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UNIVERSITY OF KENT
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

AGE AND SEXUAL DIVISIONS:
A STUDY OF OPPORTUNITY AND IDENTITY IN WOMEN

CATHERINE ITZIN

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to explore women's experience of age throughout the lifespan, to examine the connections between age divisions and gender divisions in the construction of opportunity and identity in the lives of women, and to evaluate the influence of feminism on women's experience of the life cycle. The intention was - within a symbolic interactionist framework and with reference to role theory, social scripts and socialisation - to look at whether and, in what ways, identity and opportunity for women are socially constructed within a system of structural inequality and women's subordination, and to study the changes that might have occurred as a result of a decade of feminism in the lives of women influenced by feminism.

Within a general theoretical perspective of life course studies, an ethnographic methodology and grounded theory methods were used to generate concepts and to develop a formal theory of women's age and gender oppression from the theory which emerged, as a result of the research process itself. Part One deals with the research process. This includes a review of feminism and the literature on age, the life cycle and socialisation. Methodology, research methods and characteristics of the sample are discussed in Chapter Two. Part Two on Internalised Oppression covers double standards in attitudes to age, distinctions between the male and the 'female chronology', the role of representations and childhood socialisation in the social construction of identity, the meaning of life-cycle related depression and the influence of feminism on identity. Part Three on Oppression, analyses the data in relation to age and the sexual division of labour, age and female sexuality and women's sexualised value. Part Four on Liberation looks at strategies devised by women at various life stages as a result of the influence of feminism to resist the oppression and to establish alternatives. Part Five on Formal Theory, presents a materialist analysis of gender oppression, age oppression, ideology and identity, and the socialisation process.

The evidence of this thesis suggests that women's lives are constructed from a combination of age and gender divisions throughout the lifespan, which operate as a form of social control both economically and sexually. It also suggests that, influenced by feminism, women have been able to increase their opportunities and redefine their identity within the female chronology. The research is original in conceptualising gender with generation (the 'female chronology'), oppression with internalised oppression, in demonstrating the function of power in the social construction of opportunity and identity and in identifying feminist influences on the female life cycle.

DEDICATION:

For my mother Neva, my father Frank, and my grandmothers Lenore
Maley Smith and Mary Ellen Pihringer Itzin

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EPIGRAMS

Of Despair

*Women are only good for breeding, to sleep with,
and at the age of forty, shoot the lot',*

Ruth's Father.

Of Hope

Walking on eggshells

*Here's an old lady with tangerine hair
living in a hut that walks on hens' feet
in the middle of a forest whose dawn
looms at one edge as the sun's chivvied
by a gang of wolves at the other. The air's
a stew of pine and blewitt, the earth rusty
with old needles. The wolvis trees sigh
through clenched teeth for a sea that
sparkles like knives a thousand miles
away and falls like silver pins through
their pelt. Carefully she takes an egg,
blue as hyacinth, from a trug, digs her
thumbnail in, splits it. Finds the knot
of blood small as a naevus glued to
the yolk and hooks it quickly out with
a pin.*

*She's the one I leave my door
open for, ruddering across the lawn with
her pestle at noon. On Saturdays her house
is good enough to eat, the gutters are made
of halva, there's a crib of sugared violets
on the step. I'll take the children visiting,
they're at the right age and their manners
will have to do. The table's set for guests
with heavy spoons and knives, dented with
all that eating and carving and scrubbing.
When she's cooked, she comes out flat
and tawny as gingerbread.*

*This birthday,
I've to start wearing glasses; words are
creeping too close, the children's friends
leave messages to phone back, Blackberries
redden like nipples in the child-tall nettles
I fling a shoe at the ginger tom who's come
to sniff our mice, The lino's cold, Eggshells
or hair fall.*

Lesley Saunders
August 1987

Of Power

'Nothing more clearly demonstrates the vulnerability of women than the special pain, confusion and bad faith with which they experience getting older. And in the struggle that some women are waging on behalf of all women to be treated (and treat themselves) as full human beings - not 'only' as women - one of the earliest results to be hoped for is that women become aware, indignantly aware, of the double standard about ageing from which they suffer so harshly.'

Susan Sontag 1972

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INTRODUCTION

GENDER AND GENERATION: FEMINIST INFLUENCES

This is not a study of ageing as it is usually conceived, as the study of old age or of old people. It is a study of women's experience of age at all ages and life stages: a study of the connections between gender and generation throughout the lifespan. It interviews 'older women' (women in their fifties, sixties and seventies), but not about being old or about old age. Like all the other women included in this study - the women in their teens, twenties, thirties and forties - they are interviewed about their experience of age at all ages and stages in their lives. This study starts with the commonplace that age and gender are connected in the lives of women. It then looks at the meaning of this for women at all life stages. It also looks specifically at the influence of the 1970's 'second wave' of twentieth century feminism on the lives of the women interviewed, all of whom identified themselves as 'influenced by feminism'.

By looking at the life cycle of women, the aim of the study was both to analyse the construction of gender and chronology and to conceptualize the female chronology. By interviewing women of different generations with differences of class, race and culture as well, the study aimed to identify what women might have in common as women with regard to age, and where their experience differed. Writing at the time this research began, Dale Spender suggested that 'women do have a common experience which can be described and explained ... the experience of being women in a men's world ... of oppression of men.' She saw this 'common frame of reference' obtaining to the past as well as the present. If this were true it

would be reflected in common aspects to the experience of women of different ages and social classes. By sampling women according to their influence by feminism, the study aimed to identify the changes that might have come about in women's experience of the life cycle after a decade of feminism.

One of the motivations for this study was, as a feminist approaching the age of 40, becoming increasingly aware of the problems facing women in mid-life and beyond. In 1970, a contributor to Robin Morgan's anthology of writings from the women's movement, had written:

'What, fat and forty three and I dare to think I'm still a person? No, I am an invisible lump. I belong in a category labelled a priori without interest to anyone. I am not even expected to interest myself. A middle aged woman is comic by definition. The mass media tell us all day and all evening long that we are inadequate, mindless, ugly, disgusting. She is a bag. She is to be escaped from. To be told, when you have your years still to wade through and when you don't feel inside much different than you did at 20 (you are still you - you know that), to be told then that you are cut off from expressing yourself sexually and often even in friendship, drives many women crazy - often literally so. I have insisted on using a pseudonym in writing this article, because the cost of insisting I am not a cipher would be fatal. If I lost my job, I would have an incredible time finding another. Listen to me! Think what it is like to have most of your life ahead and be told you are obsolete. Think what it is like to feel attraction, desire, affection toward others, to want to tell them about yourself, to feel that assumption on which self-respect is based, that you are worth something, surely he will be pleased to know that. To be, in other words, still a living woman, and to be told every day that you are not a woman, but a tired object that should disappear. I am bitter and frustrated and wasted, but don't you pretend for a minute as you look at me, forty-three, fat and looking exactly my age, that I am not as alive as you are, and that I do not suffer from the category into which you are forcing me'.²

The questions that interested me were: what was the nature of the category she was being forced into? How was it constructed? To what

extent was her identity underwritten by economic and social arrangements, and to what extent mitigated by them? Two years later, Susan Sontag published her essay on the double standards in attitudes to age and ageing which 'denounce women with special severity'.³ She suggested that women were considerably more disadvantaged than men in their experience of age. If this was the case, how did these double standards come about and what affect did they have on women's identity and opportunity?

These were, in the early seventies, some of the first feminist accounts of women's experience of age. When this research started in 1982, there had been over a decade of feminist influence in the lives of women. Did these accounts still pertain, or had there been changes in attitudes and experiences as a result, for example, of sex discrimination legislation which aimed to increase women's equality in employment, or of the medical advances in contraception (the pill, the IUD) that provided women with an opportunity to control their fertility and time of childbearing? The Women's Movement had also produced a substantial feminist analysis of women's oppression generally (though not yet of age and ageing) in this period, and an awareness of the influence of political structures on personal lives. What then might have changed in terms of identity and opportunity for women in relation to age and their experience of the life cycle in this decade as a result of the influence of feminism?

