as being synonymous with the onset of 'urgency' in finding or locking in a husband.

> [At the age of] 25…I'm hoping to sort of start finding someone….so I'd be able to be married to them for a few years before having kids…and you can see what married life is like before having kids (Sam, 19, single).

The early thirties are associated with beginning to 'settle down', creating a life suitable for having children.

> I want to be married for a while before we have kids. You know, I want to enjoy life with my husband, just the two of us (Sam, 19, single).

As can be seen from the above accounts, the period of transition between being 'single' (unmarried) and becoming a wife then mother, is ideally between the ages of 27 and 32. For those women who do not experience this ideal, there is realistically a maximum period of about ten years to achieve the perceived normative transition into wifehood and motherhood. Marrying before the age of 24 is perceived as 'too early', whilst approaching 35 is considered 'too late'.

The timing of this decision making and transitions seems crucial in my data, yet there are varying findings in other studies. For example, Settersten (1997) and Settersten and Hagestad (1996) assert that what they term 'cultural timetables' concerning entry into family formations are flexible, thus 'late' entry into marriage or child-bearing is perceived to be for the most part acceptable, and without serious negative consequences.

This contrasts with the empirical findings of Sharp and Ganong (2007), where the perception (and experiences) of negative consequences about 'missing' the normative period of entry into marriage and motherhood are strong. This latter finding supports my interview data. The perceived stigma associated with remaining unmarried in middle age is discussed in Chapter Six. The stigmatisation of unmarried women in their mid-thirties onwards is both imagined (of others) and experienced by single participants. The majority of the participants who included accounts of stigma were over the age of 30, however participants as young as 25 also offered detailed narratives of the stigma they expect to face as they approach middle age. The stress associated with remaining unmarried is also prevalent in participants' accounts of personal experience.

The appropriate relationship trajectory and avoiding stigma

The participants' narratives in this research thus infer the perception and ideal of a normative life course, a linear sequence of events comprising the 'appropriate' trajectory. As detailed in Chapter Six, a young woman 'should' ideally first look for a boyfriend whilst forging a career, and enjoying a social life characterised by freedom, 'fun' and a lack of responsibilities. In this sense, a young woman should be making decisions purely for the benefit of herself as an individual. Over time a romantic relationship should develop into a marital relationship, where decision-making is shared, and where a home suitable for child-rearing is established. Then, a woman 'should' take primary responsibility for child-rearing. A woman perhaps will then return to work (if desired) once children are at school age. Anything that deviates from this idealised linear

sequence of events in the life trajectory was marginalised or even judged negatively by participants.

Significantly, just being married is not considered enough to fulfil the identity of the 'competent' woman. There were many narratives in this research which documented the 'rules' for a legitimate marriage. Firstly, legitimate marriage should be temporally-specific, insofar as a woman should be an appropriate age, and have spent an appropriate time in the relationship with her prospective husband before she marries. Secondly, the nature of the relationship is important in that it must be perceived as committed, secure and stable. Finally, as Jen (29, relationship) puts it, the 'vital statistics' of the husband impact upon the level of legitimacy achieved by marrying. The potential 'appropriate' husband is imagined as someone who is reliable, stable, and affluent (or at least has the potential to be economically prosperous). All of these factors combine to evaluate the legitimacy of a given marriage, and details must 'fit the mould' in order for the marrying woman to be taken seriously.

Similarly, just being a wife may be a platform for creating a competent and legitimate feminine identity, but is not enough in itself. Living an 'appropriate' married life is also influential in attaining legitimacy. The legitimacy acquired by being a wife can be negated by failure to conform to a set of behaviours perceived as appropriate for the life trajectory, namely getting a mortgage, child-bearing, and raising those children in an 'appropriate' manner (particularly financial provision, and primary care by the mother within the home).

> I think once we're married, following that day, there's a list of
> things we need to aim for. The [buying of a] house is first
> (Gillian, 24, engaged).

The following section is concerned with some of the ways that marriage, and particularly the need to present the female self as legitimately married, impacts on the ideals and aspirations of the participants' life trajectories.

Married status and the construction of a legitimate and competent feminine identity

There is considerable evidence in participants' discursive constructions of marriage that marital status relates to the construction of identity, governance of the self, and effective 'performing' or presentation of the self. Goffman (1963) asserts that individuals, in this case women, are social actors, and as social actors engage in performances to provide those around them, their 'audiences', with impressions which are aimed at signifying the desired identity of the actor. According to Goffman, the 'front' created by the social actor on a microsociological level is made credible by constant and ritualistic performances of self-representation shaped by wider sociocultural environments. A straightforward method of gaining a credible identity is thus to create a 'front' that falls in line and is consistent with societal norms. Butler (1990), following West and Zimmerman (1987), argues that gender is something that is 'performed' through reiterative behaviours. It can be argued that participants in this research are 'performing' femininity, both in the interview, and prospectively in their life trajectory. They use the

discourse of marriage, and imagine or enact 'doing' being married, constructing themselves as competent and legitimate woman.

'Doing' being married in the workplace

The performative nature of 'doing' being married is perhaps most clearly explained through interview narratives of experiences in the workplace, where the status of being a married woman implies distinct privileges. All but one participant was engaged in some form of paid employment. Some were studying and working part-time, others worked part-time and cared for their children, while some were in full-time employment (see Chapter Five). The significance that the participants assigned to their paid work varied greatly within the cohort, but it appeared important to all of them that they were taken seriously in their chosen job or career, irrespective of the time they desired to remain in the role. All conveyed the idea that there was value in their chosen job, whether casual, temporary, or a career. Some believed intimate relationship status, and personal life, to be integral to their working experience; while others asserted that their personal life should have nothing to do with their job. However, all participants included subjective accounts of personal experiences *while* at work that were explicitly linked to intimate relationship status. Many stressed the frequency of conversations while at work about relationships, and the relationship status of themselves and others. To be considered capable and competent as a successful and mature legitimate woman in the workplace, being married is crucial. Marital status is important in the construction of identity and the presentation of the public female self at work. These young women were very aware

that by performing being married, female workers send a message to those around them that they are confidently 'settled' with their partner and in their lives.

> Being married, you know, it proves your maturity, 'cos you made that massive decision (Nicole, 23, relationship).

Deciding to get married and being married signify maturity and legitimate adult status.

Social relations in the workplace, and workplace relations, are reported to reinforce the stigmas associated with remaining single, particularly into middle age. Being a married woman in the workplace symbolises competence in that the woman must be desirable and attractive enough for, as Amanda (21, single) puts it, 'someone else [to] love you'. Participants imagine that being married will enable them to be more confident in their workplaces due to this assumed attractiveness and success in achieving marital status. Conversely, being unmarried in the workplace serves to position participants as requiring help or assistance in finding a husband, because single women are assumed to be in search of a long term partner. Many participants discussed the occurrence of 'matchmaking' at work, and single participants like Emily (22, single) and Jade (20, single) spoke of being 'set up' at work, with colleagues arranging 'dates' or potential suitors for them. Emily believes that this behaviour is commonplace, as it is a focal point of social relations in her workplace.

> Yeah everybody does it [match-makes] all the time. I always get asked if I'm seeing anyone, you know, seriously...with their view being to set me up on blind dates or whatever (Emily, 22, single).

The assumption here is that if you are single, particularly from your mid-twenties

onwards, you are in need of some kind of assistance from your female peers and workmates in locating a suitable partner. However, encouraging single colleagues in this way is perceived by most single participants as patronising.

> At work I really saw a difference once I was married. And it's bad but sometimes I catch myself doing it to the [single] girls too…you know, trying to set them up with guys…and I used to hate it! (Renee, 31, married).

Interestingly, the assumption is ever-present that finding a husband is a universal goal, even though some of the participants in this study were certainly not interested in finding a partner they considered to be 'husband material', at least not in the near future. They preferred to have 'dates' or 'hook ups', encounters they considered casual and synonymous with freedom and youth. Conventional romantic discourse is also perceived by participants as being prevalent in the workplace. Participants such as Ashley (24, single) perceive their workmates as 'traditional', and imagine that most colleagues believe that a woman is in some way 'not complete without a husband'. The assumption of most people that a woman 'needs' a husband is resented by participants, despite the fact that the presence of a husband is integral to the majority of participants' imagined life trajectories. The frequency of narratives describing experiences of being 'set up' at work, and the assumed underlying belief that a woman 'needs' a husband, emphasise the normative romantic discourse played out in the workplace.

Sarah (28, relationship) suggests that having the status of being married at work will set her reputation as 'being there to work'. She implies the ambiguity of a woman's legitimacy and competence as an unmarried single. The common belief is that single

women do not want to be single, and are thus stereotypically assumed to be 'anxious' 'hormonal' and 'unhappy' about their single status, thus potentially less productive at work.

> My boss always gets shitty with us [single female workers] 'cos he reckons all we do at work is gossip about our social lives. I guess he thinks we're all worried about trapping men, but most of us just like going out and having a good time (Sarah, 28, relationship).

Marital relationships connote emotional stability and maturity. Married women are therefore perceived by participants to be more emotionally stable and mature, thus more able to cope with work related stress, and potentially happier and more confident at work as a result. 'Having a husband to go home to' (Deb, 33, married) further implies emotional stability.

Further, being married is both perceived and experienced as being 'easier' in terms of the extent of which a woman feels she must disclose details of her personal life. As Nina (29, relationship) says, 'people don't ask so many questions when you're married'. Married participants' subjective accounts of 'doing' being married in the workplace underline this issue, where married women are 'left to get on with' work (Daniela, 29, married), are not pursued by male colleagues (Rowena, 32, married), and are perceived as being, as Natasha (35, married) puts it, 'off limits'.

> Guys at work won't crack on to you if they know you're married....you know, they don't want to have to answer to your husband (Natasha, 35, married).

> I think the boys at work respect that you are [married] (Amy, 34, married).

Being married connotes emotional and financial security, stability and maturity, and provides participants with an identity that performs legitimacy and stability for them in that their status as married (particularly the visual presence of a wedding ring) explains a woman's situation adequately. As Deb (33, married) claims, 'they see the ring, and they know'. Moreover, there appears to be a moral or ethical boundary in terms of men romantically pursuing a woman whom they know to be married, and the same goes for women. Donna (22, relationship) says 'it's not appropriate to flirt with people at work who're married'. The use of the word 'appropriate' here implies that the marriage contract is something that is universally respected. Single women appear to be more sexually objectified in the workplace.

In the workplace, being a married woman is perceived by participants to connote a more settled, therefore 'boring' social life. As Naomi (27, married) says, 'my colleagues aren't interested in finding out what I did at the weekend compared to the other [single] girls, 'cos [they believe] I'm a boring old married woman'. This is perceived to result in fewer enquiries from colleagues into a married woman's personal or social life, a factor which is valued by participants like Katie (23, relationship), who believe that 'what you do in your own time is none of their [colleagues] business'.

Negotiating relationship status at work

The following account from Stacy serves to highlight many of the performative elements of 'doing' being married in the workplace, and how marital status is entrenched within

the presentation of the self.

> We've been separated now for about 8 months, we live in different cities…we're not going to get back together, we'll get a divorce eventually…just so much easier to remain [married at work]. I don't want to be a single girl at work again…Well I mean…like, it's nice to be in the club…

> …it's like I'll feel like I've failed if I become single again…like I don't personally think it's [marrying] an achievement..but, um, yeah it kind of is (Stacy, 29, married – separated).

For Stacy, her status as a married woman at work is so central to her identity that she will not reveal she is separated. In her opinion, being married implies competence as a woman. This competence, insofar as she has been successful in locating and securing a husband, is perceived to be translated into her ability to complete tasks and being successful in her role at work. She feels that the 'failure' of her marriage will be imagined by her colleagues and superiors as personal failure, and a reflection of her identity, thus her professional ability at work may be called into question. Further, she fears that her colleagues will project onto her stereotypically 'feminine' traits in dealing with her divorce. She wants to avoid being perceived by others as 'emotional' or 'weak'. She also worries about the 'interrogation' she will receive from colleagues as to the reason(s) for the relationship's dissolution.

> We just grew apart. That's all. But I know they'll think, 'oh he's left her for another woman' (Stacy, 29, married – separated).

For Stacy, the breakdown of her relationship is characterised as 'stressful', and disclosing the news of this in her workplace will 'make things much worse'. She feels that her identity as a legitimate and competent woman is undermined by the failure of her marriage, thus she actively defends her right to remain 'married', and therefore

unquestioned, at work well beyond the end of her marriage.

It must be noted at this point that the above experiences may imply that the participants' workplaces are both sexist and patriarchal. This may indeed be the case. However, this assertion is questionable due to the apparent lack of gender bias in discursive constructions of single versus married status in the workplace. The single versus married discourse, according to participants, applies to men as well as to women. Male colleagues, according to the participants' narratives, encounter similar experiences according to their relationship status, insofar as single male colleagues experience 'matchmaking' at work, while married male colleagues are positioned as 'off limits', and share the privileges of respect as married women by having the status of being married at work. There are however, some marked gender differences, in that the stigma associated with being an unmarried female appears to be more corrosive. Moreover, a woman's competence is implied as biologically determined and inherently linked to her emotional and hormonal condition. The same does not appear to apply to men.

The above accounts demonstrate the participants' desire for approval in the workplace, and marriage – in particular presenting the self as married, 'doing' being married – implying a variety of privileges. The participants strive to perform as competent in their role, and being married implicitly aids the construction of a mature, competent and legitimate feminine self identity.

Married status and social life

> Everyone's coupled up, and I'm sat there making up the numbers
> (Caroline, 32, single).

Marriage is perceived by the participants as enabling legitimacy in social settings as well as in the workplace, and femininity is performed through the significance of marital status. The participants' narratives of social encounters and experiences illuminate the relevance of relationship status in identity construction, and how that status impacts on attempts to create and maintain a competent and legitimate feminine identity. Marital status, particularly being married versus being single, has various perceived implications for the way that the participants feel they are treated and viewed by their friends and families and acquaintances.

The processes of becoming engaged, preparing for marriage, and experiencing the wedding are important elements of creating legitimacy. All participants viewed becoming engaged as an event to be celebrated, where congratulations from peers are expected. Further, the conventional process of the man proposing to the woman was spoken of with excitement by all of those who wished to marry, again reaffirming the identity of the woman as desirable, as she is the one to whom the proposal has been made. The presence of an engagement ring was also a talking point throughout the participant group, insofar as (providing the ring is impressive) the woman is socially obliged to 'show off' the ring, publicising her identity as desirable and mature. Although, perhaps surprisingly, most participants did not explicitly cite the wedding as an important element of marriage, discursive construction of the wedding experience, or

hopes and imaginations of a future wedding, inferred that the experience of the wedding was of considerable significance in creating a legitimate and competent feminine identity. Most participants perceive their weddings to be the perfect opportunity to explicitly and visually prove to their micro-communities that their relationship is both based on mutual love, and is serious and committed in nature.

> It gives you a chance to show your love for each other in front of all of your friends and family (Kerryn, 21, relationship).

The act of becoming married is constructed as proof of a woman's abilities to find an appropriate man, and to make the serious and mature decision to marry, while emphasising her attractiveness and desirability as she is celebrated. Many participants such as Haley (20, relationship), Jessica (23, engaged), Margaret (30, married) and Anna (24, relationship) refer to the wedding day as 'my special day', and weddings were universally situated as far more important and relevant for the bride than for the groom. The physical presence of the wedding ring is also of importance in 'doing' being married in the presentation of the self. The ring on the wedding finger (providing it looks as it 'should') connotes status, and potentially signifies affluence, attractiveness and emotional stability.

Participants such as Deb (33, married), Sharon (31, married) and Camilla (29, engaged) frequently refer to the 'relief' of being a married woman in social settings, where they no longer have to 'explain why they're single' (Sharon). Being married is constructed as increasing and maintaining self-esteem and confidence in social settings. Participants like Natalie (20, relationship) suggest that the implied social status of being married will

enable her to feel more confident when socialising, particularly in situations where she meets new people or 'has to impress'. She explains that by being married, she will appear to 'know what she wants', helping her present herself as a competent and legitimate woman.

Conversely, single status often requires justification in conversations with peers and acquaintances. This most explicitly manifests itself through single participants' narratives about being 'happy to be single' (Maria, 27, single). Participants frequently identify their single status as something they 'do not mind'. This implies in itself that single female identity is usually negatively constructed as being in need of a partner, and as lacking the ability to find and keep a partner. Perhaps in an effort to combat the stigma, participants often went to considerable lengths to justify and account for their single status, putting a positive spin on a circumstance that they were aware was not ideal.

Presenting the female self as married connotes prestige, success, and attractiveness according to most participants. They held strong opinions, and offered detailed narratives of personal experiences to demonstrate how marital status impacts upon social situations and socialising. Discursive constructions of socialising provided a sense of the 'couple-oriented culture'. Most single participants told of feelings of self-consciousness, where socialising with married friends reaffirmed existing anxieties about remaining alone.

> Socialising with heaps of couples reminds you of how alone you are. It's in your face (Sally, 28, single).

Caroline (32, single) spoke extensively about the difficulties she encounters in finding friends to socialise with, underlining the common perception of the 'vicious cycle' of remaining single.

> You want to put yourself out there, to meet guys, but you can't by yourself, it's desperate. But all your girlfriends are with theirs' [husbands or partners], or out doing couple stuff (Caroline, 32, single).

Caroline refers to 'couple stuff' as a number of couples socialising together, a situation which she avoids due to feeling 'out of place' and 'alone'. Heather (27, single) shares this attitude, in that she associates socialising with couples as a single woman with reinforcing the belief that 'you're going be alone forever'. For participants such as Bec (21, single) and Maria (27, single), socialising with other couples is also something to avoid. They position 'couple' socialising as dull and less exciting than socialising with other single friends. Maria also suggests that there is much less 'pressure' placed on her when she is around single friends as opposed to married friends; around whom she feels inadequate. She feels that she is the focus of attention when socialising with couples or married friends, as the emphasis in conversation 'always seems to come back to me and how I can't find a man'. This is not only embarrassing and hurtful for Maria, but positions her as less legitimate and authentic as an adult woman compared to her married peers.

Interestingly, married participants also emphasised their awareness of the divide between married and single women in terms of social life. Married participants were eager to play down the perceived common characterisation of married women as settled

and more 'boring'. Both Naomi (27, married) and Rowena (32, married) gave examples of social situations they felt they had been 'left out of' due to their married status; where they felt it was assumed by their single friends that they no longer were interested (nor perhaps capable) of 'having fun' as they did prior to marriage. In effect both sets of accounts suggest a divided social world for women, where the point of change is getting engaged or married.

Much of the anxiety expressed by participants on the issue of remaining single into middle age emphasises the (at least) perceived 'couple oriented culture', particularly in public, social or work settings. Single participants display anxiety in the feelings of being alone or 'without a partner', as well as the perceived connotations of their single status on their identity. Partnered participants' narratives indicate the feeling that their peers perceive them as emotionally confident and settled 'achievers', enabling Giddens' (1992) 'ontological security', and helping create the legitimacy that facilitates confidence in work and social settings.

It must be noted that the perceived stigma that the never-married women experience may be more 'noticed' or acute due to their desire to marry. Some of the participants experience apprehension and stress because they position themselves as 'failing' in achieving their desired married status, and all of the benefits that come with this status. Thus perhaps these women are more sensitive to stigmatisation directed at them by their married or young female peers. However, there is some evidence here to suggest that this is not the case. Of the eight participants who did not wish to marry, the 'non-conformists', six spoke at length about the stigmatisation they experienced at work, in

social settings and within their families, as discussed in Chapter Five.

> It's constant, you get hassled...you have to persuade people you
> don't want it (Liz, 24, relationship).

In summary, married status implies particular identity traits, and this privileges married women in comparison with their single female friends and relatives. These few outlier cases serve to reinforce the normative marital discourse, particularly in terms of the status being married affords a woman in certain settings. 'Doing' being married in social life has both benefits and limitations for women.

'Doing' good mothering

As was seen in Chapter Six, marriage is almost universally identified by participants as a precursor to child-bearing. The discussion below examines how normative ideals of marriage, child-bearing and child-rearing feature in the participants' discursive constructions of their life trajectories and aspirations. Pronatalism is also discussed, as the marital transition is inextricably linked to the timing of child-bearing. The great majority of those interviewed position their desire for marriage as a prerequisite for child-bearing; integral to the identity construction of the 'good' mother.

Marriage and motherhood remain powerful ideologies of family formation for women (Coontz, 2004). Considerable 'pronatalism' was evident amongst those interviewed. Married or even unmarried women who do not desire children were negatively judged. Heitlinger (1991) notes that pronatalism operates on a range of levels and this diversity

of views was reflected in the narratives. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter Six, child-bearing following marriage is perceived on a cultural level as natural, and central to a woman's identity. In fact, marriage enables the fulfilment a woman is supposed to feel when she has children (Gillespie, 2003). As Janet (26, relationship) says, 'it's the done thing', and Nina (29, relationship) agrees, stressing the importance of child-bearing as part of 'every' woman's life. For women, choosing not to have children is for the most part implied as unfeminine, even deviant, selfish or unhealthy and unnatural (Gillespie, 2000; 2003). Many participants like Deb (33, married) and Natasha (35, married) say they 'feel sorry' for women who do not or cannot have children. Pronatalist discourse asserts that childless women tend to be pitied by others, emphasizing the something 'missing' from a childless woman's life (Letherby, 1994, 2002; Rowlands and Lee, 2006). Pronatalism also functions on a psychological level, where child-bearing is entrenched in aspirations and emotions on a micro level. Many participants emphasise their personal desire for marriage as enabling an appropriate environment in which to play out their desire for child-bearing.

Park (2002) asserts that pronatalist pressures remain powerful at the beginning of the twenty first century and there is certainly evidence of pronatalist pressures throughout participants' narratives. Pronatalism operates on a population or state level through state intervention and regulation of fertility (Heitlinger, 1991). Many participants like Karen (19, single) and Camilla (29, engaged) knew about the Australian government's 'Baby Bonus' new mother payment scheme that was in operation at the time. They demonstrated the impact of legislation on social constructions of appropriate parenting

through condemning women who are perceived to be, as Karen puts it, 'having the kids just for the money you get off the government'. Discursive constructions of appropriate mothering are associated with ideologies of patriotism and obligation, and this notion is very much linked to marriage. Gemma (18, cohabiting) sums up the conventional ideology of having children within a marriage as 'for the good of everyone'. She emphasises the importance of the population bringing up their children in a way that produces 'proper' future generations, giving a voice to state and Family Values movements who discourage child-bearing for the young or unmarried or otherwise unsuitable.

In short, the marital (heterosexual) relationship is constructed as the 'best' environment for the development of children. This is implicitly juxtaposed against the stereotyped 'juvenile delinquent' or 'at risk' offspring assumed to be a result of unstable family environments. The political undesirability of single (or unmarried) motherhood, and the national impact of family configurations is present within narratives of 'good mothering'. Women's decisions to marry and have children are discursively framed within a media and political culture where family values are identified as good for the nation (Bock, 2000).

Responsibilities for child care

Motherhood is normatively constructed as the basis of adult femininity (Gillespie, 2003), thus discussions of marriage – located as the archetypal symbol of adult femininity – and

children, establish an alignment of discourses of femininity and discourses of 'good' mothering. For example the notion that the woman will act as the primary care-giver to the children was almost universally assumed or desired amongst participants. Heidi (22, engaged) is uncomfortable with the idea that her future husband might want to raise the children, given that she currently earns a higher salary. Although she is aware that it would be more financially viable for her to remain at work full time, she stresses her ideal of being the parent to stay at home and raise the children, noting that she would be jealous of anyone spending more time with her children than she could, even if it is her husband. This discomfort with alternatives to the traditional model of mother-at-home is shared by Kirsten (35, relationship), who has 'always imagined' that she would stop work to look after the children.

For Janet (26, relationship) the normalised idea that one partner will stop work in order to raise the children is a vexed question. She is conscious of the need for a substantial income to maintain a traditional breadwinner-homemaker family model of living. Janet's views are typical of many of those interviewed who desire children. They construct the traditional one-income family as a desirable ideal in theory, but their rather anxious commentary about it suggests awareness that it will not necessarily be a straightforward matter, particularly if it comes to a choice between standard of living and stay-at-home motherhood.

In other words, a level of awareness is indicated by some of the participants, of potential financial constraints entrenched in the traditional breadwinner-homemaker family

lifestyle in the conditions of late modernity. However, the extent to which these participants acknowledge possible future financial difficulties is minimal. They prioritise the woman as primary care-giver to children, with the working arrangements of the mother coming as somewhat of an afterthought. The participants almost universally describe the 'ideal' discourse of motherhood. They reiterated the non-working mother ideal, positioning themselves discursively as 'good mothers' supported by their hard-working husbands. The concept of potential future work for them is located according to personal desire, rather than economic necessity. Very few of the participants admitted that they might go back into full time, or even part-time employment following the birth of children, simply to make ends meet. This reluctance seemed to be linked to the powerful moral stigma associated with putting children into full time care whilst both parents work, coupled with the assertion that it would be the mother who would be contacted, or have to leave work to care for the children in an emergency, thus being disruptive for both mother and child (England, 1996). This might also imply that women are indifferent towards paid employment, particularly following motherhood.

Hakim argues that women may be considered as 'grateful slaves' in terms of their attitudes towards paid work following child-birth, in that paid work is of much lesser importance or relevance to women's constructions of what is important in life (Hakim, 1991; 2000). In other words, it is implied that a women who is serious about a career after the birth of her children is not being a good mother. Tichenor (2005:14) states that, 'while a wife's income may be important to the family, her employment lacks the social legitimacy accorded her husband's work', so paid work for women is usually perceived

as an option rather than entailing a sense of duty. Further, according to Hochschild (1989) and Rubin (1994), it is typical that women retain household responsibility, thus 'adding' paid employment onto the identity or role of wife/mother.

Yet times have changed and many of these young women must be aware of friends, workmates and acquaintances who are working mothers of small children. A level of nostalgia is evident in that the participants explicitly reflect on their own childhood, where their mother took on the majority of child-rearing duties. Across the participant group, importance is attached to children being 'raised' at home, rather than in child care facilities. It was notable that, although settling down is perceived as dreary by most, motherhood is much more romanticised and attractive as a prospect. The imagined 'fulfilment' achieved by gaining first the husband, then children, and thus forming the complete family is highly attractive. Further, the sacrifices made for children in terms of financial costs and a loss of personal time and freedom are constructed as selfless and worthy, therefore appealing.

> I want to give everything to make sure my kids are looked after
> (Heidi, 22, engaged).

Thus, selflessness and making sacrifices for the good of your children helps to create an identity as a competent and legitimate married woman.

Given that approximately 46 per cent of Australian children aged 0 to 12 receive some sort of child care (ABS, 2005), with 45 per cent of 0 to 4 year olds in formal child care (ABS, 2004), participants are likely to have some indirect experience with child care.

The prevalence of the practice indicates continued high rates for the use of child care services, yet the moral and scientific debate surrounding 'other than mother' child care continues. Participants idealise and desire future circumstances where they can remain at home to raise their children, although the age of children relevant to this ideal is never specified. In their narratives, the contingent future identity of being a good mother is achieved by stating this ideal stay-at-home-mum discourse, even while they perhaps know that they will probably at some point be doing something different. Given the considerable and unmet demand for child care places (Lee et al, 2001; Hancock, 2002; Goodfellow, 2005), there is not much evidence that all young mothers are now opting to stay at home and live on one salary until their children have reached adolescence. Indeed the cost of home mortgages, car loans and the financial stress associated with the rise in consumer prices implies the opposite story. Thus these comments depict an idealised discourse associated with the presentation of legitimate gender identity, where femininity is realised in the moral discourse of the 'good mother'. The practice may be quite different.

Unmarried (single) parenting

Unmarried parenting calls into question the legitimacy of the child, the legitimacy of the mother, and the legitimacy of the decision to have a child without the (perceived secure) presence of a father (Bock, 2000). Yet births from unmarried mothers are increasingly normalised (Smock, 2004; Bock, 2000), and participants show an awareness of this reality. The attitudes of those interviewed towards other women who have children

outside of marriage are neither negative nor positive. In fact, the explicit judgement or demonizing of other women is identified as underhanded and immature. This is particularly the case where the participants have direct contact with single mothers as close friends or relatives. Participants like Sally (28, single) and Caroline (32, single) provided accounts of close friends or relatives who are single mothers, and the tone of these narratives implied both a reluctance to judge, and a feeling of pity towards the perceived financial and emotional difficulties that single mothers face. Sally describes her sister as 'doing the best she can', implying that her best is far from ideal. Sally's sister, according to Sally, 'has to make do', given her unmarried circumstances.

The participants strongly desire a 'certain', not uncertain future, and this desire is most acute when discussing the raising of children. The wish for a 'set' life trajectory once children arrive is easily imagined and played out in the breadwinner-homemaker form of family, with its associated stability and implied superiority. Most of the participants' narratives included detailed descriptions of the material and emotional security required in order to raise children to be competent adults. Women aim to perceive themselves as 'fit' and 'competent' mothers, and the most straightforward method is to have children once married, creating an identity as a stable and mature woman in a secure relationship ideal for child-rearing, opposed to the stereotypical young, poor, single or lesbian woman, 'unfit' for motherhood (McDonald, 2005; DiLapi, 1987). Having children within marriage cements the legitimacy of femininity as it is imagined as the confirmation of full adult status. Further, the bearing of children within a marital relationship compounds the construction of the self as the 'good mother'; a discourse

central to women's lives.

Marriage and motherhood are central to femininity, so 'doing' being married (Butler, 1990) is necessary for participants to achieve an imagined 'full' legitimate and competent feminine identity (Stoppard, 2000). Participants rely on marital status for the legitimacy of being the good mother. Their identity as a good mother will be significantly enhanced by the moral superiority implied by the marital relationship. This identity is further enhanced by the apparent ideal desire to be a stay-at-home mother. The 'rules' for motherhood, and the ascribed and imagined 'ideals' are clear amongst this participant group, with marriage as a straightforward tool for enabling a perceived stable and 'certain' future; one that is longed for when imagining bearing and raising children.

Being more than 'just' a wife

The above sections detail the ways that a legitimate and competent feminine identity can be achieved, at least in part, by 'doing' being married and presenting oneself as married. Marriage alone is not sufficient in establishing an 'ideal' or 'full' competent and legitimate identity, as discussed above, where anything that deviates from the conventional or normative life trajectory, such as choosing not to have children, having children prior to marriage, and not 'settling down', is marginalised. Next, the problems and obstacles as well as those obstacles involved with 'doing' being married in the achievement of this idealised identity are discussed. Those interviewed were not entirely

positive and idealistic about becoming a wife and mother, much though they desired it. They did admit that they expected to confront obstacles and problems in achieving their ideal.

Being a 'wife' and identity construction

The first theme of the semi-structured interviews covered the topic of life goals and aspirations. Participants were asked to talk about anything that they felt they wanted to achieve or experience during their lives. Given this cue, participants constructed self-biographies based on happiness and contentment. Finding a man with whom to share life featured heavily. This desire for a romantic partner formed the basis for all other aspirations. The imagined career path was the topic most heavily discussed by participants aside from finding and maintaining a conjugal relationship. The participants' work and career aspirations ranged widely in terms of their practicality in real life. Some detailed well-researched career and life goals which they believed were possible. Melissa (20, cohabiting) for example, offered a detailed account of how she and her imagined future husband would divide paid and unpaid work (she, as a nurse, will be flexible with shift work) in order to provide financially and emotionally for the two children she desires. Others spoke more idealistically of hopes and dreams, with little detail given about how these might be achieved.

> I want to have a job that I love, that makes me happy and that I can really work hard in…a job that I like working towards (Haley, 20, relationship).

None of the women explicitly aspired to be 'just' a wife and mother. This superficially appears to be a direct contradiction to the discourse of 'good mothering' where participants view the stay-at-home mother as the absolute ideal. The stay-at-home mother identity is certainly implicitly appealing; for example two participants (Miriam, 22, relationship, and Jenna, 24, relationship) imply that their only desire was to marry and have children. However all participants (including Miriam and Jenna) actively and explicitly distance themselves from the conventional or traditional characterisation of the stay-at-home mother.

All of the participants' narratives include the stated desire to do more than 'just' be a wife and/or mother. In the case of the 'good' mother discourse, where remaining at home to care for children is constructed as ideal, the emphasis is on caring for the children, and not on the associated domestic duties. In this way, participants are 'performing' good mothering as discourse in the interview by expressing the desire to solely care for children. The reality, they imply, will be different. Most of those interviewed acknowledged not only the financial difficulties faced by a single income family, but also distanced themselves from the identity of the conventional 'wife'. A subtle distinction is made between the attractiveness of presenting the self as the selfless and caring mother, and the unappealing 'dreary' subordinate identity of the conventional housewife. What is clear from participants' narratives is that although the stay-at-home mother identity is located as ideal, there is also a definite awareness, across age and relationship cohorts, that 'just' being a wife and mother is not sufficient for establishing their full legitimacy and authenticity as a competent woman.

It seems possible that the feminist critique of the family has facilitated an increased awareness in the participants of life aspirations for women beyond the marital home. The participants were very aware that being just someone's 'wife' is no longer considered to be socially legitimate for a competent woman in contemporary Australian society. Considerable thought had gone into imagining and planning a satisfying life trajectory, and although marriage, or finding a husband, fits almost universally into these aspirations, it is acknowledged as only one of many important milestones or experiences. The vast majority of participants express the hope and desire, if not expectation, to 'do' or 'have it all' (Harris, 2004).

The meaning of marriage has become distanced from the notion that the wife is there to support the husband, to be a housewife. The idea of being 'just' a housewife is considered unattractive by most participants, who are eager to present their self identities as much more than the conventional role of the housewife implies. Participants like Keely (24, relationship), 'hate' the idea of being labelled a housewife, as well as having the identity of a housewife. While she is happy to engage in her share of domestic duties, Keely asserts that there is 'heaps more to life' than 'basically working for your husband'. The identity of a housewife or stay-at-home mother is, on its own, unappealing for most participants, and imagined as sub-standard in terms of achieving full competent legitimate feminine adult status. Bec (21, single) imagines 'being in the suburbs, bored', while Mary (27, engaged) dislikes the idea of being a 'maid' for her husband and future children. Toni concurs,

> I can't think of much worse, than being stuck with all the mums....the only talks you have are about your children....I need more (Toni, 30, cohabiting).