To study the influence of feminism on 'the female chronology,' I decided to talk to women who had been 'influenced by feminism', women

whose consciousness was raised about the function of gender and the nature of sexism and women's subordination. I looked for women whose feminist perspective might also have extended to an increased awareness of other forms of oppression such as age. I started with Participant Observation in the North London Older Women's Group - women 'influenced by feminism' who met as a support group for 'older women' and whose very *raison d'être* was an awareness of age and gender. I then conducted life history interviews with 46 women between the ages of 15 and 72 who had been 'influenced by feminism'. A detailed account of the sampling procedures through feminist organisations and networks and the characteristics of the sample are included in Chapter 2.

However, the main characteristic of this sample was its mobility. There did appear to be major changes - movement - in the lives of the women interviewed as a result of feminism (discussed in Part Four Liberation). But the sample was also geographically mobile, educationally mobile, occupationally mobile, maritally mobile through divorce and sexually mobile (in the movement of women from heterosexuality to lesbianism). Socially, the sample was characterized by working class upward mobility through education and occupation. It was therefore an unusual and unrepresentative sample in terms of the general female population, but it was particularly representative of a population whose mobility accentuated awareness of social, sexual and age divisions in society. The sample was also mobile with regard to age: in the length of life lived by each

individual woman and, in the as a group representing stages in the female life cycle.

For this study is about both the life course of individual women and the life cycle of women generally. It interviews women at all stages of the life cycle about their life course experiences and transitions - how they negotiated and renegotiated their lives. In doing so, it draws on 'the analytical power of both conceptualisations for understanding the ideological mechanisms of control which sustain social structures as well as in unravelling the complex strands which make up an individual's personal history.'⁴ Being about both the individual life course and the female life cycle, it reveals the structural mechanisms of the social control of women at all life stages, and the strategies used by individual women to negotiate those stages and to minimise or overcome the social control. It therefore shows the 'crucial relevance of gender' to chronology, to 'transitions and turning points'. But it also reveals the crucial relevance of chronology to gender. It emphasises 'ages and stages' in the life cycle, and the 'individual's transition into those stages in changing historical circumstances.'⁵ It shows the strategies women have found to survive the life cycle and, where possible, to take their own control: to define their own life stages and meanings, rather than passively to pass through and be defined by predetermined stages.

This study also shows what Oakley has described as the 'inevitability of status transitions', the 'amount of control which can be had over' life transitions and 'how the determinism of biology

and its cultural management is more pronounced for women than men.'⁶ Life cycle stages are not necessarily the same as chronological age. Age is biological, often with considerable differences between individuals. Thus, a woman at the age of 40 can be at the same stage of marriage and motherhood as a woman at the age of 20. There are also cultural differences: 'a person 40 years of age is old in so-called undeveloped nations, while in an industrialised or advanced society one must survive many more years before [being] considered aged.'⁷ Life expectancy obviously plays a part in perceptions of age: as people live longer in industrialised countries, the boundaries of old age become later in the chronology. But life stages are also socially constructed and culturally determined.

In this study, the main investigation concerned the social construction of age and gender, but the life cycle approach also enabled the socio-economic and historical situations of each individual to be addressed appropriately. Indeed, as Deem discovered in studying women's leisure and the life cycle, the 'life cycle approach does not (as earlier studies might imply) necessarily conceal the influences of class, region, ethnicity or gender; it can, rather, sharpen awareness of their effects.'⁸ In this study the life cycle approach certainly revealed contradictions in the traditional systems used to designate the social class of women, and provided further evidence of the need for a social classification of women according to their own variety of part-time as well as full-time employment and their unpaid work as wives and mothers. For within a life cycle perspective, women's position in relation to marriage, motherhood and

paid employment significantly affects their opportunity and identity with regard to age.

The most significant factors to emerge from the life cycle approach in this study were women's movement in and out of marriage, in and out of motherhood and in and out of the labour market over time, and the impact of this movement on women's opportunity and identity. What this small scale qualitative study discovered about the influence of feminism on women's experience of the life cycle has been corroborated by large scale quantitative surveys and census data. Thus, this qualitative data showed a significant change in attitudes beliefs and behaviour as a result of the influence of feminism, in particular women's discovery of the importance of paid employment in their 'liberation', as an alleviation of the oppressive conditions of marriage and motherhood. At the same time, the major joint Department of Employment/OPCS study of women's employment carried out in 1980 and published in 1984 (covering the same period as the research for this thesis) showed a coincidental increase in women's labour market participation, particularly by married women and women with children, as a result of the influence of feminism, and an improvement in women's pay coinciding with the equal pay legislation.³

Thus qualitative life cycle study showed the changes in attitude and awareness that motivated women out of economic dependence in marriage while the quantitative employment survey showed their entry into the labour market over the same period of time, and OPCS statistics showed an increase in the age of marriage and age at birth

of first child as evidence of a shift in the timing of marriage and motherhood in the life cycle of women. Together, this qualitative data and the quantitative data show a consistent picture of movement and change as a result of the influence of feminism on the lives of women and on their experience of the life cycle.

The life cycle approach in this study also showed how age and gender are used to objectify women sexually and to value women negatively at all life stages. It 'demonstrated the discontinuities and continuities' in women's value over the lifespan, 'illustrating the constraints upon their activity which flow from cultural definitions' of age-appropriate female behaviour, and the elements of 'male power over women in private and public life, control which passes amongst fathers, boyfriends and husbands.'¹⁰ It demonstrated the extent to which women and women's value is sexualised throughout life. It revealed not just the structural inequality, the mechanisms of social control and the negative stereotypes, but also the elements of misogyny that shape and constrain women's lives at all ages and stages.

A life cycle approach was the obvious methodological choice for purposes of this study. The application of life history interview methods to a study of the life cycle was another obvious (but perhaps also original) choice given that the purpose of the study was to discover how women interpret their own lives. What the women in this study have to say about themselves and their lives has largely been accepted uncritically. Whether what the women said was objectively

true was not the issue: there was no way of verifying whether the women had 'revised' their own history. But this was a study of how women perceive themselves and their lives, how they feel and interpret their own experience. What mattered was that they communicated what they felt and believed to be true: the attitudes and beliefs they had internalised.

Interviewing women of different ages presented an unusual opportunity to assess aspects of women's experience that might transcend particular historical circumstances. The women in this study grew up in very different historical periods and, in some cases, different cultures too. In an objective historical sense, their life opportunities were remarkably different with regard to education, to employment, to marriage, to motherhood and to sexuality. Thus, for example, before the second world war there were marriage bars which prevented women from working in the civil service, in the teaching professions and in some trades (e.g. as seamstresses in department stores) after they married. Other postwar changes included the contraceptive pill, an increase in women's access to further and higher education and in their participation in the labour market. The oldest informant was born in 1911, during the first wave of the Women's Movement this century. The formative years of some of the younger women interviewed were spent during the second wave of the Women's Movement in the seventies.

Given such major social change, one could have expected very different attitudes, feelings and experiences to emerge from the

interview data. But there were remarkably common themes to the women's perceptions of themselves and their lives. Thus the voice of Emily, 18 in 1983 echoes the voice of Debbie, 18 in 1961 and of Katherine, 18 in 1933. This suggested that there may be aspects of women's oppression and internalised oppression which are independent of historical context and changing circumstances. It suggested that what is transmitted to women in each generation, what is learned through socialisation and the structures of inequality might be as effective and enduring as what is experienced objectively (ie increased educational or employment opportunities, the opportunity to control the timing and number of children).