'Just' being a wife and/or mother is identified by participants like Toni and Jane (19, single) as 'not enough', in terms of personal fulfilment. Remaining at home to raise children, while admirable on some levels, cannot achieve full legitimate and competent status, as such women are not 'doing it all'. They are constructed by the participants as being somewhat 'lazy' as Lisa (29, cohabiting) suggests. Cathy agrees:

> Looking after kids is hard work, I know that....but I don't think you'd be really overworked like some mums say they are....you know, when that's all you do (Cathy, 29, single).

Stay-at-home mothers are also imagined as lacking 'ambition' (Karen, 19, single) in terms of their reluctance to maintain a career or personal goals. Stay-at-home mothers or 'housewives' are also implied as potentially having low self-esteem in terms of feminine empowerment. Toni (30, cohabiting) and Barbara (20, relationship) assert that in contemporary society, a woman should not be confined to the home.

> These days you have to be out there...you know, have a job, have hobbies, do stuff for yourself (Toni, 30, cohabiting).

> You [a woman] don't think enough of yourself if that's all you want. You got to aim higher, do things for yourself (Barbara, 20, relationship).

Barbara's opinion was common throughout the participant group, a distinct assertion that there should be 'more to life' (Amanda, 21, single) than remaining in the home as a wife and mother; despite some expressing nostalgia for the kinds of lives their mothers led.

Domestic and child-caring duties are worthy, but also constructed as boring and dreary in contrast to the 'working mother' identity because the workplace is perceived as a social environment, where a more legitimate 'full' adult identity can be played out. The participants therefore appear to face some potentially difficult decisions on how to achieve legitimacy and authenticity in female adult identity. On one hand, the self can be presented as the sacrificing housewife and mother, remaining at home, and out of paid employment. A level of moral legitimacy may be achieved, but this is somewhat undermined by the perceived lack of personal autonomy and empowerment caused by not returning to work after child-bearing. On the other hand, a wife and mother can return to work and maintain some personal autonomy, and put her children into childcare, but not without possibly assuming the stigmatised identity of a selfish mother for doing so.

Doing and having it all?

In the contemporary construction of femininity, a woman should ideally be able to cope with all of the demands of wifehood and motherhood, but also of career and personal demands, being essentially, a 'superwoman' (Ussher et al, 2000; see also Harris, 2004; Deutsch, 1999). The women in this study fall into two crude categories: Those who (perhaps somewhat naively) aspire to and see themselves as preparing to do and be 'everything' in the near future, and those who are coping with the pressures of trying to do and be 'everything'. The commonality of course is that all of the participants share the ideology of authentic, legitimate and competent femininity as 'having it all'. The

potential dangers for women trying to 'perform' to such discourses of femininity are well documented, with these 'performances' potentially hiding depression or other health issues, not to mention the reinforcement of traditional gendered family living arrangements (Mauthner, 2002).

Some married participants provided an alternative standpoint on the pressures of assuming a 'married' identity and 'having it all'. Amy (34, married) experiences frustration in the way she is viewed, and resented by some of her friends as a married woman. She comments on the fact that her single friends in particular treat her as 'complete' and 'without problems', because she, compared to them, is perceived as more emotionally settled.

> I still have so much I want to do with my life…and I have no idea how or when I'm going to fit it all in…but my single friends especially…can't get why I might be having these big dilemmas (Amy, 34, married).

Like other married interviewees she resents the ease with which she is pigeon-holed as already having 'achieved' her goals, when she personally views marriage as a single element of her life trajectory. This is interesting as Amy feels she is expected to achieve her 'other' goals (working overseas, having children, caring for her elderly father) with ease, because of the platform that marriage gives her emotionally and financially in terms of ontological security. Amy desires continued autonomy even though she has married, and finds it difficult to reconcile this with the perceived expectation that she will include her husband in all decision-making and actions. Rachel shares this frustration:

> They [single girl friends] think their problems are bigger than mine, 'cos you know…*at least she's got a husband* (Rachel, 28, married).

For Amy and Rachel, the resentment they feel directed at them because of their married status is unwarranted, as they simultaneously feel pressure to achieve many other life goals. Rachel says she is in a 'no-win situation'. She feels that being 'just a wife', and thus not attempting to forge a career, earn a high income and set up a home suitable for child-rearing, would label her as 'selfish' and 'lazy'. So, Rachel believes she is forced to cope with the problems of attempting to have it all with little support from friends, as her friends imagine her to be 'set up' in terms of support from her husband. As she says, 'it's real good to have someone there, but it doesn't mean I have nothing to worry about'.

Identity as a married woman and personal autonomy

Marriage is commonly perceived as enabling personal autonomy, ensuring emotional and financial well-being, and establishing a certain and reliable future. Social legitimacy comes with becoming a wife. The young women in this study viewed marriage, and living as a married woman, as crucial to their adult identity as a competent and capable woman. Some see marriage as facilitating autonomy in so far as it enables them to strive for other life goals and experiences, once the platform of marriage exists. For Margaret (30, married), getting married established her financial security, resulting in her returning to university for further study; something which she described with happiness as 'a dream becoming a reality'. Others, like Deb (33, married) said she experienced a

feeling of relief upon marrying. For Deb, the emotional stability symbolised by marriage decreased her stress levels in 'every aspect' of her life, enabling her to forge a self-identity characterising her as an empowered, competent woman.

Tichenor (2005:14) argues that 'men and women get more 'credit', both inside and outside the marital relationship, for engaging in activities that are consistent with conventional gender identities'. For a few of the participants however, the compromises made within marriage, to achieve the success of the relationship, or to strive for the idealised gendered roles and identities symbolic of somewhat more traditional or conventional marriage, result in a decrease of personal autonomy, and a devaluing of personal aspirations.

Janine's Experiences in Marriage

Janine (34, married to her second husband) works full time in local government, in a professional role, and would be considered to have a great deal of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Despite this, she discussed her experience of becoming, as she put it 'just a wife' in her first marriage.

> I could never [again] just be someone's wife. [This factor contributed to] me and Greg's divorce….for years I was Mrs Smith (Janine – Married to second husband).

For Janine, like many other participants, the fear of feeling undervalued as a wife emerged during interviews. Being perceived by peers or work colleagues to simply be an extension of her husband, without an identity of her own, was a distressing prospect. In Janine's case, this devaluing of her identity, she believes, resulted in a lack of self

confidence, which eventually led to the breakdown of her first marriage.

> I was a very unattractive woman…I was a person who did everything Greg wanted me to…I thought it was his fault at the time….'cos he was always doing things with the boys, and he just left me to be his little woman at home….but I got treated like his wife [so that] made me act like his wife…he told me [after the divorce] that I'd changed from the person he married.

Janine felt a considerable lack of autonomy within her first marriage. Playing the traditional gendered role of the 'wife', which originally she strongly desired, in her words made her 'a different person', one which she considers much less attractive in terms of personality to her identity prior to marrying Greg. Janine, along with many of the participants, discussed at length their personal ambitions and aspirations in terms of career, travel, and achieving happiness. However in Janine's case, the extent to which she compromised these aspirations to achieve her perceived desirable marital relationship led to increased ontological insecurity. Interestingly, this initial experience of marriage, according to Janine, enabled her empowerment and autonomy in terms of self-identity after the breakdown of the relationship:

> Once I'd spent time on my own [and] worked out what I wanted all over again…yeah, I'm a much better person now..and he [Paul, second husband] doesn't own me, and he wants me to fulfil my dreams.

Marriage the second time around for Janine is symbolic of her empowerment as a woman, and as an individual identity. She consciously reverted to her maiden name, and did not take up her second husband's surname, as this issue was something she identified as causing her to feel devalued in her previous marriage. For Janine, reviving her maiden name symbolised keeping her identity as a competent woman in her own right.

Interestingly, she was eager to marry a second time. For Janine it was the circumstances within the marriage, combined with her original (as she notes) traditional ideals of what marriage meant that led to the breakdown of her first marriage. But this she considered to be an isolated circumstance, despite acknowledging her perception that many other women around her were experiencing the same issues. She explained at length how she would attend Greg's work functions, and 'would sit round a table with the rest of them [wives], all talking about our husbands'. Janine 'hated' this social arrangement, as she felt 'lost' and felt she must compete with the 'other wives' in terms of the clothes she wore and the way she behaved. Interestingly, the usual topic of conversation, and arguably the battleground for establishing a legitimate feminine identity, was the extent to which the wives would make sacrifices in order to help or please their husbands, something which Janine felt was 'archaic' and patronising.

The extent to which the feminist critique of women in marriage has widely taken hold is questionable here in terms of improving women's awareness of the structural and institutional frameworks entrenched within marriage as serving to oppress women. It is interesting that Janine does not attach meaning to marriage as a static institution which dictates certain behaviours or subordinates women. She discussed at length her own agency in creating more appropriate circumstances, actions and behaviours for her second marital relationship, stressing her own role. This is despite her view that many of the 'wives' she knew shared her experience of being devalued as individual identities. Though she talks at length of empowering herself to make changes, by remarrying she implies that individual women, like herself, are to blame for falling into the trap of

becoming the traditional subordinate and dutiful 'wife', in so far as it is not 'marriage' that creates subservient wives, but the wives themselves. Further, she blames her own subserviant behaviour, and her own perception of her resulting decreased 'attractiveness', as contributing factors in her divorce, without recognising any structural or wider institutional elements which may have impacted on her behaviour. For Janine, her two marriages are constructed as having meaning on a purely individual relationship level, without consideration of wider societal pressures. Despite her acknowledgement that many women in her social circle exhibited the same feelings of subservience or discontentment, she does not imagine or construct a link between her personal experiences of marriage and the power of wider structural frameworks that feminist authors have attempted to undermine and critique.

The other concerning aspect of Janine's discursive construction of her relationships is the way in which, despite claiming to be empowered and autonomous, she strives for (and according to her has found) a husband who allows her to attempt to fulfil her aspirations. The distinction must be made here between desiring a husband or partner who actively wants their wife to achieve her personal goals, and one who will allow it. Although Janine frequently uses language that suggests her current husband wants her to achieve personal aspirations in her imagined life trajectory, she also uses language suggestive of the idea that wives should hope for little more than to have husbands who, as she puts it, 'let them' or 'allow them' to pursue individual or personal goals. She even refers to wives whose husbands 'let them be themselves' as 'lucky'. Her narratives are framed within a context where the husband is considered to be 'in charge' of the

marriage; where a wife should almost consider herself fortunate to be permitted to pursue aspirations. Janine emphasised that her current husband is 'one in a million', 'a legend', and 'not like many men', in that he considers her aspirations, particularly in terms of her career goals, to be just as important as his own.

The case of Janine gives an interesting insight into the quest for legitimacy and ontological security. In marrying, considerable compromise of life goals and aspirations may occur in order to maintain or facilitate the marriage, or continuation of the marriage. A woman may have gained a legitimate feminine identity by marrying, but concurrently may have sacrificed previous life aspirations and ontological security in order to make the marriage work. As in Janine's case, the desired privileges associated with being married in fact result in considerable sacrifices, where a competent and legitimate feminine identity (as previously imagined) is not achieved.

Conclusion

According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2001) and Giddens (1992) marriage has become a site for reassurance in an increasingly individualised and uncertain world. As other reference points slip away, the more people direct their desires to giving life meaning and security towards ones they love (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Dench (1999) argues that while the feminist movement has failed on many levels, it has succeeded in terms of encouraging scepticism about marriage as an institution. There is

some slight evidence of this in my data, but most of the participants show considerable faith in the institution of marriage, and further, use marriage as a means of creating a self-identity as a feminine adult characterised as legitimate, authentic and competent. The participants desire certainty, and marriage is perceived as enabling (if not guaranteeing) certainty in the life trajectory, thus effectively diminishing ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1992). Participants actively 'use' and rely on their marital relationship status in a range of scenarios, and believe their status as married will (or does) imply a certain level of feminine competence and legitimacy. But all of those interviewed wanted to be more than just a wife. This superficially may seem to lessen the importance or relevance of marriage. However, it can also be argued that this reinforces the institution of marriage through marital status operating as a necessary platform for other goals that also achieve authentic, legitimate and competent feminine identity. If anything, the pressure to be not just a wife and mother, but also to engage in meaningful paid work and attain personal fulfilment goals, has made the situation harder for women, and thus more inclined to try and 'perform' (Butler, 1990) as the superwoman. In line with Cherlin's (2004) assertion, marriage certainly appears to exist as a marker of prestige, yet also remains something to conform to.

The pressure experienced by the participants to explicitly want to have children, and to want to raise those children personally and at home, as evidenced by the strong moralistic discourse of 'good mothering', is in contrast to their resistance against the traditional discourse of 'just' being a wife and/or mother. This points to the pressure to 'have it all', yet simultaneously be seen as the 'good' mother and wife. The young

women interviewed are trying to achieve success and competence in their life trajectory, to achieve a legitimate and competent adult feminine identity. This competence can be achieved in a number of ways. Being a wife contributes considerably to being viewed as competent (capable of finding a husband, having a successful mature relationship), but is not perceived as 'enough'. Being a wife (and to a lesser extent a mother) is no longer considered to solely be an indicator of a successful and content empowered woman, something that all of the participants wish to achieve. Having a successful career can be a way to achieve competence, but there are pitfalls associated with being unmarried in the workplace.

So, constructing an identity as a married woman puts participants on track to achieving the desired level of 'competence' because marriage is viewed as a platform for achieving other goals, rather than just an achievement in itself. The attainment of other life goals is perceived to be hindered by remaining unmarried, since 'doing' being married is perceived as being stable, mature, and capable of having a serious relationship and a career. Considerable pressure exists for participants to 'have it all', where 'just' being a wife and/or mother holds negative connotations. It is evident that there are both traditional and individualised discourses of marriage and self-fulfilment in the narratives that were produced during interviews. The following chapter analyses the participants' discursive constructions of marriage within the framework of theorising around individualization and detraditionalization.

Chapter Eight

Marriage, Individualization, Detraditionalization and Retraditionalization

> A partnership or family [no longer] provides a basis in the future. In the age of what Anthony Giddens calls 'confluent love', togetherness lasts no longer than the gratification of one of the partners, ties are from the outset only 'until further notice' (Bauman, 1993:17).

Introduction

Despite the predictions of theorists of reflexive modernity, the institution of marriage, despite high divorce rates, continues to exist as the most powerful and widely acknowledged form of social contract (Ingraham, 1999). Marriage remains a key form of social organisation, with its customs and rules interfacing with almost every sphere of social interaction (VanEvery, 1995). For most women, marriage seems to remain the most attractive relationship and lifestyle option, particularly through the association security and companionship.

This chapter will examine the extent to which the processes of individualization and detraditionalization have taken hold in life trajectory planning and practices, through

analysis of the participants' discursive constructions of marriage and marital living. The influence of individualization as discourse fuelling anxiety and maintaining the attractiveness of conventional and traditional practices is proposed. Subsequently, evidence of tradition maintenance, or retraditionalization, is considered.

Detraditionalization

The concept of detraditionalization is employed by both Beck and Giddens to describe and explain the processes of Individualization. Detraditionalization refers to the fading influences of traditional or conventional forms of culture and social life in reflexive modernity. In the domain of marriage and intimate relationships, detraditionalization is often used to elucidate the tenets of the individualization thesis, where late modern individuals can, and must, choose from a range of de-standardized relationships, freed from institutional or traditional ties. Giddens' flexible and contingent 'pure relationship' is theorised as representative of detraditionalized intimacy in late modernity, apparently replacing the traditional 'romantic love' relationship with its associated dependency and foreverness.

As explained in Chapter Two, the concept of detraditionalization has come to the fore in explaining and examining contemporary intimate relationships because marriage and patterns of partnering have changed in late modernity. Few would argue that processes of detraditionalization have not occurred, yet it is also evident that some traditions – such as church weddings and virginity pledges – are being actively reinvented in late

modernity. It is not my intention here to add to the many well established theoretical critiques of the detraditionalization thesis (for example Heelas et al, 1996). Instead my aim is to examine the 'fit' of detraditionalization as a theory for explaining a key aspect of my data: Women's reported decisions in their intimate relationships.

De-institutionalization and liberalised attitudes

It is clear that the power and impact of traditional institutions, such as the church, have declined in determining how the self is constructed in intimate relationships. Individuals are no longer born into a fixed family, kinship or status identity which remains relatively consistent throughout their life trajectory, as was the case in early modernity. When it comes to intimate relationships, the ways in which people construct meanings of marriage are no longer focused on the dynastic transfer of ownership in terms of property and money, nor do they marry early for reasons of survival and family pressure. In contemporary Australia, the majority of people marry for love, they marry much later in life, and companionate or partnership marriages are the ideal. Cherlin (2004) asserts that marriages have become deinstitutionalized through the decreasing influence of social norms, laws and religion; while Giddens (1992) asserts that the process of detraditionalization has led to intimate relationships no longer being influenced by external regulations or social expectations. Instead, intimacy is regulated by the two people involved, based on emotional communication. The young women in this Australian study provide considerable evidence to both support the detraditionalization thesis, and to contradict or undermine it.

Marriage as an individualized decision

Amato (2004) notes that marriages today are governed to a greater degree by each couple's evaluation of the quality of their relationships, so marital relationships thus become regulated by the couple's emotions rather than by institutional factors or pressures. Amongst the participant group there certainly had been a shift from institution to intimacy in terms of the meanings of marriage. All the participants discussed marriage as a deep personal relationship, evidenced by narratives discussed in Chapter Six. In their accounts, the decision to marry is based primarily on emotions, particularly romance, love and emotional wellbeing. Marrying was also constructed by participants as an individual micro-sociological decision, one to be made by only the two partners involved. This would appear to support claims for the pervasive ideology of individualization. The individualization trend in women's intimate relationships will be discussed further below.

Religion

At a micro-sociological level the participants' narratives imply a certain freedom from institutional ties. Religion, for example, appeared to have little relevance to discursive constructions of marriage in this study. Religion scarcely featured in narratives of meanings of marriage. Further, when religion was mentioned, its relevance to marriage, and weddings, was questioned or disregarded.

> I'm not religious…at all. So its [marriage] isn't about all that for
> me (Hannah, 21, relationship).

Hannah's statement exemplifies the common awareness of marriage in the era of late modernity, as no longer compulsorily entrenched within religious discourse.

The six 'religious' participants in this study all belonged to 'new' conservative or Evangelical Christian churches, which are acknowledged as becoming more popular (Martin, 1999; Bruce, 1996). These participants' views are certainly of interest, particularly in the ways that their attitudes towards traditionalized forms of marital living and gendered roles are dictated by their religiosity. A more in-depth analysis of this very small group of participants is beyond the scope of this thesis, but could provide interesting initial data for further study.

Domestic transitions

There is evidence that marriage is 'detraditionalized' at the macro-sociological level to the extent that it is postponed until later in life than in previous generations[13]. The average marrying age had risen to 30 for males and 28 for females, for 2007 in Australia (ABS, 2008a). This fact reflects significant changes in economic restructuring, birth control, and women's altered access to education and employment. Women's mass entry into the workforce, as well as an awareness of divorce rates, as well as increasing rates of single parenting, have eroded traditional expectations of the wife's role of homemaker, as demonstrated by the evidence in the participants' desires to do 'more' than the conventional 'wife' (see Chapter Seven). Participants included detailed

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[13] Particularly during the early to mid-Twentieth Century

narratives of ideal domestic transitions which were highly individualized and varied according to their imagined future circumstances.

All participants mentioned, or even stressed, that they wanted to have some time for 'responsibility free' 'fun' following moving out of their parental home. Liz (24, relationship) wants to 'rent for a bit, and just enjoy myself', while Polly (22, relationship), like Elizabeth (20, single) and Kerryn (21, relationship), is at university, which she is experiencing as synonymous with enjoyment and interesting living. Jade (20, single) is focused 'for now' on building a career following completion of education, whilst others like Katie (23, relationship) desire to remain living with their parents for what they perceive as an extended period, in order to consolidate their financial situation so as to achieve independence goals. Angela (19, relationship) and Donna (22, relationship) plan to travel overseas, while Sam (19, single) works part time while she completes a tertiary education course.

The participants share the desire to have eventful and full social lives in their late teens and early twenties, which they characterise as entailing relative freedom. Participants desire serial monogamy in intimate relationships prior to marriage, with desirable characteristics of boyfriends distinct from those of potential husbands. Ideal boyfriends were characterised as 'fun', 'easy going', 'funny' and 'good looking' by most participants, in contrast to the construction of the ideal husband who would ideally have personality traits synonymous with maturity or stability. As detailed in Chapter Seven, participants expect to 'settle' emotionally by age 30, thus their detailed and unique

narrative life trajectories include the desire to achieve specific personal fulfilment goals before they marry. The participants' imagined life biographies prior to marriage 'fit' well with Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's 'do-it-yourself biography' (2001), in that they show evidence of both reflexivity and individualization.

'Starter' marriages

Interestingly, attitudes towards marriage at a young age are simultaneously frowned upon and praised. The 'starter' or 'P-plate' marriage, where marriage occurs around age 20, and divorce (usually before child-bearing) occurs a few years later, proved a notable point of discussion during many interviews, even though marrying before the mid to late twenties was often positioned as naïve. Participants like Renee (31, married) and Tess (27, relationship) discussed the 'positive experience' of the starter marriage. Starter marriages are constructed by them as a legitimate method of gaining life experience, and as Renee says, 'making your mistakes early'. Divorce during the twenties was positively construed:

> When you want to settle down [in your late twenties] you already know what you want...'cos you've already been through the experience (Renee, 31, married).

The participants often referred to celebrity or Hollywood marriages when explaining how 'starter marriages' were 'mistakes' due to the inadequate time spent in these relationships prior to marriage. As noted in Chapter Seven, some of the participants frown upon marriages that are 'rushed into' and not given 'due consideration', and starter marriages seem a good example of this. Yet, despite the negative connotations

associated with marrying at a young age, if a woman divorces before middle age and child-bearing, she can be perceived by participants to 'have an advantage' (Karen, 19, single), namely the experience of marriage.

Where participants perceive marriage as an 'important' decision, and favour postponing that decision until the late twenties, the starter marriage provides a way to gain experience in intimacy. Janine (34) was married at 22, and separated at 26, with her divorce finalised at 28. She 'regrets' her early marriage, but acknowledges the 'sense of perspective' she now has towards intimate relationships.

> It didn't end well. I lost myself, and, well, he [former husband] didn't treat me very good in the end. But I'm not ashamed of it. I just feel guilty 'cos of all the gifts and wishes we got from everyone, and it didn't last (Janine, 34, married to second husband).

Her attitude is echoed by Heather (27, single) and Matilda (30, engaged), who spoke about close friends who had married early and separated prior to having children. They both position these friends as mature and experienced. They are, as Matilda says, 'maybe more qualified to do well now' in intimate relationships. The starter or trial marriage as distinct from pre-marital cohabitation appears to give a young woman qualifications and experience in approaching later intimate relationships around their late twenties.

Pre-marital sex and cohabitation

Pre-marital sex is defined here as sexual experience prior to marriage. This ranges from casual or momentary sexual encounters, to sex in a long term or committed (but not yet marital) relationship. Aside from the six who maintained they would not have sex before marriage on religious grounds, all participants said they would personally engage in pre-marital sex, and viewed pre-marital sex as acceptable behaviour for others. Marriage has become detraditionalized in that sense. Given general acceptance in the population of pre-marital sex, marriage no longer exists as the privileged site for sexual relationships (Rissel et al, 2003).

Cohabitation is defined here as either 'pre'-marital, or as an alternative to marriage. Pre-marital cohabitation is living together, sharing a bedroom, with some intention or desire to marry in the future; in essence, trialling marital living prior to legal acknowledgement of married status. Cohabitation as an alternative to marriage entails living together with the mutual acknowledgement that future marriage is not desired. As Cherlin (2004) notes, attitudes towards cohabitation as an alternative to marriage have become more accepting. Participants all spoke of cohabitation as an alternative to formal marriage. However, this was usually positioned as right for 'others' rather than for themselves. The acceptance of pre-marital cohabitation in desire or practice emphasises the break from traditional courting practices that were influenced by religious discourses about chastity before marriage in Australia.

Pre-marital cohabitation was perceived by all but six interviewees to be vital if not

compulsory. This highlights the difficulty of applying the individualization and detraditionalization theses to contemporary intimate relationship aspirations. On one hand, the prevalence of the pre-marital cohabitation discourse marks a break with traditional pre-marital practices – signalling detraditionalization. On the other hand, the normative perception of pre-marital cohabitation as part and parcel of the 'journey' towards marriage implies that pre-marital cohabitation is really a contemporary mediated form of conventional marriage practice – representing a continuity of (modified) tradition. Moreover, the popularity of pre-marital cohabitation emphasises the historical continuity of monogamous, pseudo-marital intimate relationship practices. This seems to go against the 'increased pluralism' of intimate relationship behaviours as asserted by theorists of individualization and detraditionalization such as Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim.

Divorce

Divorce may be defined as the legal dissolution of a marriage, following a period of separation. Participants' attitudes towards divorce also highlight the convergence of discourses of the moral 'good' wife, romantic ideals, and the importance of the individualized life trajectory. As discussed in Chapter Six, participants tend to position divorce as normalised, and are aware that many contemporary marriages will end in divorce. Despite this, traditional constructions of marriage as lifelong, and unbreakable, remain hoped for.   In support of this discourse, a range of 'acceptable' or 'appropriate' justifications for divorce were offered. For example, defence of divorce on the grounds

of a husbands' infidelity or of domestic violence was common. For many participants like Jane (19, single) and Natalie (20, relationship), such reasons were not only grounds for divorce, but necessitated divorce. Deb (33, married) and Emily (22, single) perceived domestic violence to be 'unforgiveable', while Janine said:

> If your husband cheats on you...I couldn't get past that. Some people would say you should forgive...but no..cheating means they don't respect you (Janine, 34, married to second husband).

Natalie (20, relationship) agrees, saying she 'feels sorry' for women who 'take their cheating husbands back', highlighting the consensus amongst participants that particular indiscretions by either partner 'should' result in divorce.

The participants also position divorce as acceptable if 'things really stop working' Louise (35, relationship). While acknowledging that a marriage must be worked on 'through thick and thin' (Sharon, 31, married), participants like Natalie (20, relationship), Leah (23, relationship), and Amanda (21, single) link acceptable divorce with fate and destiny. Divorce is acceptable if, despite their efforts, a couple 'grow apart' (Natalie), 'want different things' (Amanda), or 'fall out of love' (Amanda, Leah). The implication of fate or destiny means that despite the best efforts of the couple, the marriage is 'not meant to be' (Leah). This indicates that for some of the young women, beyond a reluctance to divorce, the participants are open to the idea of marriage as breakable, and perhaps not lifelong.

Marriage was universally constructed as entailing 'hard work' and not something that

should be easily dissolved. Yet, despite the common perception that marriages are more difficult to dissolve or 'walk away from' than other relationship forms (see Chapter Six), some participants stressed their unwillingness to remain in marriages that do not fulfil their expectations:

> I'd rather get divorced than stay in a loveless marriage...it wastes your time and it's not right for him either (Louise (35, relationship).

For others there was a definite reluctance to divorce. Reluctance to divorce was based primarily on traditional conceptions of marriage as a moral commitment for life. This view points to continued traditional and institutional influence on participants' perceptions of the central place of marriage in the life trajectory.

In summary, marriage tends to be viewed as an intimate and companionate relationship, not an institution. Most participants show little respect for the traditional institutional basis of marriage, for example by dismissing issues of religion, and expressing positive attitudes towards pre-marital sex, yet they still attach value and belief to marriage as a formally recognised intimate relationship. In terms of everyday practices, marriage is no longer a site for strict societally-dictated behaviours, at least attitudinally. However, marriage remains symbolically dominant as the highest regarded form of conjugal relationship. In most cases 'conventional' gendered marital relationships are either striven for, accepted, or justified on an individual level.

Increased pluralism/heterogenization

Detraditionalization implies heterogenization, where the increased choice and freedom associated with the declining influence of traditional systems results in a greater variety of decisions, in this case, relationship forms and arrangements. As mentioned above, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's 'do-it-yourself biographies' in essence imply an increasing range of possibilities. It signifies 'the end of fixed, predefined images of man. The human being becomes (…) a choice among possibilities, *homo optionis'* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:5). But while the nuclear family may no longer be the dominant partnered model statistically, the ideal at least in this participant group is for the dominant partnered model of marriage to occur, followed by children.

This finding certainly challenges claims for the heterogenization of imagined relationship options. It may indicate that the standard nuclear family model is statistically declining because of factors other than the life aspirations of women. Certainly the range of possibilities for intimate relationships has increased, and particular elements of pre-marital courting have become detraditionalized. However the 'new' heterogenous possibilities in discursive constructions of ideal intimacy do not seem to have changed the aspirations of young women in this study towards formal marriage as a relationship ideal.

It can be argued that if young Australian women such as those in this study still subscribe to the ideal of marriage, even though so many marriages end in divorce, claims for the detraditionalization of intimacy should be questioned. If the institution of

marriage remains the norm (or at least the desired norm), then this does not seem to be an instance of detraditionalization. However, it is possible that within marriage, women's experiences and desires might be increasingly heterogenized, or detraditionalized. This is discussed below.

Consensus of ideals and attitudes

If the detraditionalization of intimate relationships implies heterogenization, where increased choice and freedom is associated with a greater variety of decisions, and a proliferation of relationship forms and arrangements, then we might expect to see all kinds of changes, possibly including the relevance of age. However, any large claim for increasing heterogeneity is challenged by the consensus on the ideal age of marriage reported by survey respondents. Although their responses indicate a later age of marriage compared to previous generations as we might expect, the extent of unanimity is striking.

The median ideal age for marriage for the 206 participants of the survey was 28.0 years. The mean was 27.3 years, and the variance was 3.32. The low variance shows considerable consensus regarding the ideal marrying age. The median age amongst participants is slightly lower than the Australia-wide median for actual age of marriage for females which is 29.3 (ABS, 2008a), implying a slight difference between ideals and practice. It can certainly be argued that behavioural statistics may differ from attitudinal statistics, such that people's behaviour relevant to marriage may show greater

heterogeneity in practice. This is supported by empirical research from The Netherlands, which statistically analysed the differences in variance of marrying age over the past 70 years. It concludes that despite a steady rise in marrying age over time, increasing heterogeneity in marrying age is not evident (De Beer, 2007).

The interviews confirmed the survey consensus on ideal marrying age. Amanda (21, single), Gillian (24, engaged) and Rowena (32, married) agree that 'if you get married before you're 25, well, it's too young, you have to live first' (Rowena), and 'if I get to 30 and I'm still not married, I reckon I'll be starting to worry' (Sam, 19, single).

Even within marital relationships, it appears that roles, expectations and aspirations remain, for the most part, homogenous as far as the participant group here is concerned. Every participant who desired to marry agreed that they would take their husband's surname in marriage, and would wear appropriate styles of engagement and wedding rings on the fourth finger of their left hand. The desire both to have children once married, and to be the primary caregiver to those children, indicate the consistent moral discourse of the conventional gendered marriage. Further, the three participants (Toni, 30, cohabiting; Sarah, 28, relationship; and Liz, 24, relationship) whose aspirations could be classified as 'heterogenous', who express desires to be 'unconventional', indicate that attaining alternative practices will be 'a struggle' (Liz). They acknowledge the possibility of falling into conventional marital arrangements by default: 'it might be easier' (Toni). Thus, not only is their awareness of a range of acceptable relationship and family options normative, the pluralisation of relationship forms within the marriage is

not envisaged much either. In short, it seems most participants are aiming for conventional marriage ideals and gendered arrangements.

It is difficult to argue that traditions, and the influence of traditional institutions, have not declined. Social norms have become pluralised to various extents across space and time, highlighted not only by the uptake of cohabitation and childbirth outside of marriage, but also by the recent debate surrounding the legalisation of same-sex marriage (Cherlin, 2004). This means that in theory, each individual is confronted with an extensive list of choices and possibilities, not only for intimate relationships, but for every element of life. The logic is that lifestyles become a reflection of individual choice, and thus a reflection of identity. As a result of the processes of individualization and detraditionalization, ontological security must be created and developed by the individual. However, despite the strength of these claims by contemporary social theorists, there seems to be a great deal of clinging to traditions, especially in the personal domains of life for women.

Retraditionalization

There is evidence in the data for the maintenance of some traditional aspects of marriage, although this may be more accurately described as the construction of new, re-

invented or mediated traditions[14]. This is evidence of 'retraditionalization': The extent to which people subscribe to previously-established sets of rules and regulations, and align ideals of everyday living to a perceived consensus of rules and traditions derived from past practice. In line with Heelas (1996) who argues for the 'coexistence' thesis of concurrent detraditionalization and retraditionalization, the following sections elucidate the ways that participants, while emphasising individualized and detraditionalized discourses, simultaneously desire perceived traditional practices.

Continued traditional and institutional influences

Some institutional elements remain valued in the meanings that young women have for marriage. For example, as discussed in Chapter Six, women in favour of marriage said they would prefer to be married when they had children. Although many stressed they would not judge others who had children out of wedlock, they expressed a strong desire to have the perceived stability and commitment of a marital relationship before children were considered.

> I'm not against it [having children out of marriage]; I'd just
> prefer to be married first (Hannah, 21, relationship).

The institution of marriage certainly does not regulate behaviour and property as it did in

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[14] It is of importance here to clarify the use of the term 'retraditionalization'. 'Retraditionalization' might imply that there was a period of time that marriage was genuinely out of fashion and that these young women are now returning to traditional values. This is not necessarily the case. There is little evidence to suggest that the appeal of marriage has previously waned, and is currently undergoing a return to favour. Rather, the relevance of retraditionalization in this thesis is linked to the discourse of individualization. Some of the young women actively pursue behaviours and practices which they concede as being traditional in that they are 'old fashioned'. These women position themselves as more 'traditional' than the majority of the population who they deem to be detraditionalized. Retraditionalization, then, entails 'tradition maintenance', where the young women believe they are regaining the beliefs and practices of previous generations, despite the argument that these practices have never really disappeared.

previous eras, yet the institutional component of marriage still features in the participants' considerations of marriage today. The perception that people are more likely to remain in a marital relationship and work through problems, for example, demonstrates the continued institutional importance of marriage. Dedication to the ideal of marriage was played out through frequent references to the 'effort' that couples must make to remain married:

> It's hard work, but you have to stay together despite any
> problems you might have (Eliza 31, single).

Furthermore, the participants show considerable reluctance to divorce on the basis that they will somehow be 'letting down' the institution of marriage.