The continuity and similarity of self image and attitude in spite of social change - and indeed also in spite of social class - was interesting to note. In this sample surprisingly there appeared to be minimal social class differences in attitudes to age and ageing, despite the differences in the labour market situation of the women interviewed. This may have been due to the predominance of upward mobility amongst the working class women interviewed. In fact, although women of all social classes seemed to have internalised similar attitudes, their response differed according to class: low paid, low grade employment could make early marriage and early motherhood a more attractive proposition for working class women. Susan Sontag has suggested that working class women age 'earlier' than middle class women, but care less about it because they can't afford to. And there is evidence that poverty (which is related to social class) is a factor in ageing.¹¹

But this study would suggest that age/gender constraints operate similarly against working class and middle class women, that attitudes and feelings are similar regardless of class, (though opportunities will differ) just as they appear to be similar regardless of historical context (and changes in opportunities). This would suggest that different aspects of social construction operate simultaneously and separately with regard to women's experience of age. Thus women as women do have (as this data indicates) a common experience of age/gender oppression. Social class, race, disability and changing historical circumstance introduce additional factors into that common experience. The methodology of this dissertation indicates these differences, but it highlights the similarities of women's experience as women.

The persistence of attitudes and beliefs and their power to influence women's lives was remarkable. As the research progressed, the data seemed to demand an explanation of the systems which attempt to institutionalise women's position with regard to age and gender opportunity, and the processes which continue to internalise the age/gender attitudes and identity. The use of a grounded theory approach ultimately enabled the emergence from the research process and the data itself of a formal theory of age and gender oppression, ideology and socialisation.

It was also remarkable how the women interviewed in this study had transcended the limitations imposed on their lives by the oppression and the internalised oppression. The Women's Movement had

increased their understanding of the oppression of women and their awareness of how they had internalised its attitudes and beliefs. Influenced by feminism, they had all managed to free themselves from the constraints of the oppression in some significant ways. Because each woman was interviewed about the course of her whole life, it was possible to identify specifically the changes that occurred as a result of the influence of feminism. Part Four, (Chapter 7) discusses strategies of Women's Liberation, including the economic alternatives which were reflected in women's labour market participation during and following the decade of feminism.

The group of women in this study for whom attitudes and experience of age and gender were most markedly different were lesbians influenced by feminism. Indeed, so marked were these differences that an extended sample of lesbian women of all ages was interviewed to explore these differences as they emerged, and these are discussed in Chapter 8. Although they had significantly internalised many of the negative attitudes, beliefs and behaviours at stages in their lives, their freedom from constraint appeared to relate to their different market situation, their full time uninterrupted employment and their lack of economic and sexual dependence on men.

A life cycle approach thus enabled two stories to unfold: one of similarity, of stasis and compliance, the other of difference, resistance and change. It was possible therefore to see how women are assested similarly by the oppression of women, what women have in

common, what is institutionalised structurally and what is transmitted familially and culturally, how women have complied with their oppression. It was also possible to see how women have resisted their oppression, what things women have found the power to change, the variety of strategies women have adopted to change their life (their attitudes and behaviour, their identity and opportunity), how they have 'got out from under the oppression', and how feminism has assisted in this process.

Nor was it the case that some women complied and some resisted. All women both complied and resisted in different ways at different stages in their lives. All of the women interviewed, influenced by feminism, had changed the patterns of their lives over time. The life cycle approach here has provided a unique picture on the one hand of the social construction of the oppression of women and how it is internalised, and on the other hand of how women have 'detached' themselves from the internalised oppression of their conditioning and devised strategies to minimise the damage and to maximise their opportunities within the oppression.

A great deal of reference is made in this thesis and in all the literature to women and age, and to women and ageing. What has not been addressed is a definition of 'old', or an indication at what age women become old, or are defined as having become old. In the case of this study, the failure to put an age to old age - or middle age, or even to youth - is deliberate. In the case of other work, the ages

which are attached to age categories vary considerably and are often problematic.

Thus, medical literature often defines old age in terms of male retirement at age 65, but then distinguishes between people of advanced age, (75+) defined as the 'old elderly' and the 'young elderly' of 60 or 65+. Health and social services usually categorise people according to age of retirement (formerly 60 for women and 65 for men), and people who are in receipt of pensions are usually regarded as 'old'. They are then labelled 'pensioners' or OAPs, (old age pensioners). 'Middle age' or 'mid-life' have been used to describe the middle years of adulthood, but with considerable chronological variants: covering ages 40 to 60, or 45 to 65, or 50 to 65. Middle age has also been shown to be a category applied to people, but not one they apply to themselves. Thus, in a recent random national sample of life history studies of ageing, not a single respondent had ever felt middle aged, or thought of themselves as middle aged, though they currently ranged in age from 35 to 86.¹² None of these respondents thought of themselves as old either. This data certainly calls into question the meaning and value of age categories and shows how difficult it is to define an age when old age or middle age begins given that people either define themselves differently in relation to age, or do not regard themselves as fitting into the categories.

The term 'older' has been used, particularly in feminist literature, to indicate that women are no longer young but also that

they are not yet old. The question then is at what age do women cease to be young, but it is a term that avoids the category of middle age altogether, perhaps because of the negative connotations of that category, particularly in its application to women. It is also a term that allows for an element of self-definition, enabling individual women to identify themselves as 'older', and avoiding rigid chronological categorisation. Women might identify as 'older' anywhere from the age of 35 to 65 - or even younger, or even older, and they might identify as 'older' in some situations and not in others. It becomes a relative category at the disposal of women.

The fact that a great deal of literature effectively refers to youth and middle age, or mid-life, and old age without actually attaching a chronological age to the categories is not necessarily a problem which requires remedy. Rather it is possibly an indication of the unsuitability of chronological categories for describing the experience of age and the process of ageing. It is perhaps an unacknowledged response to the fact that the process of ageing is a transition from one stage to another, as much as from one age to another. As the age at which women pass through life stages varies, individual women will never fit into rigid age categories.

The reality may be that there isn't an age at which women become old, or not young, or middle aged, that there is a continual process of transition. There is a physiological process of ageing which is much the same for women and men. If there is an age at which women are said to be old, or no longer young, or middle aged, this will

probably be as a result of the social construction of age divisions. It was the intention of this study to explore the experience of age and the process of ageing for women throughout the life span, precisely in order to identify and analyse this social construction of age and gender, and the influence of feminism on women's identity and opportunity.

Part One of this dissertation covers 'the research' and reviews the influence of feminism on the literature on age, gender, the life cycle and the sociological theories relevant to this study (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 explains the methodology used, the sampling procedures and the characteristics of the sample. Part Two (Chapter 3) deals with the 'Internalised Oppression' and discusses identity and internalised oppression, (women's attitudes, beliefs, expectations and feelings) and the socialisation processes which construct it. It also conceptualises and describes the differences between the male and the 'female chronology'. In Part Three, Chapters 4 and 5 explore the construction of age and the sexual division of labour, and age and sexuality. Chapter 6 presents a theory of sexualised value. In Part Four - 'Liberation' - Chapter 7 discusses the strategies women have adopted to free themselves from the constraints which the combined effect of age and gender have imposed on their lives. And in Part Five - 'Formal Theory' -- Chapter 8 develops a theory of age/gender oppression: a materialist analysis of women's oppression, of age oppression, of identity, ideology and representation, and of socialisation.

Footnotes - Introduction

1. Spender, D. (1982), p. 18.
2. Moss, Z. (1970), p. 188.
3. Sontag, S. (1972), p. 73.
4. Allatt, P. and Keil, T. (1987), p. 1.
5. Ibid, p. 2.
6. Ibid, p. 3.
7. Busse, E.W. (1959), p. 13.
8. Allatt, P. and Keil, T. op. cit. p. 6.
9. Martin, J. and Roberts, C. (1984) p. 11 and p. 23.
10. Allatt, P. and Keil, T. op. cit.
11. Rhodes, B. (1982), p. 206.
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PART ONE - THE RESEARCH

CHAPTER ONE

**FEMINISM AND THE LITERATURE ON WOMEN, AGE, THE LIFE CYCLE AND
SOCIALISATION: REVEALING THE INVISIBLE**

I. THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN STUDIES OF AGE AND AGEING

A review of the literature of women and age shows the progressive influence of feminism over the decade from the early 70's. When this research began in 1982, there was a substantial literature on women's oppression, and particularly on the sexual division of labour and women's subordination.¹ There was also at this time a challenge to the 'invisibility' of women in many fields. Spender, for example, had identified the 'invisibility of women' in language and education and went on to expose 'the process of making women disappear' in the intellectual history of Western Culture.² In sociology, the problem of male bias had been described by Mathieu:

As a specified sociological category, the category man doesn't exist. Not that it never serves as a reference in descriptive studies of the most varied phenomena, or in general theories, quite the reverse. But this functioning of thought remains unconscious. One thinks one is speaking in general when in fact one is speaking in the masculine gender ... Either women do not exist, as a result of the preceding system of thought; this is a real obliteration, not a hidden presence as in the case of men, or women appear as an appendage of the main discourse, emerging from the back of the house, discreet, unknown, enigmatic and silent, to disturb for a moment the reflection of man as man; or they exist alone, isolated.³

In practice this had meant research being done on or with men and then written up without reference to this fact, or without taking its significance into account, or with reference to the researched simply as 'people' rather than males. In this way, the particular, and possibly different, experience of women had been obscured or unwarily subsumed within the experience of men as if it were the same

experience. Or the particular experience of women had been included within a concept of 'human' experience, in which *sexual differences* might be accounted for but in which *sexual divisions* were neither recognised nor understood.

During the late seventies and early eighties there was a growth in the literature on old age and ageing in the fields of gerontology and the sociology of ageing, motivated in part by demographic changes which meant substantial increases in the number of older people over the forthcoming decades.⁴ Consequently this literature was largely problem-solving and service oriented, and it was, as sociology had been, frequently gender-blind.⁵ In such studies of the life cycle as had been undertaken at this time, models 'tended to be those suitable for the development of men, not of women,'⁶ as in the following example:

The first period is the one in which the child lives at home, and in which his (sic) life centers around a narrow group of interests, school and family. A second period begins between the sixteenth and twentieth year (the average for the cases studied is around seventeen years). The turning point (most of the time quite sharply defined) is characterized by the entrance into a self-chosen and independent activity (in 78.5% of our 140 cases) and by the first independently acquired personal relations (32%). Frequently the turning point can be placed at the time when the youth leaves the home of his family ... The third period begins between the twenty-sixth and the thirtieth years of life (the mean is 28.6 years) ... It begins in most cases with the final and *definite choice* of vocation (in 69% of our 140 cases studied) and furthermore, with the choice of a definite personal tie together with the establishment of a home (52.3%). This phase (which lasts until approximately fifty years of age) is the *culmination period* of life. It is representative as the most fruitful period in professional and creative work ... The average beginning of the fourth phase is 48.5 years. The criteria which were decisive in characterising the first three phases were those which applied to the building up of life, whereas a decrease in the amount of activities and the appearance of "negative

dimensions" (such as sickness, loss of associates, etc. ushers in the fourth and fifth phases ... The transition to the fourth phase is marked by psychological crises ... A high point in the destruction of one's own creative work (according to S. Fischer in about 40% of her fifty creative individuals) is to be found at the beginning of this period ... This phase brings with it also a decrease in the number of dimensions, a restriction ... The decline which we noted in the fourth phase, mostly in connection with vital processes, becomes much more evident with the beginning of the fifth phase. The average age at which this phase starts is 63.8 years, based upon the 140 cases studied by Frenkel and Kral. The fifth phase is often introduced by complete retirement from one's profession and from any sort of work in 64.5% of our cases.⁷

This is an example of what Mathieu described as thinking one is:

... speaking in general when in fact one is speaking in the masculine gender.⁸

There was a hidden, unspecified assumption that women were included in the process described as universal, and yet the entire process was defined in male terms. and referred only to male experience, patterns and timing. Because of the extent to which 'male' had meant 'human' (and human experience had been equated with male experience), the actual differences in women's experience of age, and the structural power differences between women and men in the life cycle were obscured. As a consequence of this bias, women's development, where it was identified at all, was defined as deviating from the male model:

As a result of this neglect we have been less successful in finding suitable models for the developmental stages of women as human beings, as distinguished from merely biological beings on one side or role-performers on the other, than in pin-pointing the stages in their life cycle or in their labor-force participation ... a great deal of the story of female development as told by researchers so far seems to be primarily a story of increasing deviation from male patterns and hence of relative defectiveness as

measured by male standards.'⁹

However when this research started in 1982, a process of revealing the invisibility of women in the study of ageing had begun.

In 1976, for example, Beeson identified the tendency of social gerontology to focus predominantly on male subjects, either rendering women invisible or paying no theoretical attention to sex differences in ageing when these could not be ignored. She referred to statistical and demographic data which showed the special problems of older women such as greater poverty,¹⁰ increased prevalence of living alone and higher incidence of institutionalisation,¹¹ women's disadvantage in remarriage,¹² and even symbolic denigration¹³ (i.e. negative or misogynist attitudes). She concluded that:

Somehow these differences do not show up in theoretical statements, nor do they often lead to generalisations by scholars about the situation of ageing women. Theoretical and methodological styles have worked to perpetuate dominant culture values even where women have received attention. These values may accurately be labelled as sexist or andro-centrist.¹⁴

Beeson discussed some of the forms this andro-centrism or sexism had taken. Research on retirement was one example, for retirement had been seen as 'the most crucial life change requiring a major adjustment of the older person,¹⁵ but it had been studied only or primarily with reference to males.

Women who retire have been neglected because of parallel assumptions about the relative unimportance of work in their lives.¹⁶

Beeson suggested that flaws in 'role theory' had contributed to this distorted and sexist account of women in social gerontology and showed how the theories that exclude women are maintained in spite of data that contradict them. For example, that:

... women who retire report a sharper increase in feelings of uselessness than do their male counterparts.¹⁷

Research on widowhood provided another example, and particularly 'the practice among gerontologists of comparing widowhood for women to retirement for men' with the conclusion that it is 'less significant.'¹⁸ Beeson demonstrated how such influential theorists as Cumming and Henry,¹⁹ (originators of the now largely discredited 'disengagement theory' of ageing), and Zena Blau Smith²⁰ or Ruth Cavan²¹ could come to the dubious conclusion that widowhood is easier for women than men and argue that women have a 'smoother passage' through life transitions 'because ageing for them begins earlier and lasts longer' when in fact 'there is little or no empirical evidence for these conclusions.'²²

In general, Beeson questioned why the social gerontological literature evaluated women's experience of ageing as 'less problematic, less traumatic and their difficulties seen as more easily resolved' when the actual data often suggested otherwise, and when the writing of women themselves usually presented quite the opposite point of view. For example, if it were indeed true that ageing begins earlier for women than men, then this would arguably make for a rougher rather than a smoother life, given the exigencies of ageing

for anyone. Beeson suggested that the problem lay in the confusion of 'dominant social values' with 'subjective experience', a process which 'becomes more misleading as the group under consideration are more powerless.'