Marriage was perceived as an 'important' institution for society by Prue (24, single), Cherie (33, single) and Jessica (23, engaged), while Gemma (18, cohabiting), one of the youngest participants, stated that, as an institution, marriage is 'worth holding onto'. This common attitude towards marriage as something to have faith in, and be dedicated to, is found in frequent references to the 'effort' that couples must make to remain married. The widespread awareness of divorce rates amongst the participant group results in strong attitudes in favour of, as Jade (20, single) says, 'not messing up'. This implies divorce is perceived as 'failing' the institution of marriage, as well as a failure on the part of the individual. Marriage is treated as important for society, even sanctified, and should not be taken lightly.

So while the decision to marry is almost universally based on intimacy and individual

romantic relationships, the 'weight' of the institution still features in the participant's narratives. The institution of marriage is no longer a wholly naturalised given, understood from above to below (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995), yet marriage as a desired social institution for the expression of intimacy still symbolises something to have faith in or believe in.

The participants' discursive constructions of relationship status (particularly in middle to old age) also imply the continuing institutional relevance of marriage. The common idea that a middle aged woman is considered either single (not in a relationship) or married highlights the assumption that marriage is the only form of serious relationship in adult life, and demonstrates the naturalness of the institutional elements of marriage still captured in contemporary culture, as well as the desire to do what is socially 'normal'.

Anxiety

For Beck-Gernsheim (2002), individualization results in a striving for security. The participants' narratives certainly illuminated their anxieties. All were aware that their life trajectories were 'up to them'; however they did not give much evidence of feeling 'freed' by this. Instead, as Beck-Gernsheim suggests, they seemed eager to escape uncertainty and shore up a secure and stable long-term relationship, ideally by their late twenties. They were wary and anxious about the diversity of intimate relationship options, and reluctant to be perceived by others as different or marginal, or less

competent; particularly through remaining unmarried into middle age. In their view, people who deviate from conventional marriage are perceived as less socially acceptable or morally inferior. In short, the increased risk and uncertainty of detraditionalization seems to increase the attractiveness of traditional forms of living, hence pointing to retraditionalization. In this apparent reinvention process, the age-old tradition of a romantic love courtship leading to marriage was central.

Romantic love and legitimate feminine identity

The significant presence of the discourse of romantic love, particularly the ideal of the 'soul mate' or 'the one' – in participants' constructions of intimacy indicates complex contexts of detraditionalized and retraditionalized relationship aspirations. Embracing the ideal of romantic love underlines the effort that the contemporary individual must now make to solve the unrelenting reflexive questions of 'who am I?', 'what do I want?' and 'what will make me happy?' to name but a few. The retraditionalized emphasis on romance, particularly in terms of the importance of fate, destiny and finding 'the one', implies the impact of individualization as ideology. In the reflexive construction of identity, the above questions must be considered. Being attached to the ideal of romantic love, and finding refuge in the idea that when it comes to finding a husband 'what will be, will be', perhaps alleviates anxiety and potentially enables the creation of ontological security for the young woman in question.

This is in line with Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) claims, and also with the arguments of

Weymann (1989) who points to the seeking of psychic, magic, esoteric and metaphysical 'authorities' to help make sense of the endless questions and possibilities placed on the individual.

Giddens' typologies of love

Giddens' idea of confluent love is contingent, in that both partners may terminate a relationship that no longer exists within the terms of the 'pure relationship'. Confluent love is contingent on ongoing mutual disclosure and trust for as long as it works. When this ceases, partners move on. This was not a favoured idea for the participants. The romantic discourse of the 'soul mate' means that they viewed their marital relationships in terms of being forever, for life, with that 'one and only' partner.

> Marriage is for the rest of your life, til death us do part…you've found the person you're going to spend the rest of your life with…I mean that's what getting married is about (Amie, 20, single).

> When you meet that person who you want to spend forever with, that's when you know you've found the man you want to marry (Cathy, 29, single).

The above statements emphasise the significance of the discourse of 'romantic love', and, in line with Gillis (1996), indicate the sustained relevance and value attached to the concept of romantic love. This is an example of retraditionalization.

However, whilst the ideals and aspirations of intimate marital relationships in theory

mean that the partners will be together 'forever', the issue of time in the relationship was a complex and contradictory one for participants. In their narratives, running parallel to the romantic love discourses of 'love at first sight', and 'destined to be together forever', is a distinct level of contingency which echoes some of Giddens' claims regarding 'confluent love'. Pre-marital relationships were often discussed in terms of their seriousness, validity or legitimacy according to how much time had passed in the relationship. Love was only acknowledged (particularly in other peoples' relationships) as being legitimate once a certain amount of time had passed. The acceptable period of time varied, but, particularly when talking about entering into a marriage, any relationship less than a year old was negatively perceived, with accusations ranging from naivety to foolishness or stupidity on the part of those seen to be 'rushing in' to a marital relationship.

> People who get married cos they get swept up in all that. When they've been together for like, 6 months or something…brainless! (Ashley, 24, single).

> It's a serious decision. You should take time with your partner to decide to make sure you're right (Gillian, 24, engaged).

It is possible to identify an ongoing contradiction in terms of finding, acquiring and keeping a husband. Firstly, the notion of 'the one', the idea of there being a predestined husband fated to be yours, runs throughout the participant's narratives, for example,

> I know this sounds clichéd, but I want to find my knight in shining armour…someone who I'll meet and fall completely in love with, get married, have kids, live happily ever after…that's all I really want (Maria, 27, single).

> When we meet we'll just know…I believe it. You immediately know, like, straight away, when you click with a person…I

haven't met him yet, but I'll know when I do (Cherie, 33, single).

For Maria and Cherie, the ideal and belief in there being one person who they are 'supposed' to be with is key to their constructions of marriage. Naomi (27, married) agrees, saying 'I know I'm meant to be with him'.

But at the same time, their narratives allude to the pressure to plan their life trajectories, and to accept and embrace the individual agency involved with acquiring and maintaining a certain social position, whether that be in a career or as a wife and/or mother. They appear to simultaneously believe they have to work at finding and keeping a husband on the one hand, and on the other hand that fate or destiny will bring them together with the man they are meant to be with 'forever'. This is an uncomfortable juxtaposition within the participants' narratives. They acknowledged the pressures of personal attainment in finding a husband, and implied individual life plans in achieving this goal. But they also believed or hoped that some higher esoteric power would bring them and their destined partner together, simply, as it is 'meant to be'. Even for Maria and Cherie who held strong belief in the fateful romantic ideal of 'the one' forever, there is awareness of the contingency involved in nurturing and maintaining the relationship, particularly in relation to everyday tasks and behaviours.

> I know we'll need to work on things…who will look after the children, who'll go out and work…I want certain things, like I don't want to do all the housework…yeah that'd be [a] huge [issue in the relationship] if he refused to do any of that (Cherie, 33, single).

Cherie's vision charts the uneasy ground between the traditional discourse of romantic

love and the modern ideal of confluent love. Confluent love signifies a relationship formed and maintained through mutuality, not unequal levels of power. Cherie's aspirations for the traditional romantic marital relationship and her life trajectory towards a contemporary companionate marriage aim for mutuality in one sense, but are also contingent on her husband accommodating her wishes (or not). If he is 'the one' for her then she may just have to live with his laziness. It could be argued that this anticipation of negotiation is part and parcel of the new mutuality and reciprocated disclosure of the 'pure relationship'. However, like Cherie, those interviewed often implied that the sacrifice of their own aspirations and the need for their ongoing compromise in decision-making. In their framings of marriage, 'romantic love' and 'confluent love' are by no means mutually exclusive, but they do signal possible future tensions in marriage.

Confluent love and mutual disclosure

Another element of detraditionalized 'confluent love' challenged by the narratives in this study is the presumption of freedom for women as sexually accomplished actors. Giddens' (1992) idea of a society where it is acceptable to act outside the boundaries of traditional 'appropriate' femininity seems questionable when the participants' narratives about sex are examined. There is social stigma attached to not being considered a morally 'competent woman' which is crucial to ideals of legitimate femininity as a wife. The 'confluent' style of relationship requires equality between the partners in the mindsets of both partners. This 'equality' in terms of disclosure about the woman's prior

sexual experience is not necessarily viewed as desirable by the young women interviewed, for example,

> I love my boyfriend, but I don't want him to know [about her sexual history]…I know he'd probably be okay with it, but I don't want to make it an issue. He doesn't need to know….Well I've been with over 40 guys…and I told him I'd been with two…No way…he'd say I was a slut (Jenna, 24, relationship).

For Jenna, her previous sexual behaviour is something she is careful to avoid discussing in her current relationship. She describes her current relationship as 'serious', 'monogamous' and 'committed'; attributes she identifies as respectable and appropriate. She positions her current relationship as 'serious' against all of her previous encounters and is reluctant to disclose her extensive sexual history for the fear that it will not be deemed feminine or proper, in the framework of her 'legitimate' current relationship. Jenna's identity in her current relationship is constructed around being a legitimate, competent woman who does not 'sleep around'.

Jodie, like Jenna, is wary of being 'frowned upon',

> I don't want to be one of those women who sleeps around, and gets a reputation…I want to be in a stable loving relationship where I know I can trust my partner (Jodie, 23, single).

Jodie equates her own loyal behaviour with that of her partner, encoding an assumption of mutuality – if I am faithful then he will be too. Like Jenna, Jodie does not want to be viewed as a disreputable woman. She positions herself as different from 'those women'. Both women equate being intimate with many men as mutually exclusive from trusting, stable or loving relationships. These examples emphasise the dominance of discourses of traditional chaste femininity. Being a wife and/or mother lends authenticity to an identity

as a 'competent' woman, while a woman who is arguably more sexually free is considered here disreputable. This challenges Gidden's assertion of the inevitable plurality or heterogenization of relationship options and sexual practices for women as sexual agents. Interviewee narratives such as these instead echo conventional moral discourses of appropriate femininity, emphasising a 'virtuous' ideal woman in line with traditional Christian religious doctrine that implies a different moral standard in sexual behaviour for men and women.

Romantic discourses highlight the desire to rely upon a basis for marriage above and beyond everyday choices and rational decision making. Accounts of fate and destiny intertwine to create a realm of belief and a force of external agency on a person's life trajectory. Belief in 'destiny' possibly relieves participants of the stresses associated with individualization and the freedom or pressure to create choice biographies. Yet in keeping with retraditionalization trends, discourses of female virtue and self-sacrifice were still dominant in the romantic narratives of some interviewees.

For example, Lisa stressed both romantic and contingent elements to her relationship:

> I've known him since we were 5….went through school together, you know, we were always mates, through thick and thin you know. Then….I dunno, one day it just hit us…I never looked at him in that way, but then all of a sudden I was like, wow! (Lisa, 29, cohabiting).

In being friends with her partner for many years she acknowledges the confluent mutuality of negotiating the hurdles of adolescence and everyday life. However, she simultaneously implies her romantic relationship with the man was due to fate,

constructing the shift from platonic friendship to intimate partners as 'meant to be'. Lisa had earlier experienced making a choice about the conclusion of an intimate relationship with another man, emphasising the contingent element of confluent love in the pure relationship. She speaks candidly about the breakdown of one of her previous relationships that approximates Giddens' model of the 'pure relationship',

> After a while [14 months] …it was a case where he had his job and I had mine, and..it became serious. And then it got to the time [when Lisa's partner was offered a job interstate] and it wasn't worth going along.

Lisa highlights the mutual disclosure that characterizes the confluent love of the pure relationship. Her account echoes Giddens' proposition that the pure relationship relies upon women's autonomy and equality of power within the relationship. In noting that her job was as important to her as her partner's was to him, mutual negotiation in decision-making is shown.

Constructions of love are fluid and flexible, and may change over time and with different life trajectories. This may go some way to explaining the arguably contradictory constructions of love as romantic or confluent in the narratives of the participants in this research. In comparing narratives in this study to Giddens' typologies of love it is noted that romantic notions of fate and destiny, meeting 'the one', and experiencing some form of 'love at first sight' – all run parallel to the constructions of late modern everyday life and living, where any number of decisions are made frequently by the individual to shape their own life biography. Advancing romantic love discourse as the basis for marriage gives a measure of safety and security, and distances participants from the potential disappointments entrenched within everyday life. Yet

awareness of the difficulties of negotiating everyday issues in marriage, as well as acknowledgement of the possibility for divorce, emphasises the simultaneous duality of the women's narratives and discursive constructions of marital relationships. The data so far muddies the waters of Giddens' separate types of 'romantic love' and 'confluent love'.

Contingency and compromise

Despite the explicit absence of the impact of gender in their accounts of present and future intimate relationships, the participants' discursive constructions of marital life implicitly point to retraditionalized gendered living. Holmes (2004: 252) notes that women are well aware that in marriage, 'that the woman will do the compromising'. Most participants' narratives of their personal desires acknowledged that a husband would be likely to have his own personal goals and aspirations which could clash with theirs. The most common attitude was that sharing life with a partner was based on mediating and resolving two individual sets of aspirations, rather than finding a husband who shares similar goals. A desirable 'husband' was constructed as economically prosperous, reliable, kind and mature, with whom compromises could be reached.

> I want to be with someone who pays me as much attention as I would to them. I want a husband who is caring and sensitive and loving…and romantic……but that's so tough to find in a man! (Karen, 19, single).

Yet imagined marital life as loving partners seemed highly contingent on a husband's desires, including 'important' decisions like having children.

> I guess it depends on what my husband wants (Leah, 23, relationship).

The participants positioned aspirations as personal and individual for the two partners, with little planning of joint life trajectories. Compatibility with a husband is dependent on love and romance, with the support of 'good' character traits. It is therefore not surprising to note that most of the participants detailed 'wanting different things' (Natalie, Louise), or 'growing apart' (Amanda, Leah) as an acceptable justification for marital dissolution.

There was considerable compromise suggested in participants' desire for a husband. It was implied that anxieties surrounding not finding a husband and fear of growing old alone might mean 'lowering standards' for an ideal husband, even as far as desire for children.

> I want three kids, two girls and a boy…but I guess if my husband doesn't want children, we'll have to just work it out at the time (Heather, 27, single).

Heather's attitude typifies the extent of this contingency. She strongly desires children, yet does not identify this desire as necessarily needing to be shared by a potential husband prior to commitment. Quite the contrary, she positions the decision and desire to have children as something to be discussed once married. Janet (26, relationship) shares Heather's attitude towards child-bearing. In her narrative she struggled with whether having a husband or children was more important, resolving that, as mentioned in Chapter Six, 'you can't have the kids without the husband'. Lisa also constructed child-bearing as contingent on the views of a potential imagined husband, again

positioning the decision to have children as one to be made after they were married:

> I'd really like children, but if my husband really doesn't want
> them, then, you know, it's something you just have to deal with.
> (Lisa, 24, relationship)

The above attitudes emphasise the extent of the desire for a husband, where achieving married status in the life trajectory is both a final step in securing desired status, and an initial step in beginning, to mediate and resolve other 'big' life choices. One would imagine, considering the detailed narratives of the participants' discursive constructions of marriage as 'hard work' and 'a huge decision', that the participants might consider assuring similarity in life choices with a partner prior to marriage or commitment. However, this pragmatic approach might well contradict the fate/destiny discourse of romantic love.

The sense of contingency in marriage was not limited to 'big' life decisions. Aspirations for overseas travel and even time spent on personal hobbies were constructed as contingent on husband's attitudes, as well as issues such housework and paid work. The number of variations on the phrase 'I guess it will depend on what my husband wants' underline the extent to which participants are willing to compromise with their imagined husband. Differences in attitudes and life goals between partners are not considered 'enough' to justify dissolving a relationship – like Giddens suggests in his framing of 'confluent love'. Yet at the same time, these are the very differences that constitute reasonable grounds for divorce in some of the participants' narratives.

Indications of a willingness to reach very high levels of compromise indicate the

strength of the participant's desire to marry, even though irreconcilable differences are still recognised as grounds for divorce. This high sense of contingency supports Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995:6) explanation of divorce. They cite the 'mismatching' of two highly individualized biographies, making partnership marriage hard to achieve: 'The integration of two such centrifugal biographies is a feat'. The examples above serve to support the influence of individualization as ideology, in the specificity and individuality of desires in the imagined life trajectory, whilst also implying a retraditionalizing shift, in the extent to which participants are (potentially) willing to compromise in order to gain and maintain their marital relationships as wives.

Domestic living and pseudo-mutuality

The division of labour in the home was a key site for retraditionalization discourses in the participants' narratives, although these were often contained in apparent challenges to the traditional division of labour in the family. Most stressed their desire for equal and equitable divisions of labour and power in marital relationships, particularly distancing themselves from the experiences of married women in previous generations. As Shanna (24, cohabiting) says, 'I'm not going to put up with someone [husband] who doesn't want it to be equal too'. Yet, despite their general rhetoric that household labour should be equally distributed, many participants imagined taking the greater proportion of domestic duties in marriage, positioning this not as gender inequality, but because they enjoyed domestic tasks, highlighting the pseudo-mutuality of marital living (Bittman and Pixley, 1997, see also Thompson, 1991).

> It should be 50:50 [division of domestic duties in marriage] I know, but I'll do the ironing and laundry 'cos I like to (Emily, 22, single).

> He hates doing the housework, and I don't mind. I quite enjoy some of it (Mel, 29, cohabiting).