All classes or groups do not contribute equally to the dominant value systems or definitions of reality. Traditional sex roles can be expected to be more in line with the subjective experience of males since they have more power in defining male and female relationships.²³

Beeson noted that when 'categories of experience have been predefined by researchers', definitions of reality other than those anticipated by the researcher are prevented from emerging fully and therefore 'assure maintenance of the dominant value system'. She also noted that:

Gerontologists have tended to use a version of public language to describe the ageing process, particularly when they use role theory ... The public world at this point in history is predominantly a male one and the private world predominantly female, and public predefinitions today speak disproportionately to the male experience.²⁴

'Ageing women', wrote Beeson, 'are good examples of such powerless subjects.' They are victims of attempts 'to structure the world of meaning for certain class or group members by more powerful groups or institutions.'²⁵ This failure to confront the 'differential experience of men and women in the ageing process ... resulted in a "half-history" of ageing and the substitution of half-baked generalizations for concrete evidence' even in progressive studies of ageing when this research started in 1982^{25a} However, by the end of

the seventies there was some acknowledgement in the mainstream literature of the need for 'more sophisticated analysis of sex differences in the nature and impact of ageing', in recognition that 'ageing may be more difficult for women because they are more narrowly defined'.²⁶ And it was recognised that 'if women do adjust more easily to ageing, it is because they are used to ill-defined, ambiguous roles and have already experienced impermanence in the form of role loss.'²⁷

There continues to be far too much non-gendered mainstream ageing literature which refers to health, housing and social service provision for 'the elderly' as if they were a homogeneous bunch.²⁸ There is still a remarkably gender-blind literature on retirement,²⁹ and discussions of social policy for older people which continue to render women invisible.³⁰ But as a result of the influence of feminism, there has been increasing awareness of both the invisibility of women and of male bias in research on ageing, and an increase in research by women of women which recognises the imbalance and aims to redress it.

There has therefore been, in the eighties, a small, but growing body of research about women age and ageing - on such issues as health,³¹ housing,³² social interactions,³³ widowhood,³⁴ poverty,³⁵ and social policy and service provision.³⁶ In particular there has been research on women's specific experience of retirement.³⁷ This literature has begun to deal effectively with sex differences in ageing and it has (with some few exceptions) also begun to deal with sexual divisions and structural inequality, and most importantly with

the issue of power: of males as members of a dominant social group and females as institutionally and structurally subordinate.

In the field of gerontology in the seventies there were advances in an understanding of the structural inequality of old age (of ageism).³⁸ Then in the early eighties, attention began to be paid specifically to the structural inequality of women in old age - to the combined effects of ageism and sexism. It was then that Phillipson identified those 'patterns of subordination' in women's lives:

... which in earlier years may have been experienced singly, surface as a complex interlocking web in later life. Sexism, which is experienced throughout the life cycle, is joined by ageism, defined here as the stereotyping and discrimination against people on the basis of their age.³⁹

At the same time in 1981, Peace in her 'international perspective on the status of older women' referred to the 'double standard which is both ageist and sexist.'⁴⁰

The following year, in 1982, an address to the NGO Committee on Ageing of the United Nations drew attention specifically to the invisibility of women in ageing and to the structural inequalities that determine 'by design' that 'the poorest of the poor are found in most societies to be elderly females:'

The figures are straightforward: of those over sixty years, women are the significant majority everywhere in the world; life expectancy for women is substantially higher than for men and this is expected to continue. Yet women rarely surface as the central issue in ageing. They are a side issue.⁴¹

Childbearing, kinkeeping, marital status, age-segregated living arrangements and economics were identified as factors linking the low value of women's status and the low value of people's status in old age and the even lower value of the combined status of 'old women':

'Old age for females accelerates the discriminating imbalance experienced by women during the life span. It does not reverse it.'⁴²

If the literature on ageing tended to ignore women, likewise, the literature on women tended to ignore the issue of age. Older women, were, for a long time, invisible in feminist literature. This too began to change, and 'ageing is becoming a feminist issue'.⁴³ Since the mid-80's, there have been a number of publications with a feminist perspective, by, about and for older women,⁴⁴ usually critical of the assumptions made about women as they age.⁴⁵ It has been primarily in the feminist literature that an analysis of gender and age has begun to take place which recognises the dual discrimination resulting from sexual and age divisions. What remains relatively unexplored still is the life cycle of women from a feminist perspective, based on an analysis of structural inequality and women's subordination, and the function power in determining women's opportunity and identity.

II. LIFE CYCLE STUDIES

In the early eighties life cycle studies began to emerge as a new discipline in the field of gerontology.⁴⁶ This was initially in response to - and in reaction against - the study of old age, and other life stages in isolation from the process of ageing throughout the life span:

The life course approach provides a way of examining individual as well as collective development under changing historical conditions. It shifts the focus of study of human development from stages and ages to transitions and the timing of life events. Rather than focusing on stages of the life cycle, a life course approach is concerned with how individuals and families made their transitions into those different stages. Rather than viewing any one stage of life, such as childhood, youth and old age, or any age group in isolation, it is concerned with an understanding of the place of that stage in an entire continuum.⁴⁷

Life course studies also developed in response to the need to study adult life and development as well as child development and old age. As long ago as 1968, Neugarten noted: '... the need for a psychology of adulthood in which investigators are concerned with the orderly and sequential changes that occur with the passage of time as individuals move from adolescence through adulthood and old age with issues of antecedent-consequent relationships'.⁴⁸ She also identified the lack of a 'developmental psychology of adulthood in the sense that we have a developmental psychology of childhood', lack of data on adults and the lack of an 'integrated body of theory that encompasses the life span.'⁴⁹

Life cycle studies offered new perspectives on the issues of age, gender and structural inequality. They have acknowledged the

interaction between the lives of individuals, social institutions and historical forces, the interaction of demographic, social and economic factors as well as of cultural background.⁵⁰ They have taken into account 'pathways by which individuals move throughout their lives, fulfilling different roles sequentially or simultaneously',⁵¹ and the fact that individual life courses have been both shaped by history and also contributed to shaping history itself.

In feminist studies in the early eighties, it was the invisibility of women in mid-life that prompted a look at the life cycle implications of gender, and specifically of 'women's place in man's life cycle.'⁵²

'... women not only reach mid-life with a psychological history different from men's and face at that time a different social reality having different possibilities for love and for work, but they also make a different sense of experience, based on their knowledge of human relationships. The failure to see the different reality of women's lives and to hear the differences in their voices stems in part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation. By positing instead two different modes, we arrive at a more complex rendition of human experience...'⁵³

In response to the awareness of invisibility and bias, there was a new interest in feminist research on the 'adult' or 'mid-life' experience of women, with an emphasis on the experience of women themselves.⁵⁴

More recently, the ability of the life cycle to explain structural inequality and the subordination of women has been

recognised.⁵⁵ Allatt and Keil describe the 'analytical power of both life cycle and life course conceptualisations 'for understanding the ideological mechanisms of control which sustain social structures as well as in unravelling the complex strands which make up an individual's personal history.'⁵⁶ The life cycle also offers a perspective on the issue of power:

The life cycle is a well established mode of analysis which has been used to frame the stages and to draw attention to the apparent inevitability of certain experiences. In this sense the ideological dimension provides insight into the processes of social control which operate: for while each stage has to be negotiated by each individual, the context of that negotiation is the currently obtaining structure of power between men and women.⁵⁷

In its study of individual transitions over time, the life cycle approach offers a unique opportunity to see and to study the social construction of opportunity and identity at different life stages, and a new perspective on the study of social change.⁵⁸ This is particularly relevant to the issue of gender, for life course studies enable a distinction to be made between individual time, historical time and family time.

The life course approach lends itself to a study of women's experience of age and ageing and to links between experience and attitudes (between opportunity and identity) precisely because of its ability to embrace simultaneously the individual, the social and the historical dimensions of experience, and their interconnections. It is particularly relevant to this study because it recognises that:

... the statuses associated with age at different points in the life course, rather than age itself, are the determinant factors.⁵⁹

Specifically, 'the life course approach suggests that chronological age is a less significant variable than the status within which individuals or groups find themselves at a particular point in time.⁶⁰ Given the apparent differences in status between women and men of the same chronological age, the life course approach offers both a theoretical and methodological framework for accounting for these differences and for discovering the precise relationship between the 'social' experience of women and their perceptions of 'self' throughout the life cycle. In this study, the life cycle approach enabled an exploration of the combined effects of age and gender through the lives of women in a way that could account for the influence of structural inequality and power on women's opportunity and identity.