Dempsey (1997a, 1997b) notes the continuing influence of conventional or traditional gender ideologies, as well as the ways women justify inequitable divisions of household labour; while Tichenor (2005:14) asserts that 'spouses are often more comfortable with a certain level of gender asymmetry in their relationships'. Few participants acknowledged the gendered nature of their relationships as unequal. When they did acknowledge their relationships as unequal, participants went to considerable lengths to convince the interviewer that this gendered inequality was not something put upon them but their own (individual) choice. Overall, the division of household labour in the participants' narratives remained either highly traditional, or reconstructed mediated forms of traditional housework practice, with male partners often assisting or completing 'token' household tasks:

> He makes an effort, but I like doing it better (Lauren, 26, cohabiting).

Bec provided a typical account in defence of the unequal division of household labour, distancing herself from women in previous generations, whom experienced subordination in marital living.

> I can see me doing most of the housework, but I like doing it; its not because I'm going to have a husband who bosses me around, I just know that I'll probably enjoy doing it more than him, so that's the way it'll work out (Bec, 21, single).

He does his share (Jessica, 23, engaged).

In line with Dempsey (1997a, 1997b), the above quotes indicate that participants actively reproduce the conventional or traditional gender order, but do not acknowledge themselves as subordinate or victimized in their experiences of the division of labour within intimate relationships.

Some of the participants in this study associated traditional gendered models of living (for example taking on all of the domestic duties in the home) as old-fashioned or traditional and frowned upon this. They claimed they made efforts to reconstitute and mediate gendered living arrangements. However, the traditional institution of marriage implies gendered roles, and there was acknowledgement across the participant group that for a variety of reasons, women will end up doing most of the household tasks, and childrearing. For some participants, the perceived simplicity of these 'traditional' roles is attractive, perhaps because a 'traditional' living arrangement diminishes ontological insecurity. The identity of 'wife' and 'mother' is already well established and known, and perceived to be easy to assume.

> Its quite traditional…I'm a modern woman, but yes, I do the cooking and the cleaning and Mike cuts the grass and does all the handyman stuff…and he makes most of the decisions…finances and things like that…its just easier that way (Naomi, 27, married).

> I like having a man around the house…like in the past I shared [a house] with guys [friends] but it wasn't the same as now…its nice having someone to take care of me…don't laugh, I feel safer when he's there with me. We're just meant to look after

> each other, I take care of our home, and he takes care of me. I know it's a bit old fashioned to be like it, but its good to have someone to take care of you (Simone, 28, married).

The above two accounts highlight traditional gender roles in the marital home. The acknowledgement by Simone that her marriage is typified by 'traditional' gender roles, emphasises the legacy of the romantic love complex, based on complementarity and gender difference. These relationships rely upon a mediated version of traditional gender divisions of labour and emotional behaviour in the home, so they are certainly not representative of the late modern diversity of intimate relationships as identified by Giddens.

Although the majority of participants implied they wanted to strive for equality in emotional exchange, many seemed content with, or resigned to, traditional typologies of gender roles within marriage and the home. It can be argued that in the era of 'confluent love', increasing sexual autonomy and freedom for women has served to strain traditional gender roles within intimate heterosexual relationships, with the result that the participants were aware that there were many choices they could make, including the goal of gender mutuality. However, for the most part, their awareness of inequality and their desire for a balance of power in marriage does not seem to lead to practices of mutuality in the relationship (Baxter et al, 2005; South and Spitze, 1994). 'More, perhaps much more, creative energy goes into sustaining a sense of intimacy *despite* inequality, than into a process of transformation' (Jamieson, 1999:478). The retraditionalized marital relationships imagined or reported here tend to reinforce gender division and inequality, rather than, in accordance with the 'pure relationship',

democratising personal life for women.

An equal distribution of tasks in family life is a normative expectation for many participants. For example, in line with the results of the study by Tinklin et al (2005), all participants stated that responsibilities involved with childcare should be shared to some extent.

> I want my kids to know their father. Not like, you know, have him around and working, like really know him. I want him to take a really active role (Donna, 22, relationship).

This indicates a degree of detraditionalization in the liberalisation of attitudes towards conventional or traditional gendered marital roles. However, in line with assertions by Dempsey (1997b), Amato et al (2007)[15] and Williams (2000) the rhetoric of these young women may not necessarily match their later practices or behaviours. The transformation of intimate relationships in the realm of domestic duties in the home towards becoming more diverse or less determined by traditional gendered divisions of labour, such as Giddens suggests, was rarely found in this study. A form of pseudo-mutuality was presented by some participants. By their account they wanted to take responsibility for the bulk of household tasks. This emphasises the impact of the rhetoric of discourses of individualization, where inequality is disguised rather than undermined. Equality in terms of emotional work was often not realised for participants in their accounts of married life. Historically, there existed an expectation on wives to conform

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[15] Amato et al also analysed men's attitudes towards the role of a wife, comparing responses from 1980 with 2000. Men surveyed in 2000 were much less likely than those in 1980 to agree with the statement that 'The husband should be the main breadwinner', yet there was little difference over time in attitudes towards childcare: most men surveyed in 1980, and 2000, agreed with the statement that 'A woman's most important task is childcare'. This study highlights the expectation that women should 'do it all', where a wife should contribute financially, yet maintain responsibility for childrearing.

to their husband's needs and desires (Bernard, 1972). There is considerable contemporary evidence to suggest that wives still invest more time and effort in attempting to strengthen and solidify their marital relationships through emotional work and domestic duties than do their husbands (Hochschild, 1989; Dempsey, 1997b, 2002; Thompson, 1991; Hackstaff, 2004; Tichenor, 2005), Many of the participants expect to conform to their husbands' (or potential imagined future husbands') lifestyles and desires by doing the emotional work of compromise. The extent to which the participants' personal aspirations are projected to be self-censored by being contingent on their husband's needs and desires is notable. The majority of the participants' attitudes towards conventionally gendered marital arrangements indicate both retraditionalization and tradition-maintenance. Moreover, Donna's comment above highlights the common perception of participants that it is up to the woman/wife to decide on the distribution of household tasks, implying an inequality in decision making in the realm of the home, and it will be the woman who (normally reluctantly) takes charge of the organisation of the division of labour in the home:

> If I ask him to clean or cook or whatever then he usually does
> without…too much grief (Naomi, 27, married).

Cultural authority

Evidence of detraditionalization and retraditionalization amongst the behaviours and attitudes of the participants as detailed above derives from largely unconscious, ingrained attitudes and perceptions regarding married life. However, at times, the participants in this research spoke of conscious desires and behaviours towards

retraditionalization, through adopting particular behaviours which they perceive as 'traditional'. This is linked to the pervasive meaning of marriage as performative, insofar as the participants are at pains to present themselves in a way that is in keeping with their perceptions about what is socially acceptable and what achieves a competent feminine identity for them.

Evidence of 'conscious' retraditionalization was found in efforts to legitimise relationships. For example, despite never attending church in everyday life, both Chloe and Nina wanted to marry in a church. The performative statement of the priest in marrying a couple adds cultural authority to the marriage, indicating the church's religious authority may be fading, but remains culturally valued. It may also be that the church as a wedding venue is more attractive.

> I like the setting of the church. It's more traditional, old
> fashioned (Chloe, 26, relationship).

> [A wedding] in a hotel or on the beach is okay, but those places
> aren't...a church is designed for people to get married (Nina, 29,
> relationship).

The desire to marry in a church seems to imply marriage as a formal, traditional institution, worthy of preservation. Marrying in a church ensures that the marriage is as culturally important and symbolic as it can be. Retraditionalization, particularly through the choice to adopt rites or acts that are perceived or constructed as traditional; or through choosing to live by sets of perceived traditional rules or regulations, seems to serve as a means of enabling feelings of ontological security for some young women interviewed.

'Traditions' as repeated and ritualized life practices, are embodied in everyday activities and social roles, over time and space – maintained and reworked by different and successive groups. Thus processes of detraditionalization, tradition-maintenance and retraditionalization are in fact mutually reflexive. Inevitably and unavoidably they are grounded in traditions and quasi-traditions, with their associated authority. Retraditionalization in the data was evident in the meanings made around making sacrifices in marriage, overcoming obstacles by compromise, and conforming to the romantic love typology (in contrast to Giddens' confluent love typology). Nevertheless, participants would only go so far in retraditionalizing. They were willing to divorce for specific reasons; they supported pre-marital cohabitation and they acknowledged the value of serial monogamy before the final marriage commitment took place. Even 'starter' marriages were acceptable to some. Personal career or other life goals were important to them, yet the sheer amount of contradiction in their narratives about marriage implies that these women will be at some point or another faced with the reality that they cannot do or have 'it all'. When faced with a choice between personal fulfilment through attainment of goals, or personal fulfilment through emotional stability, the husband (and implied emotional stability and ontological security) is more likely to be chosen.

Smart and Shipman's (2004) study of arranged marriages in the UK, showed aspirations of the participants towards both individualization/detraditionalization and retraditionalization, with partners actively holding onto elements of perceived traditional

practices, to which they attached interest or value. In Australian society, the extent to which traditional marriage practices continue to be enacted varies according to time, space, ethnicity, religious affiliation and age. The circumstances of partners, both materially and emotionally, also has an effect. This suggests that for young women planning on getting married, processes of individualization, detraditionalization and retraditionalization are much more complex than implied by the individualization thesis and its attendant claims.

The discourse of individualization

The extent to which the macro-sociological process of individualization, as a social process has extensively taken hold amongst participants is questionable. However, there is evidence that the ideology of the individual is pervasive – participants feel they 'must' choose unique life biographies and trajectories. The individualization and detraditionalization theses emphasize agency over structure, in the case of intimacy, particularly downplaying gender. The resources necessary to enable 'do it yourself' biographies are assumed as given, and as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996: 40) assert, the existence of 'collective units of meaning and action' – such as extended family, kin, and community – are dismissed.

It is clear that for participants the political rhetoric of individualization, and particularly individual choice, has been taken up. The narratives offered by all participants emphasise individual choice and agency. The participants' aspirations are detailed and

reflexive, for example:

> I want to move up in my work…I'm in a good position now, and I want to keep moving up the ladder…I work really hard, but it's a job I love…by the time I hit 40 I want to be in an executive role. I want children too, and that's going to put the brakes on my promotions…but I don't think that it's an unrealistic idea (Nina, 29 –relationship).

> I'm gonna be a pharmacist…I'll be qualified in a couple of months….so I'll be working bloody hard…I want at least a couple of children, but not for now…maybe when I'm 29 (Shanna, 24, cohabiting).

The above quotes are typical of the individualised life trajectories imagined by those interviewed. Concurrently, their narratives also indicate the anxieties involved with feeling that they must make individual choices, and that these choices are up to them alone. Contrary to the 'freedom' that the detraditionalization thesis entails, participants seem wary and anxious about increasing the diversity of relationship options, and are reluctant to be judged as different or marginal by those around them. Most participants, like Camilla (29, engaged) and Vanessa (27, cohabiting) acknowledge that although various relationship options are open to them, most that deviate from conventional marriage are less socially acceptable. Moreover, considerable anxiety stems from the notion that failure to 'achieve' married status by middle age will result in stigmatisation at work and in social life, given that marriage is thought to 'lock in' a husband for partnered child-bearing and rearing. Within the discourse of individualization, failure to achieve married status is taken to reflect the individual woman's flawed choices, and/or problematic personality traits, rather than any other structural context. The risk of facing individual criticism or stigma seems to be the principal anxiety, so that marriage in a more conventional or traditional format is perceived as not only more attractive but

socially safer.

The absence of gender consciousness in narratives

Few of the participants explicitly spoke of any form of wider structural gender inequality impacting on their aspirations. In short, their gender was not identified as an obvious factor in enabling or hindering their goals. In contrast to the argument of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001), the participants did not show any particularly explicit awareness of family or work related gender dimensions. In this study the participants universally implied that they *can* choose, are able to choose, and are obliged to choose the contexts of their intimate relationships – as if the structures of gender inequality did not exist. As Brannen and Nilsen (2005:423) poignantly suggest, 'if you can choose, then you also believe it is up to you to decide; and you are seemingly not at the mercy of forces beyond your control ... young women may think that they have equality and choice but ignore the ways in which gender continues to structure opportunities'. This 'outdating' of a feminist agenda emphasises the problematic nature of theorising female individualization (McRobbie, 2004).

Conclusion

The strong commitment to both late modern and traditional elements of marriage throughout the participant group questions the 'fit' of the individualization thesis for satisfactorily explaining the aspirations and practices of these participants. In line with

Gross (2005), it is problematic to acknowledge intimacy in the form of marriage as individualized or detraditionalized, when the moral and social importance of the marital relationship remains strong, as reflected in the continued uptake of marriage. As long as marriage is expected for most people by most people, and divorce remains for the most part frowned upon, traditional or at least conventional discourses of the intimate relationship will continue to be hegemonic.

The uptake of seemingly conventional or traditional practices in marriage highlights the attractiveness of marriage as a 'known' familiar institution and relationship. Yet the contexts of ideal or acceptable marital relationships offered by those interviewed strongly implies gender inequality, particularly in the construction of pseudo-mutual marital roles, without any acknowledgement of this. The rhetoric of individualized 'choice' biographies in the relevant theoretical paradigms overemphasises the agency available to participants, where anxiety and pressure to conform to conventional identities of the 'good' mother or wife and the woman who 'has it all', permeate narratives and presumably shape decision-making practices.

Although they actively plan their individual life trajectories, those interviewed frequently took others into account when discussing their aspirations and preferred relationship options. Ties to family, as well as views contingent on the desires of their husband or imagined future husband were commonly referred to. Such connectedness highlights the complexity of women's aspirations as reflexive late modern individuals, and challenges the 'individual' in the individualization thesis, because these young

women do not purely think about themselves when making decisions. Gender inequality remains, but is justified or explained away by referencing other factors rather than gender inequality. Beck (1992) notes that both the realm of paid work, and the division of labour in the home, may still be sites of continuing gender inequality. Evidence from the participants' narratives suggests this to be the case, with this continued gender inequality resulting from the persuasive ideology of individualization. Despite the apparent emancipation and 'freeing' of both men and women from traditionally gendered constraints, gender inequality continues because women feel 'free' to choose to put the needs of their husband and children first. To this end, it is acknowledged that in many of the participants' lives, the goal of gender equality in relationships is not mirrored by material changes, resulting in a distinct contradiction between expectations and reality. As Thompson and Holland (2002:338) assert, this is the central contradiction of the individualization and detraditionalization theses, in that 'while changing gender relations are situated at the core of current processes of social change, inequalities between the genders may be growing and may become more apparent and untenable'. The participants' rhetoric regarding marital roles, particularly in the divisions of labour and childcare, are not mirrored in real living.

The next chapter concludes this thesis, analysing the theoretical and empirical contribution of the study. The chapter notes the limitations of the study, discusses the implications for policy and practice, and recommends future further research.

Chapter Nine

Conclusions and Implications

of the Research

> Whom you love and how is supposedly open, but to what extent can a woman choose to love herself above others? (Holmes, 2004:256).

Introduction

This thesis has constructed an account of the meanings young women in the Newcastle and Lower Hunter region ascribe to marriage and marital relationships. The research questions were explored using an empirical data set, to interrogate the various feminist critiques of marriage and the family, and the body of theoretical writing on individualization and detraditionalization that has come to the fore in explaining intimate relationships in contemporary western settings.

The grounded theory approach enabled the shaping of research questions, and a qualitative data collection strategy, which provided the insights necessary for such an exploratory study. Throughout the several phases of data collection and analysis, standard grounded theory methods were used to rigorously assess and reassess emerging themes and trends in the data. The reflexivity of the grounded theory approach allowed

the empirical analysis to identify the participants' discursive constructions of marriage, as well as enabling the contradictions and ambivalence within the participants' narratives to be uncovered.

In this chapter, I offer a summary of the main findings from this research project. I provide a discussion of how the study extends the existing literature on marriage and intimate relationships for young women, particularly considering this study's contribution to feminist theorising on marriage. I examine why and how the findings both challenge and reinforce the existing theoretical literature on intimacy under processes of individualization, detraditionalization and retraditionalization. Finally, I discuss the policy and practical implications of the study, considering the limitations of the research, and reflect on possibilities for future further enquiry.

Summary of the findings

Meanings of marriage through the life trajectory

For the vast majority of the participants, the marital relationship is the most appealing and desirable form of intimate relationship in adulthood, and exists as a goal or target in a variety of ways. Marriage is associated with love and romance, commitment and security. The allure of marriage for many participants has been entrenched from an early age. Thus the attractiveness of marriage lies in its familiarity on both a micro-sociological level as a relationship, and institutionally at a macro level. The marital relationship was constructed by most as entailing something 'more' or 'extra' than other

forms of intimate relationships, with added value compared to cohabitation, for example.

Most participants' accounts strongly indicated a 'faith' or 'belief' in marriage. I was surprised particularly by the positive attitudes of those participants who had, as children, experienced their parents' marital breakdown, or unhappy marital relationship. Rather than being put off marriage by these childhood experiences, these participants were spurred on to 'try harder'. They showed great loyalty to marital discourse and located marriage as indicative of 'true love' and romance, often connected to fate and destiny.

When they imagined themselves approaching middle to old age, marriage was constructed as vitally necessary for shoring up security and avoiding anxiety about loneliness, isolation and stigma. I found that the marital relationship remained the most ideal way to permit feelings of security and reassurance in the life trajectory, enabling 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1992). The participants seemed to look to the marital relationship – synonymous with relationship stability – to relieve feelings of nervousness when considering the future. They were nervous about 'failing' to locate and retain a husband. This anxiety was most apparent in accounts of the fear of experiencing the stigma associated with being an unmarried middle aged woman. Participants' concerns were compounded by the threat of growing old alone without a husband for companionship and support, given the social stigma of never having married or formed a family.

Marriage and legitimate feminine identity: Having it all?

The study participants, like most people, wished to be seen by others as having positive and desirable qualities. Marriage implies some of these qualities. According to the participants, being (and 'doing' being) married in the workplace signified various positive identity and personality traits which they believed had an impact on how they were viewed. Marriage created a self identity in adulthood which symbolised femininity, maturity and competence. 'Doing' being married was perceived and experienced as beneficial in a range of scenarios at work and in family and social life. The status of a married woman was emphasised by participants as enabling the desirable identity of the competent and legitimately feminine adult woman, pointing to the importance of group membership. The data supports Cherlin's (2004) observation that marriage has become an indicator of prestige, meaning that marital discourse remains normative and desirable for most.

Yet all of the interview participants expressly desired an identity that entailed more than being 'just' a wife. Marriage, and the status of being married, represented for them a vital platform for the attainment of a fuller, more desirable adult identity. In fact many aspired to be 'superwomen' – wives; full time mothers, and paid workers – in order to achieve personal fulfilment. The ways that married status fits into the superwoman role is discussed below.

In the accounts of the participants, moral discourses of 'good mothering' were inextricably linked to the meanings they attached to marriage. The appeal of marriage as

necessary or ideal for the bearing and raising of children supports Beck's and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) observation that children now occupy a central place in the emotional lives of contemporary heterosexual women (and men). They argue that in the developed West, the adult-child bond has come to represent the only permanent relationship. The way that many participants constructed marriage as a pre-requisite for child-bearing indicates that marriage will continue to constitute the most attractive relationship for enabling a highly significant form of ontological security (Giddens, 1992) – having children.

There is evidence in their discursive constructions of 'doing' being married that the participants are resisting the normative discourse of 'just' being a wife and mother. Yet there are also many obstacles and stigmas associated with not conforming to conventional marital roles. Being a wife implies competence in identity, but is just one step in the right direction. All of the participants wished to be perceived as successful and empowered women, yet being a wife was not enough to solely indicate or guarantee this identity. Focussing on a career and neglecting the responsibility of being married was also perceived to be problematic. Having a successful career might achieve competence and empowerment, if the pitfalls associated with being unmarried in the workplace were avoided (by being married).

The participants' accounts of a desirable identity contained frequent contradictory and confused remarks. It was clearly difficult for most of those interviewed to successfully negotiate and resolve the pressures of 'having it all' with the strong discourses of the

'good' mother and wife. This struggle for many appeared to represent a 'no win' situation. Incurring some form of stigma – for either 'not wanting enough' as 'just' a wife, or for not being a 'good' mother and wife by indulging in full time paid work – was perceived as inevitable. Moreover, not one of the married or engaged participants I encountered expressed the level of satisfaction implied by the imagined achievement of married status.

While being married was constructed as a necessity for attaining a competent social identity as a woman, it is not clear whether this competence, or indeed, a legitimised feminine identity, could ever be fully realised or achieved. They saw marital competence as tangible and achievable, however their ideals and dreams of ideal married life, are perhaps just that – dreams.

The pure relationship?

A major finding is that the economic, material, practical and emotional circumstances of these young women's lives tended to discourage the ideals of mutual trust, disclosure and understanding exemplified by the 'pure relationship'. In reality the women seemed far too busy developing mechanisms to get things done in their lives – including securing a husband – to strive for mutual self disclosure in their intimate relationships. Indeed, several were keen to avoid self-disclosure with a partner given their past sexual activity.

The participant's discursive constructions of love were most often about marriage as a practical reality, thereby largely refuting Giddens' claims about the 'pure' intimate relationship of late modernity – at least as far as this cohort is concerned. As noted previously, the women's accounts of their romantic relationships provided examples of both detraditionalization and retraditionalization trends. However, while there was evidence of both individualization and detraditionalization to some extent, the most common finding in the data was a tendency towards retraditionalization of marriage and its meanings.

The discourse of individualization

Another key finding of this study has been the dichotomy between the participants' perceptions of their decisions and aspirations as unique and highly individualized, and a marked pattern of convention and conformity in their aspirations as they report them. Choosing to marry, and to have a particular kind of marriage, is positioned by participants as highly individualized – 'just my own choice', yet there remains distinct attitudinal homogeneity and conformity. Certainly the details of wedding arrangements, engagement periods, and precise time to buy a house or travel or have children varied according to a participant's circumstances, yet for the most part, the young women spoke of the same desires:

- find a suitable husband

- get engaged and married

- have children (if the husband was willing)

- exist in a distinctly gender-divided yet pseudo-mutual style of domestic living.

It has been argued that marriages are no longer regulated nor experienced uniformly. The marriages experienced or expected or idealised in this study both confirm and refute this claim. While minor details varied, there was extraordinary similarity in the imagined or experienced gendered distribution of tasks and decision-making within the marital dyad. Further, there were many examples of participants' acceptance that they would fulfil the (inevitable) role of the conventional wife, despite their awareness of contrary ideals. Many life decisions and aspirations were constructed as contingent on a husband's opinions. My overall impression was that 'having' (and keeping) a husband was more important than having a 'house-trained' husband who would share the domestic load. An important finding is that for these young women at least, the feminist critique of women in marriage seems to have had little effect in empowering women (and men) to perceive women's aspirations and goals as equal to those of their husbands.

For most participants, the choice of marriage partner – and indeed the decision to choose to marry – appears to be a 'free' choice, a choice based on individual and unique desires. But all of the participants were aware that they *must* choose, and that their choices should be based on their own inimitable and individual aspirations. Despite this pressure to choose 'personal' and 'unique' pathways in intimate relationships, the data revealed that the women in this study are likely to choose (or want at least) a man who will satisfy a relatively strict set of conditions and who holds particular personality traits. Looking for an 'easy going', 'spontaneous', 'good looking' and fun boyfriend, who must

eventually become a 'dependable', 'stable', 'committed' and 'well off' husband, demonstrates not only the homogeneity of these 'unique' and 'individual' aspirations, but also the difficulties these women face in successfully negotiating the complex trajectory of the secure intimate relationship they so strongly desire.

Retraditionalization

This study found trends towards retraditionalization and tradition maintenance, as well as trends towards detraditionalization. Retraditionalization was reflected in the adoption of 'traditional' beliefs and practices. These were framed positively, and actively utilised and positioned as perceived advantages. The popularity of conventional or traditional marriage practices illuminates marriage as a familiar and 'known' institution that the women longed for. The gendered inequality encoded in visions of pseudo-mutuality in imagined or lived marital roles emphasises the pressures and anxieties associated with the project of finding and keeping a husband. This is both individualization and retraditionalization at the same time. It signifies the power of the rhetorical discourse of individualization that appears so prominently in the participants' constructions of marriage. This discourse, intensified by the pressure to strive to 'have it all', suggests that the neo-liberal discourse of individualization strongly overemphasises the agency available to young women to create different kinds of permanent intimate relationships for themselves.

The discourse of individualization seems to override any feminist agenda that might be

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assumed amongst this cohort of upwardly mobile young women. They did not see their ideals or aspirations for intimate relationships in their life trajectory as hindered or influenced by their gender, rather they viewed themselves as individuals who had to make decisions and had opted for the traditional feminine path of conventional marriage. I found that many of the participants' view what they called 'traditional' or 'old fashioned' forms of gendered marital living as attractive and appealing, even convenient, despite often recognising them as unequal in terms of gender. Although unlike Hakim's (2000) findings in many ways, similarly, it seems the women give the nod to feminism, but assert their (apparent) free choice to seek a strongly gendered division of labour within the marital dyad. In this way I found both traditional and individualized discourses in the participants' discursive constructions of marriage and marital living.

I conclude that the anxieties associated with failing to achieve the ontological security of married status in late modernity may have resulted in the positioning of the traditional marital relationship as much safer and more secure, compared to newer or unconventional forms of intimate relationship. Although participant rhetoric suggests gender equality is necessary for the marital relationship, in areas such as the division of labour, childcare, and family decision making, the participants either reported or imagined deferring to their husband's wishes. There is no doubt they felt they had a sense of choice, and that their choices were 'up to them', but their choices were also overwhelmingly considerate of, or contingent on the people around them, particularly a husband. The participants' aspirations were reflexive and complex, and their decision making was based on others, not purely on themselves; a factor which undermines the

'individual' focus in the individualization paradigm.

It is worth noting the many references throughout the data that implied dissatisfaction with the 'extra' emotional and domestic work that the participants who were married or cohabiting found themselves doing in order to maintain their relationship and not 'rock the boat'. Many of them indicated unhappy marriages and divorces in their parents' and their own generation. So the marital bliss imagined by participants as enabled by retraditionalized conventional gendered relations may not be as perfect or optimistic in reality as anticipated.

Theoretical development and implications: Individualization versus gender

In this research I was aiming for up to date explanations of the meanings young women ascribe to marriage and the persistence of marriage as a goal for young women, following the apparent 'stalemate' in feminist research on the topic. As data collection and analysis progressed, it became clear that many tenets of the individualization and detraditionalization theses were evident in these young women's accounts of their marital aspirations and expectations. Decision-making in intimate relationships was positioned by the participants as highly individualized, for example. The participants believed their decisions were 'up to them' and unique, thus the discourse of individualization was strong. The attractiveness of individualization and detraditionalization in particular, for explaining the emergent patterns in the data became

obvious, and it is easy to see why these two paradigms of explanation have come to the fore in existing work on marriage and intimacy. However, the application of these meta-theories to my empirical data in the end proved both methodologically and analytically problematic.

The 'fit' of the individualization thesis to my data was questionable. Firstly, many participants seemed highly traditional in their understanding of themselves in relation to marriage. They seemed to feel that, as women, they strongly wanted and needed to be married, to follow the traditional time-honoured journey of womanhood. They were intensely aware of how unmarried women were seen in society and did not want to stand out. As argued in Chapters Two and Three, little of the existing empirical work on marriage includes findings which wholly support the individualization and detraditionalization theses. Further, and more importantly, the theorists in question do not rely on empirical evidence to support their assertions. The thesis findings support criticism of the extent to which these convenient meta-theories are relied upon in research on marriage. There is not sufficient problematising of the ways that individualization and detraditionalization theorising overlook gender differences – implying that men and women are more or less the same in these late modern trends.

Yet it is too simplistic to assign feminist empiricism on the one hand, and individualization and detraditionalization on the other hand, to opposite ends of the structure versus agency debate. While the feminist critique of marriage has reached somewhat of a stalemate in addressing young women as reflexive and individualized

actors, the gendered inequalities and structural constraints affecting the participant's decision making in intimate relationships seem as relevant as ever. The individualization and detraditionalization theses celebrate the social actor and tend to overlook such relevant constraints as pseudo-mutuality, compromise or contingency on a husband's desires. Yet, the participant's expectations and aspirations at least paid lip service to the discourse of individualization.

Thus, as the findings of this study indicate, the many useful facets of both feminist and individualization theorising on marriage should be drawn together in order to highlight the complexities of contemporary young women's decision making. The analysis of participants' discursive constructions of marriage in relation to the individualization and detraditionalization theses enabled the affirmation of some elements of the theses, while concurrently offering empirical evidence for other simultaneous processes, namely retraditionalization, with reference to the highly gendered nature of decision making about marriage.

Sociological implications

The participants positioned themselves as 'free agents', free to choose the types of intimate relationships, with the types of men they desired. Gendered constraints typically seen in traditional style marriages were overlooked in favour of detailed 'unique' accounts of imagined life trajectories. Yet gender inequality was maintained by the very idea that women 'freely' choose to focus on the needs and desires of a husband (and

children) over their own – while men can apparently focus exclusively on their own needs within marriage. While the unmarried young women often indicated they wanted gender equality in their marriages, they did not seem to expect it would really happen for them. In line with the findings of Tinklin et al (2005), the young women in this study agreed with equal opportunities in principle, but their views were moderated and tempered by their experiences. This difference between desire and reality warrants further attention.

It seemed to me that the participants' expectations were sometimes incredibly romanticised and idealised, even unrealistic. In short, they were 'aiming too high' in wanting it all and imagining their marriages would last forever. Moreover, they wanted gender equality in their marriage and full social approval. On the pragmatic side however, they seemed prepared to endure high levels of compromise, settling for highly gendered marital roles, and deferring to a husband's wishes, for some even relinquishing the idea of having a child if the husband was unwilling. The lines by which marital responsibilities are drawn appear clearly gendered. These contradictions must be understood in terms of the continued structural constraints and pressures these participants, as women, continue to face in Australian society. I conclude that the feminist critiques of marriage and the family must be revisited and revitalised in order to draw attention to these ongoing inequalities in new ways that can connect effectively to the aspirations of upwardly mobile young women.

In marriage research, sustained attention must be paid to the persistence of moral

discourses that are entrenched in decision making about intimate relationships. In this study, consciousness of seemingly 'old fashioned' stigmas such as 'the unfit mother', the woman of 'ill repute' or the 'spinster', have far from disappeared. Even if the participants' moral justifications are purely performative – for example wanting to be perceived by the researcher as a 'good' mother or wife – the incredible frequency by which these women grounded their attitudes and aspirations in terms of 'good' and 'bad' remains worthy of further consideration.

The identified disparity between the participants' expectations and realities may well have clear ramifications for their health and well-being. Cultural and popular representations of the 'superwoman', and the popularisation of discourses asserting that women can, and should, 'have it all', should be challenged at every opportunity. At the same time, women should be much more effectively supported in making choices that incorporate family responsibilities and careers. Adequate provision of family services such as childcare facilities will lessen the load for aspiring superwomen. Young women and girls should be actively taught not to expect everything from marriage. At the same time they should be encouraged to expect more than to give in to others' desires before their own. Finally, the findings from the data here indicate that the marital relationship for these participants is understood as culturally synonymous with conventional gender roles. Perhaps marriage is an irredeemably patriarchal institution – but it is difficult to imagine a large scale abandonment of marriage, so long as many of the unequally gendered roles characterised by the marital relationship retain their attractiveness to young women. The need for further feminist theorising on contemporary marriage is

obvious.

Limitations of the study

It is appropriate to acknowledge that this study had various limitations in regard to data collection and generalisable claims. Firstly, a comparative analysis of young men's attitudes towards marriage and intimate relationships would have certainly added to the thesis. A consideration of men's accounts of marital experiences and aspirations could have analysed the implications of men's attitudes on gendered marital living arrangements, divisions of labour in and out of the home, as well as gaining further insight into detraditionalization and individualization trends.

Data collection and analysis also overlooked some important aspects of social difference. The sampling strategy resulted in a predominantly white, heterosexual and middle class cohort with only weak religious affiliations. A wider sample that incorporated diversity in ethnicity, class and religion would have enriched the study. Further, due to time and space constraints, and the desire to adequately analyse participants' accounts of meanings of marriage and intimate relationships, more in-depth analysis of the nuances of social difference within the cohort was not possible. The omission of these analyses, although necessary for expediency, was unfortunate. Finally, a sample that included bisexual or lesbian women, although beyond the scope of this project, would have provided a valuable empirical contribution to the existing body of work that examines the place of marriage in the perceptions and experiences of young

women seeking same sex marriages.

It seems appropriate to remind the reader that the city of Newcastle constitutes a predominantly white Anglo working class population with strong family and kinship continuity both in neighbourhoods, and through generations. There is no doubt that marriage does not mean exactly the same thing for these young women as it did for their mothers. At the same time Newcastle seems to enshrine many traditional family values and this is reflected by the popularity of elaborate traditional weddings. Strong social pressure on young women and young men to marry remains. Accordingly, more focus on the generational reproduction of values and attitudes to marriage in an area with the cultural specificities of a city such as Newcastle, would provide valuable additional analysis.

More attention to the family composition of participants might have shed more light on the aspirations for marriage and intimate relationships, particularly in relation to traditional attitudes, revealing how detraditionalization and retraditionalization trends play out in a slowly gentrifying industrial city. Survey questions such as 'how many generations of your family have lived in the region', or 'are both of your parents from Newcastle' might have provided insight for further discussion during interviews and focus group discussions. The participants could then have been questioned, and data analysed according to these responses, which may have enabled a more useful way of dividing the sample instead of by age or relationship status.

Further future research

An important finding in this thesis highlights inconsistencies between the participants' aspirations for marriage and marital living, and the realities experienced now or in the future. Many participants' accounts of the imagined marital relationship could be described as naive, romanticised and idealised. Particularly when considering financial security, little foresight (based on current income for example) was present when describing imagined future marital living, especially following the birth of children. Dual income families were seemingly considered a lifestyle choice, rather than an economic necessity. This points to the importance of longitudinal research designed to document the lived experiences of young women, and how these experiences live up (or perhaps down) to their earlier expectations and aspirations. Longitudinal research such as *The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health* (Women's Health Australia), and *The Social Futures Orientations and Identities of Young People in Queensland* Study (Skrbis et al, Waves 2 and 3: 2008-2011), have provided, and will continue to supply, valuable quantitative data that yield insights into the experiences of women in relationships over time and across social space (class, ethnicity, religion and sexuality). Revisiting some of the participants from this study in the future, to compare their lived experiences with their expectations, and to chart the actual trajectories of their intimate relationships, would greatly enrich the current findings.

Concluding remarks

The nature of this topic was suited to exploratory investigation, since the primary objective was to uncover the meanings and values young women attach to marriage, and to contribute to building new theoretical paradigms – feminist and sociological – to suggest why young women make conventional relationship decisions, and why marriage continues to be attractive to young women.