II. ROLE THEORY, SOCIALISATION AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY

Reviewing the literature on sociological theories relevant to this study (and particularly symbolic interactionism and role theory), revealed, as in the other literature, an absence of analysis of the influence of structural inequality and power on opportunity and identity. Role theory has been particularly prominent in the literature on gender:

In Western societies today, sex is an organising principle of social structure, and despite popular belief to the contrary, it plays a great part in determining social roles.⁶¹

In addition, the concept of sex-role theory is used liberally in much of the psychological and sociological literature, including popularised psychology and lifestyle/life course handbooks.⁶² Often too, when the purpose of the research is not specifically sex-roles, the vocabulary of role theory has been appropriated, its value and validity taken for granted.

Goffman regarded "role" as an outfit or costume (identity) which is adopted for the convenience of the performer: as if it were a part in a play or performance.⁶³ Peace referred to women's 'primary goals in life' being 'to pursue the roles of wife, mother and homemaker': to 'changing roles', 'loss of role' and 'combining roles'.⁶⁴ What has been missing in this literature as in the ageing literature is an awareness of the significance of social structures in determining social roles: an analysis of sexual divisions and the extent to which

'power' is institutionalised within social structures and in the activity or behaviour labelled 'role'.

The problem with role theory and socialisation is that it has been conceptualised as 'ideological', as a set of attitudes, beliefs and behaviour (identity) detached from the material conditions of women's lives, as existing and operating at an individual level independently of and separately from the social and economic system, or from institutionalised exploitation and inequality. Role theory is inadequate, only a partial description of reality, because it has failed to identify the function of power in the systems that 'create the identity' associated with roles. In short, the problem with role theory is the extent to which it has been conceptualised as unconnected with the economic conditions which define *any* system (and certainly the sex-role and age-role systems), and the extent to which it has failed to connect the construction of roles or identity with the economic divisions of the systems. For role theory to be of any use in understanding women's experience of age, it needs to conceptualise 'roles' as directly connected with and constructed from the concrete, material and economic conditions of the social system.

It has, again, been feminist research which has developed an understanding and analysis of the relationship between sex roles and social structures:

The 'Sex-Role System' encompasses the network of attitudes, feelings and behaviours which result from the pervasiveness of sex-role stereotyping within our culture.¹⁶⁵

The sex role system has three distinguishing factors: 'the assignment, on the basis of sex, of one of two different series of personality traits, the masculine and feminine stereotypes" the sexual division of labour, and "the investing of the male with a higher value than the female'⁶⁵

Central to notions of a sex role system and sex role stereotyping are an understanding that 'sex differences ... are primarily the product of socialisation' even in respect of such apparently biologically determined settings as mothering and nurturance,⁶⁷ and the recognition of power as an organising feature and a determining factor in social systems. Thus, to the early view that social structures were the instrument of socialisation is added the part that socialisation plays in perpetuating the social structure. From feminist theory has come an awareness of power structures:

'... the importance of the interface between the personal lives of women as a variety of realms, and the external structure of power relations which give rise to and perpetuate these situations.'⁶⁸

Feminist research has been systematically critical of the cultural views of role and socialisation theory for 'directing attention from the real basis for the roles of women - power.'⁶⁹ It is this obscured power structure, the lack of awareness of the different - and unequal - positions of women and men occurring within social institutions such as 'the family' or work and retirement, housing, leisure, or law which has characterised role theory. Thus,

in a discussion of 'middle-aged marriage', it is stated that 'decreasing marital satisfaction is most likely where the wife is limited to a housewife role' and it is suggested that if the wife 'works outside the home communication and problem-solving will improve within it'.⁷⁰

What is obscured here is that the 'housewife role' is itself work, unpaid domestic labour; that historically some women had no choice but to 'limit themselves to a housewife role' because there were marriage bars to employment (for example in the teaching profession and the Civil Service). Furthermore women who may have left paid work for a 'housewife role' (whether for reasons to do with marriage bars or because of a prevailing ideology which has propagandised 'women's place as in the home') are not wholly free to 'choose' to return to work. There are age bars and age discrimination in employment which disadvantage women wishing to 'return' to the labour market in middle age. For most women at all ages, the 'work role' which is their alternative to the 'housewife role' is low paid, low status and often part-time. 'Role theory' obscures the sexual division of labour and women's subordination.

A similar 'sleight of mind' occurs when using role theory in relation to 'mothering'.

'Women who organised their identities around mothering may now be motivated to find new roles and sources of satisfaction. The major mid-life transition for most women occurs at the termination of the family cycle whereas for men it occurs at the termination of their occupational careers.'⁷¹

'Organising one's identity around mothering' may be one way of describing childbearing and childrearing, but what it obscures about structural inequality is again significant.

That women are socialised into the 'role' and therefore that this 'identity' comes from conditioning as much as from choice. That there are ideological pressures on women to organise 'their identities around mothering', as a result of theories such as Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation (ie that children need mothers who don't work outside the home). That the mothering 'role' is a full time job and is not recognised or remunerated as such. That this 'role' frequently requires some degree of economic dependency on a husband or male partner (or in his absence, the state) for varying periods of time. That this economic dependency often includes emotional dependency as well, which results from the socialisation of females as passive and dependent, and also from the isolation in which mothering is done. That women are often forced to choose between the mothering 'role' and an 'occupational career', or forced to give up paid employment after having children because the world of work is not structured to accommodate the needs of women with children. That women may have had to limit themselves to a mothering role by the absence of childcare provision that would enable them to maintain their work 'roles' during the years of childrearing. Alternatively that women may be forced into part-time work during the childrearing years, and part-time work is not the same as an occupational career. That the 'mothering role' and 'occupational careers' are not comparable either in terms of the conditions of work, or income, or economic independence, or status.

And, again, that the opportunities for a woman to find a new 'role' and 'satisfaction' in work or career in the second half of her life are limited by age bars in employment, by lack of employment experience, and by the fact that this 'mothering role' has no positive value whatsoever in the market place (indeed it arguably labels a woman as potentially less desirable for employment). Finally that women's 'mothering role' ends at about the age of 45 while men's 'occupational careers' or working lives continue to the age of 65; that this 'role theory' obscures at least twenty years of the prime of a woman's life.

These examples illustrate the extent to which role theory and the study of 'sex differences' have failed to take into account the structural position of women in relation to men. In 1975, Bernard noted how the study of sex differences and role theory in isolation not only obscured but reinforced structural inequality:

'Whatever the stated objectives of research on sex differences may have been, its latent function has been, in effect, to rationalise and hence to legitimate the status quo, including of course its role structure, especially the inferior position of women.'⁷²

The missing element in role theory has been an analysis of power:

My concern, then, is no longer with proof of the existence of sex differences, whatever they may be, so much as with the values placed on them and the uses made of them - including power.⁷³

Feminist theory, in the decade following Bernard's remarks, increasingly came to substitute 'a power or institutional paradigm for a socialisation paradigm'.⁷⁴

Symbolic interactionism has also made a major contribution in developing a theory based on a connection between belief, behaviour and social context and which analysed those relationships.

... symbolic interactionists do recognise the influence of external social factors, such as class, race and sex, during the life span. But insufficient attention is paid to the analysis of these factors.⁷⁵

But as with role theory, the emphasis has been too largely on the role of the individual rather than on the role of social structures in the interaction process. The characteristics of social and structural conditions and the part played by them in the formation of individual identity has not been fully appreciated by symbolic interactionists. Feminism has therefore been critical of symbolic interactionism:

The social structure within which interaction and interpretation occur, engenders beliefs as to what constitutes acceptable action, and that same structure exercises constraints upon the actors themselves.⁷⁶

This critique is shared by other feminists, particularly with regard to the study of women and age. Ritcey therefore proposed an interactionist rather than a normative model which recognised that:

... the social experience of gender and/or old age is not programmed in biology, but is a social construction perpetuated in the social interaction which maintains social institutions.⁷⁷

She also recognised that 'the prevailing power structures of the larger society define the boundaries of the analysis', and that any

meaningful analysis must elucidate '... not only the meanings ... but the structures which influence those meanings'.⁷⁹

In this respect, the theory of social construction has provided a more accurate account than role theory of identity and opportunity in the age-role and sex-role systems. Social construction has been defined as:

... not only the routines and mechanisms for educating, or socialising, newcomers into the system, but also the means for maintaining the definition of reality on which it is based and the subjective loyalty of individuals.⁷¹

Institutions have been defined in this instance as 'social arrangements which have survived over time and become standard.'⁸⁰ Routines, structures and *meanings* can be institutionalised, and 'meanings of events and behaviours are determined by gender, social position and indoctrination'.⁸¹

The learning and acting out of 'scripts' is an essential part of the theory of social construction. Script theory has been applied particularly in the areas of sexuality by Gagnon and Simon, by Laws and Schwartz and by Jackson: analysing the social construction of sexuality as a process of learning appropriate sexual scripts.⁸² This study in looking at the social construction of age and gender through the life span within a symbolic interactionist framework has applied script theory to marriage and motherhood as well as sexuality, and focused particularly on the factor of power.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER ONE

1. Barrett, M. (1980); Delphy, C. (1977); McKintosh, M. (1981); Kuhn, A. and Wolpe A. (1978); Leonard Barker and Allen (1976); Bruegel, I (1981).
2. Mathieu, N.C. (1977), p. 29.
3. Spender, D. (1980) (1982).
4. Townsend, P. (1963); Hunt, A. (1978); Carver, V. and Liddiard, P. (1978); Tinker, A. (1984).
5. Carver, V & Liddiard, P, (1978). Even such a recent reprinted basic syllabus text as *An Ageing Population* includes a majority of essays which make no distinction between men and women: Laslett's 'History of Ageing and the Aged', for example, or Cowgill and Holmes' 'Ageing and Modernization.' Both Slater and Palmore write radically about age discrimination in employment and compulsory retirement, but also as if the male and the female experience were the same. Vischer discusses attitudes to ageing with no distinction between women and men. Bromley, in speculating on social and environmental gerontology, does mention the different experience of women - ie the menopause, but this physiological change is traditionally the only way in which women have been distinguished, and then usually negatively.
6. Mathieu, N.C. op cit. p. 79.
7. Frenkel-Brunswick, E. (1968), pp. 80-81.
8. Mathieu, N.C op cit.
9. Bernard, J. (1980), pp. 106-107.
10. Butler, R.N. & Lewis, M.J. (1973), p. 91
11. Brotman, H.B. (1974), p. 250.
12. Butler & Lewis, op cit.
13. Arnoff, C. (1974), p. 86.
14. Beeson, D. (1976), p. 56.
15. Atchley, R.C.C. (1972). p. 103.
16. Beeson. D, op cit. p. 53.
17. Streib, G.F. & Schneider, C.J. (1971) p. 161
18. Beeson, D. op cit. p. 54.
19. Cumming, E. and Henry, V.H. (1961).

20. Smith, Z.B. (1973)
21. Cavan, R.S. (1962)
22. Beeson, D. op cit.
23. IBID, p. 57.
24. IBID.
25. IBID.
- 25a. Conrad, M. (1982), p. 216.
26. Ward. R. (1979) p.135.
27. Kline, C. (1977), p. 486.
28. Pelham, A.O. & Clark, W.F. (1985); Gray, J.A.M. & McKenzie, H. (1986); Marshall, V.W. (1986); Cunningham-Burley, S (1986); Hawley, P. & Chamley, J.D. (1986); Bromley, D.B. (1984); Greene, R. (1986).
29. Palmore, E.B. et al (1985); Morrison, M.H. (1986); Evans, L. et al, (1985); Lyon, P. (1987); Braithwaite, V.A. & Gibson, D.M. (1987).
30. Moroney, R. (1986).
31. Haug, M.R. et al. (1985); Golub, S & Freedman, R.J. (1985); Jack, R. (1987); Mellstrom, D. et al (1988); Porcino, J. (1983).
32. Holden, K.C. (1988); Kalymun, M. (1985); Cohen, F et al (1987); Coleman, L. & Watson, S. (1987); Carp, F and Christensen, D. (1986); Tinker, A and Baron, M. (1981); Rossiter, C. (1986).
33. Jerome, D. (1981a & b); Roberto, K. and Scott, J.P. (1984-85); Adams, R. (1987)
34. Hartwigsen, G. (1986); Lopata, H.Z. (1979); Sereid, S.S. (1987).
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CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY: USING THE PERSONAL TO UNDERSTAND THE POLITICAL

I. ETHNOGRAPHY AND GROUNDED THEORY

If there has been relatively little written on the experience of age and ageing for women, and its effects on identity and opportunity, there has been even less written which develops theory in this area in conceptual terms.¹ The research requirement for this thesis was therefore to find a methodological approach which was compatible both with the need to undertake an exploratory study of a relatively unresearched field and the need simultaneously to develop theory in this field. It needed, furthermore, to be an approach which might provide an understanding of the construction of social and psychological 'reality' not only in descriptive but explanatory terms, consistent with the theories of symbolic interactionism and feminist theories of women's subordination.

Ethnography - a form of social research which 'focuses on the detailed investigation of relatively unknown social phenomenon'² - was the general methodological approach adopted for purposes of this research. It is often used to study a small group of people within the overall society and has been used in small-scale exploratory work to isolate areas for further research. 'The central concern of ethnography is the generation and development of theories, usually through analysis of forms of social interaction and their social meaning.'³ Characteristics of ethnographic research methods include the study of individuals or groups in their own social context, a lack of pre-conception and pre-structuring of the study, the use of research methods which include

the collection of any data that might be relevant, participation by the researcher in some form with the population being studied, and the existence of multiple perspectives by the researcher of what is being studied and with or amongst those being studied.

The advantage of ethnography to the study of how age and sexual divisions affect women's identity and opportunity is that it acknowledges the interaction of structural features in society with the subjective perceptions of individuals. Ethnography takes into account both the objective characteristics of a social situation and the meanings attributed to the situation by the people participating in it. In common with and deriving from the theories of symbolic interactionism, ethnography assumes that an explanation of human behaviour requires more than a description of how behaviour is influenced by objective factors.⁴

'This is because human actions are based upon, or influenced by, social meanings: intentions, motives, attitudes and beliefs.'⁵

The principal advantage of an ethnographic methodology to the study of women and age is the opportunity it provides to elicit from the participants their own definitions and explanations of their life experience and at the same time to examine the social context in which it has occurred.

Within an ethnographic methodology the particular approach regarded as most suitable to the research problems and goals of . . .

this study was that of 'grounded theory'⁶ because of its recognition of the need to ground theory in the 'behaviour, feelings and insights of those studied'.⁷ Glaser and Strauss assume that theory is grounded in social research itself: that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. Generating a theory involves a process of research.⁸ Two advantages adhere to the use of grounded theory. It militates against 'fitting a borrowed theory to the data collected...and avoids the selective choosing of examples to validate a proposed theory'.⁹ An essential requirement of a theory is "... a strategy for handling data in research, providing modes of conceptualisation for describing and explaining."¹⁰

One aim of this study was the generation of 'formal theory' through a process of 'theoretical sampling' defined by Glaser and Strauss as:

... the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his (sic) data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal. The initial decisions for theoretical collection of data are based only on a general sociological perspective and on a general subject or problem area ... The initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework.'¹¹

Strauss distinguishes three phases in ethnographic fieldwork. 'In the first phase, the researcher, guided by broadly defined

interests, collects data with a view to testing a wide range of possible ideas.'¹² The initial aim is an exploratory investigation, which avoids 'narrowing problems into specific research hypotheses' and which 'involves selectivity in observation and analysis around a set of emerging research ideas and theories in order to develop, redefine or redirect them in accordance with what is discovered as fieldwork progresses.'¹³ The first phase also involves the use of 'sensitising concepts' to provide a general source of reference.