The social importance of marriage remains extremely strong for these young women. One could almost say it defines their future adult lives. If the findings of this study were found to apply to young women in Australia more generally, then it is possible to suggest that while marriage is theoretically posited as now only one of many realistic relationship options or ways of living, it appears to retain a privileged status for the current generation of young Australian women in their mid to late twenties. Such a premise suggests that there is certainly a place for a renewed feminist critique of marriage, as the gendered forms of living present in the participants' narratives of ideal and imagined everyday marital roles suggest that gender inequality in marital relationships and expectations is set to continue.

Since gender inequalities still seem to persist in intimate relationships, gender remains a most relevant analytic tool for critical research on marriage and intimacy. Theoretical paradigms such as individualization and detraditionalization tend to overlook the importance of gender, and as such cannot adequately explain the findings of this study. Gender still matters. And the feminist critique of marriage and the family, for these

participants, therefore also remains highly relevant.

A theoretical approach that synthesises claims about the subjectivity of individuals in late modernity with a thoroughly feminist critical approach to gender should be combined for the purposes of researching the experiences of young women, marriage and intimate relationships. Hopefully this thesis has contributed to that project. Marriage has not gone away, and nor has it been substantially transformed in terms of gender roles. The 'choices' that young women make for conventional marriage roles (that will exhaust them) are not 'free' and individual, but constrained and shaped by continued patriarchal discourse modulated by the drive for conspicuous consumption.

This study finds that the marital relationship remains characterised by conventional gendered living, and for the most part is not being transformed by those women who desire continuing autonomy, successful careers or to fulfil personal goals such as travel. Marriage is now viewed as a relationship rather than an institution, yet the cultural authority of marriage as a traditional, highly gendered institution remains powerful in shaping the participants' aspirations and desires for intimate relationships.

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WHA (Women's Health Australia) (2006) *Data book: 1973-78 cohort Survey 4 (28-33 years)*, online: http://www.alswh.org.au/surveys.html#surveytable

Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey

Research Project:

Why Do Young Women Marry? The Meanings of Marriage for Young Women in Newcastle and the Lower Hunter Region

Conducted by Dr Pam Nilan, Dr Ann Taylor and Ms. Emma Kirby, School of Humanities and Social Science, The University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia

Thank you very much for agreeing to complete this survey. We are trying to find out what you think about marriage. Your answers are important to us so please take your time in answering the questions.

How to complete this survey

Please answer every question in Sections 4 and 5. Please answer only those questions that apply to you in sections 1, 2 and 3. If you are unsure of how to answer a question, please note your query on the survey. Some questions require you to mark only one answer, while some require you to mark all the options that are applicable to you. Please read the instruction above each question carefully.

If you need help answering any of the questions contact
Emma.Kirby@studentmail.newcastle.edu.au, or 02 4924 1022

Section One – Respondents in Non-Marital Relationships

Q1. How long have you been in a relationship with your current partner?

_____

Q2. Do you intend to marry your current partner?

Yes ← **Please ignore Question 4**   O

No   O

Don't know   O

Q3. (a) When would you ideally like to marry? (Mark <u>one only</u>)

Within the next 6 months   O

Within the next year   O

Within | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 years | (please circle)

When is not important   O

(b) Why do you want to marry?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q4. (a) If you answered 'no' or 'don't know' to question 1, do you want to get married at some stage in the future?

Yes	O
No	O
Don't know	O

(b) Could you please briefly explain your answer?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q5. All respondents in this section –

What are the most important factors for you when making a decision to get married? (You may tick more than one)

Earning enough money to live comfortably	O
Being out of debt	O
Owning a home	O
Having a good job	O
Having a full time job	O

Owning a car	O
Having enough money to afford a decent wedding	O
Being in a relationship with a partner before marriage, for a specified period of time (please state how long) ………………	O
Living together harmoniously	O
Having children	O
Being a certain age (please specify age) ………………	O

Section Two - Married or Engaged Respondents

Q6. (a) Did you live together (cohabit) before you were engaged (or married)?

Yes	O
No	O

(b) If so, for how long?

_____

Q7. How long is (or was) your engagement?

_____

Q8. What do you think made you want to get married?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q9. What are the most important factors for you when making a decision to get married? (You may tick more than one)

Earning enough money to live comfortably	O
Being out of debt	O
Owning a home	O
Having a good job	O
Having a full time job	O
Owning a car	O
Having enough money to afford a decent wedding	O
Being in a relationship with a partner before marriage, for a specified period of time (please state how long) ………………	O
Living together harmoniously	O
Having children	O
Being a certain age (please specify age) ………………	O

Section Three - Respondents not Currently in a Relationship

Q10. (a) Even though you are not in a relationship at present, do you want to get married at some stage in the future?

Yes   O

No	O
Don't know	O

(b) Could you please briefly explain your answer?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q11. What are the most important factors for you when making a decision to get married? (You may tick more than one)

Earning enough money to live comfortably	O
Being out of debt	O
Owning a home	O
Having a good job	O
Having a full time job	O
Owning a car	O
Having enough money to afford a decent wedding	O
Being in a relationship with a partner before marriage, for a specified period	O

of time (please state how long) ………………

Living together harmoniously	O
Having children	O
Being a certain age (please specify age) ………………	O

Section Four – **ALL PARTICIPANTS**: Ideas about Marriage

Q12. What does marriage mean to you? (Please begin by defining what you think marriage is, in your own words)

Q13. Why do you think young women in general in Australia may desire to be married?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q14. Who were you brought up by during your childhood? (Mark <u>one only</u>)

Two Married Parents	O
Two Unmarried Parents	O
Two divorced parents	O
One parent - mother	O
One parent - father	O
Grandparents	O
Other	O

Q15. Please tick your most appropriate response to the following statements (Mark <u>one only</u> for each statement):

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) My childhood experience of relationships (eg - my parent's relationship) has shaped my views on marriage	O	O	O	O	O
b) My religion has shaped my views on marriage	O	O	O	O	O
c) Marriage is an important life goal for me	O	O	O	O	O
d) I think I will be/am more successful as a married woman	O	O	O	O	O
e) Being married means more than living together	O	O	O	O	O
f) Being married means more to me than having a successful career	O	O	O	O	O
g) Marriage is important for women in Australia today	O	O	O	O	O
h) Marriage is less important today than it was 25 years ago	O	O	O	O	O
i) I would only have children if I was married/getting married	O	O	O	O	O

Q16. What do you think marriage is associated with? <u>Please RANK the 10 most important factors (1 = most important)</u>

Achievement		Independence		Settling down	
Arguments		Life Goal		Sharing	
Children		Love		Social Status	
Commitment		Loyalty		Stability	
Companionship		Maturity		Tradition	
Emotion		Religion		Wedding	
Financial Stability		Security			

Section Five – **ALL PARTICIPANTS**: Background Information

Your Age…………………   **Your Postcode…………………..**

Your   Ethnicity………………………………   Your Religion……………………………………

Q17. What is your usual occupation?

Q18. Please list all paid work that you currently do (including full time/part time/temporary etc)

Q19 a) What is the average income (before tax) YOU receive EVERY WEEK, including allowances and financial support from parents? (Mark <u>one only</u>)

b) What is the average income (before tax) of your HOUSEHOLD (eg you and your partner, or you and your parents sharing a house? (Mark <u>one only</u>)

	a	**b**
	Self	Household
No Income	O	O
$1-119 ($1-$6,239 annually)	O	O
$120-$299 ($6,240-$15,999 annually)	O	O
$300-$499 ($16,000-$25,999 annually)	O	O
$500-$699 ($26,000-$36,999 annually)	O	O
$700-$999 ($37,000-$51,999 annually)	O	O
$1,500 or more ($78,000 or more annually)	O	O
Don't know	O	O
Don't want to answer	O	O
I live alone (household income is the same as mine)		O

Q20. What is the HIGHEST level of education you have completed? (Mark <u>one only</u>)

No Formal Qualification	O
Year 10 or equivalent (eg School Certificate)	O
Year 12 or equivalent (eg Higher School Certificate)	O
Trade/Apprenticeship	O
Certificate/Diploma (eg child care, technician)	O
University degree	O

Higher University Degree (eg Masters, PhD)   O

Q21. Do you have children? (Mark <u>one only</u>)

No	O
1 child	O
2 children	O
3 children	O
More than 3 children	O

Q22. Divorce and Separation

(a) Have you ever been divorced or legally separated?

Yes	O
No	O

(b) OPTIONAL – If yes, what were the reasons?

_____

_____

_____

Q23. Do you identify as heterosexual?

Yes	O
No	O

Q24. What is your current marital status? (Mark <u>one only</u>)

Married← **Please go to Section 3**	O
Engaged← **Please go to Section 3**	O
Formally Recognised De Facto← **Please go to Section 2**	O
Unmarried - Cohabiting (Living Together) ← **Please go to Section 2**	O
Unmarried - Currently in a relationship← **Please go to Section 2**	O
Not currently in a relationship ← **Please go to Section 4**	O

Q25. Do you have any other comments?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

We do not need any other information about you for the purposes of this survey.

THANK YOU FOR GIVING UP YOUR TIME TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH!!!

Would you be willing to take part in Focus Group Discussions or Interviews on the subject of the meaning of marriage?

If you would like to be interviewed or take part in a focus group discussion, please provide a name and contact phone or email on the following page, which will be removed as soon as the questionnaire is received and kept completely separate from

questionnaire analysis. We will contact you and send or e-mail an information sheet so that you can make a final decision about taking part.

I am interested in going on with this research. Please contact me about being in a focus group or being interviewed.

Name _____	Age _____
Ethnicity _____	Relationship status _____
Phone _____	Email address _____
I am interested in taking part in: [please tick either or both boxes]	
A Focus Group* ☐	An Interview** ☐
If you prefer, you can return this slip in a separate envelope to:	
Emma Kirby	
School of Humanities and Social Science	
University of Newcastle	
Callaghan	
NSW	
2308	

* A Focus Group Discussion will take 30 minutes to two hours, and consist of 4-8 participants.

** An interview will take 30 minutes to one hour 30 minutes, and is one-on-one, between you and the researcher.

Appendix 2: Table 5.5: The interview and focus group participants, an introduction

Note: 'Int1' indicates participants took part in one interview, 'Int2' indicates participants took part in two interviews, 'FG' indicates a focus group participant.

Table 5.5: The Interview and Focus Group Participants, an Introduction.

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Brought up by	Children	Religion	Desire to marry	Other notes	Interview/ Focus Group
Angela	19	Relationship	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Hopeful	Int2
Amie	20	Single	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Romantic – wants to be stay at home mum	Int2
Amanda	21	Single	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Wants 'more' than being a wife	Int1
Anna	24	Relationship	Two married parents	1		Yes	Romantic, wedding important	FG, Int1
Amy	34	Married	Two divorced parents (divorced when she was 12)	0	Christian	N/A	Self proclaimed non-conformist.	Int1
Ashley	24	Single	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful	Int2
Barbara	20	Relationship	Divorced	0		Yes	Hopeful	FG, Int2

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Brought up by	Children	Religion	Desire to marry	Other notes	Interview/ Focus Group
Bec	21	Single	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Traditionalist	FG
Billie	18	Relationship		0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful	FG, Int1
Camilla	29	Engaged	Two married parents	0	None	N/A	Hopeful/Non-conformist (marrying because of importance to her fiancé and his family)	Int2
Caroline	32	Single	Two divorced parents (single mother)	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Cathy	29	Single	Two divorced parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Cherie	33	Single	Two married parents	0		Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Chloe	26	Relationship	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Traditionalist	Int2
Daniela	29	Married	Married Mother and Step Father	0		N/A	Hopeful	Int1
Deb	33	Married	Two married Parents, Divorced	0		N/A	Romantic/Hopeful	Int1

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Name	Age	Relationship Status	Brought up by	Children	Religion	Desire to marry	Other notes	Interview/ Focus Group
			when Deb was 28					
Donna	22	Relationship	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Eliza	31	Single	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Elizabeth	20	Single	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Emily	22	Single	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Hopeful	FG
Gemma	18	Cohabiting	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Hopeful	FG, Int1
Gillian	24	Engaged	Two separated parents	0	None	N/A	Hopeful	Int1
Haley	20	Relationship	Mother and step father	0		Yes	'Hopeful'/non-conformist	Int1
Hannah	21	Relationship	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful, romantic, wants commitment	Int2
Heather	27	Single	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Hopeful (contingency)	Int2
Heidi	22	Engaged	Two married	0		N/A	Hopeful/romantic	Int1

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Brought up by	Children	Religion	Desire to marry	Other notes	Interview/ Focus Group
			parents					
Jade	20	Single	Mother (father died when Jade was 6)	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful	FG, Int1
Jane	19	Single	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Janet	26	Relationship	Two married parents (divorced when she was 17)	0	None	Yes	Hopeful	Int2
Janine	34	Married to second husband		0		N/A	Hopeful	FG, Int2
Jen	29	Relationship	Married mother and step father	0	None	No	Non-conformist	Int1
Jenna	24	Relationship	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful, wants to be stay at home mum	FG, Int2
Jessica	23	engaged	Two married parents	0		N/A	Romantic	FG, Int1
Jodie	23	Single	Single mother	0	None	Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Karen	19	Single	Two married	0	Non-practisin	Yes	Hopeful	Int1

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Brought up by	Children	Religion	Desire to marry	Other notes	Interview/ Focus Group
			parents		g Christian			
Katie	23	Relationship	Two married parents	0		Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Keely	24	Relationship	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Undecided	Int1
Kerryn	21	Relationship	Two married parents	0		Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Kirsten	35	Relationship	Two married parents	0		Yes	Romantic, Hopeful	Int1
Lauren	26	Cohabiting	Two never married biological parents	0	Non-practising Christian	No	Non-Conformist	Int2
Leah	23	Relationship	Two married parents	0		Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Lisa	29	Cohabiting	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Hopeful, elements of tradition	Int2
Liz	24	Relationship	Two parents	0		No	Non-conformist	Int1
Louise	35	Relationship	Two married parents (divorced when she was 22)	0	None	Yes	Hopeful	Int2

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Brought up by	Children	Religion	Desire to marry	Other notes	Interview/ Focus Group
Lynn	34	Married	Two married parents	3	Christian	N/A	Stay at home mum	Int1
Margaret	30	Married	Mother and step father	0		N/A	Hopeful	Int1
Maria	27	Single	Mother	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Romantic	FG, Int1
Mary	27	Engaged	Two married parents	Trying for a baby		N/A	Hopeful/non-conformist	Int1
Matilda	30	Engaged	Two married parents	0	None	N/A	Hopeful	FG
Mel	29	Cohabiting	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Romantic	Int2
Melissa	20	Cohabiting	Two married parents	0		Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Miriam	22	Relationship	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Wants to be a stay at home mum	Int1
Naomi	27	Married	Two divorced parents	0	Non-practising Christian	N/A	Traditionalist	Int1
Natalie	20	Relationship	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Hopeful	Int1

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Brought up by	Children	Religion	Desire to marry	Other notes	Interview/ Focus Group
Natasha	35	Married	Two married parents	Planning for a baby	None	N/A	Hopeful	Int1
Nicole	23	Relationship	Two divorced Parents (divorced when she was 12)	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Nina	29	Relationship	Two married parents	0	None	Yes	Traditionalist	Int1
Polly	22	Relationship	Two not married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Non-conformist	Int1
Prue	24	Single	Two married parents	0	Practising Evangelical Christian	Yes	Traditionalist/religious	FG, Int1
Rachel	28	Married	Two married parents	0		N/A		FG
Rebecca	22	Cohabiting	Two married parents	0	Christian	Yes	Romantic, Hopeful	Int2
Renee	31	Married	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	N/A	Hopeful	Int1
Rowena	32	Married	Two married parents	1		N/A	Hopeful	FG
Sally	28	Single	Two married	0	Non-practisin	Yes	Hopeful	Int2

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Brought up by	Children	Religion	Desire to marry	Other notes	Interview/ Focus Group
			parents		g Christian			
Sam	19	Single	Two married parents	0	Non-practising Christian	Yes	Romantic/Hopeful	FG, Int1
Sarah	28	Relationship	Two parents/(age 15 onwards, single mother)	0	Christian	Yes	Traditionalist	Int1
Sascha	30	Cohabiting	Two divorced parents	0	None	Undecided		FG, Int2
Shanna	24	Cohabiting	Two married parents	0		Yes	Hopeful	Int1
Sharon	31	Married	Two married parents		Non-practising Christian	N/A	Romantic	FG
Simone	28	Married	Single mother	0		N/A	Traditionalist	FG, Int1
Skye	26	Relationship		0	None	Yes	Hopeful, traditionalist	Int2
Stacy	29	Married - Separated	Two married parents	0		Undecided	In the process of divorce	Int2
Tess	27	Relationship	Two married parents	0		Yes	Hopeful, romantic	Int1
Toni	30	Cohabiti	Two unmarrie	Pregna	Opposed to	No	Non-conformist	Int1

Name	Age	Relation ship Status	Brought up by	Childr en	Religion	Desire to marry	Other notes	Interview/ Focus Group
		ng	d parents	nt	organise d religion			
Vaness a	27	Cohabiti ng	Two unmarrie d parents	0	None	Undeci ded	Non-conformist	FG, Int1

Appendix 3: Human Research Ethics Committee Approval