The origins of this study of women and age were based on such sensitising concepts as 'negative attitudes to ageing', 'age anxiety', 'pre-occupation with youth and beauty', 'appearance anxiety', 'mid-life redundancy' etc., and 'age/sex discrimination in employment'. It was essential, however, to avoid the assumption that these were in fact characteristics of experience or necessarily a problem for women generally. It was also important to be open-ended and unbiased in exploring the extent to which women at all stages of the life span might share similar attitudes to ageing. It was necessary to devise research methods which enabled women to define their own experience and problems in an exploratory framework unprejudiced by these 'sensitising concepts'. This approach makes it possible 'to discover what is unique about each empirical instance of the concept' while uncovering 'what it displays in common across many different settings.'¹⁴ It enables the discovery of similarities, as well as differences. This was one of the aims of this study.

In the second phase, ideas start to come into focus and the significance of 'groups' (or individuals or situations) begin to emerge: 'working hypotheses and propositions are formulated with reference to specific aspects of the field study'.¹⁵ By using the 'comparative method' - making comparisons between situations and persons which are similar, but which also differ in known ways - it is possible to 'develop, test, modify and extend the hypotheses and the concepts in terms of which they are expressed.'¹⁶ It is desirable to follow up multiple hypotheses simultaneously - however apparently unrelated - until emergent concepts become inter-related to form 'an integrated central theoretical framework - the core of the emerging theory.'¹⁷ Within 'theoretical sampling' the choice of 'groups' (or individuals or situations) is 'based upon those which will help to generate as many properties of the concepts as possible and to relate concepts to each other'.¹⁸ A wide range of 'groups' or individuals is therefore necessary to 'identify fundamental differences *and* similarities in conditions under which concepts and their properties vary.'¹⁹ The criterion of 'theoretical relevance' is what controls the quantity of data collected and its coherence.

The second phase of the research process ends when new categories or properties are no longer emerging: what Glaser and Strauss describe as the point of 'theoretical saturation'. The aim of theoretical sampling is to generate concepts and hypotheses which result in an integrated theory - not to 'ascertain the universality of the theory.' Although there is a third analytical

and evaluative phase to grounded theory methodology, there is in fact a 'constant interplay of data gathering and analysis through the research.'²⁰ The ultimate goal in the analysis of social interaction and its social meaning is 'to make valid sense out of the social world of the people studied...to attempt to reconstruct their view of the world.': for the researcher to report on their 'version of the actions and decisions of others and how they see their world'.²¹

The three methods available for collection of data using grounded theory methodology are observation, in-depth interviews and document analysis. Multiple methods are therefore a basic requirement of the methodology.²²

Observational roles can include "the complete participant who never makes his/her identity known" and "the participant-as-observer who makes his/her presence known, but attempts to integrate as fully as possible into the group".²³ Document analysis can include any kind of written or published material - either personal or official documents - and they can be used and analysed in different ways appropriate to the specific research.

For the in-depth interviews of theoretical sampling, informants are not selected on a representative basis, but for the data that it is considered they might be willing and able to provide.²⁴ The interviews are generally informal, unstructured and non-directive, and interviewees are not treated uniformly but questioned about the

areas of the data to which they can contribute most. The interview schedule needs to be flexible enough to respond to the data being collected and to allow for changes of direction, development or more in-depth probing as appropriate.

An ethnographic approach and the use of grounded theory methodology and methods were particularly suitable to the study of women's experience of age. This was a relatively unexplored area. The data which explains it had yet to be collected. It was reasonable to assume that *the explanations would derive directly* from the data. Whilst there were certain 'sensitising concepts', the theory that would have adequately conceptualised and accounted for the nature of the experience did not exist. It seemed reasonable to assume that possible theories might emerge from a process of exploring different categories of women and different categories of women's experience.

Finally, it was supposed that the ultimate achievement of a systematic formal and integrated theory of women's experience of age and ageing might evolve from the emergent hypotheses of a grounded theory approach. It was certainly clear that multiple methods were required to begin to adequately collect data that on the one hand described and explained the events in women's lives (their opportunities) and on the other hand, the attitudes held about women by men and other women and by women about themselves (their identity).

II. LIFE CYCLE STUDIES AND LIFE HISTORY METHODS

The life course approach raises methodological issues and challenges. In the past, most research on middle age, old age and ageing has tended to be quantitative: longitudinal cohort studies and survey methods.²⁵ Age divisions have been used to categorise people (childhood, youth, adolescence, adulthood, middle age, old age) and to 'measure' experience without reference to - or indeed respect for the significance of - the life trajectory of the individual. Until fairly recently most research on ageing has attempted to analyse the position of older people in the present without reference to the past.²⁶

Johnson noted that 'social theories of ageing propounded to date have not given sufficient prominence to the uniqueness of the human biography' and proposed to extend the concept of 'career' as developed by Goffman, Becker, Stebbins and Glaser and Strauss²⁷ to include a 'biographical career approach to the understanding of the social realities of old age.'

Hareven mentions life history analysis as one element in the life course approach and Bertaux discusses his decision to use a 'life story' methodology in his study of the social mobility of French bakers ('bizarre' as he describes it 'to use such a qualitative technique within a structuralist-Marxist theoretical framework').²⁸ Rosenmayr also discusses the need for 'biography and

autobiography' in the study of the life course, and how 'expression, through the communication and shaping of the context of experience, becomes something independent and permanent.'²⁹ The collection of data about the life of an individual through interviewing and the use of diaries, letters and other documents is central to this approach. Rosenmayr, like Bertaux, recognises the value of individual biography for the study of history and social movements: "The 'subjective' reconstruction of the life spans of individuals...must be used for understanding what is called social or political change".³⁰

Similarly, the individual life course becomes a vehicle for understanding how institutional structures operate, explaining the interplay of institutional patterns in the lives of individuals. The grounded theory approach uses life history methods for generation of theory: likewise life course studies provide the theoretical perspective and life history its methodology. The methodological similarities of these two theoretical models derives from their basis in a concept of inter-relationship and interaction between individual experience and social environment.

Life history interview methods are particularly suited to the grounded theory approach, because they invite people to describe their full life story without prejudice to what may or may not be significant and in a way that ensures that life events and experiences which have a particular meaning or significance in relation to age emerge spontaneously. It is less likely using

this method, to pre-determine what may be significant - to 'force the data to fit a theory.' It is therefore an ideal method for 'generating theory, for it not only *enables* hypotheses and concepts to emerge from the data, but *ensures* that this happens in the very process of eliciting from participants, their life experiences, and their own definitions and explanations of it.

Life history is an extremely useful methodological tool in discovering historical and experiential data about groups - working class people, black people, women - for whom there has been comparatively little 'official documentation'. Life history has been adopted as a feminist methodology, partly in response to the invisibility of women as subjects for study in their own right, or to their 'gender-blind' inclusion with men in general social studies, as if their experience were necessarily the same as men's.³¹ Life history has proved to be an effective method for making women's lives visible and giving status to women's experience.³² According to Gilligan:

The most pressing items on the agenda for research on adult development is the need to delineate in *women's own terms* the experience of their adult life.³³

Feminist methodology also recognises both the virtues of retrospective assessment and the imperatives of informant involvement in the process of 'adequate reconstruction'. In a study of women in mid-life attempting to re-enter the labour market, the criteria of adequacy were: -- -- -----

... that the active voice of the subject should be heard in the account...that the theoretical reconstruction must be able to account for the investigator as well as those who are investigated...that the reconstruction should reveal the underlying social relations that eventuate in the daily lives we are studying.³⁴

Wanting to understand 'how the underlying organisation of actions and practices results in the ordinary daily lives of women' was both the goal of the particular study, and according to its authors 'the heart of the idea of a sociology *for* women.' Thompson also shows how oral history methods 'can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.'³⁵

Life history is an under-rated methodology for collecting data about people as members of groups (social class, nationality, gender or racial groups) or people with common experiences (of work, war, education, revolution, child-rearing): **the social history**. It has the ability to collect data about the experience of an individual *over time* as distinct from the *in time* picture obtained from quantitative methods: **the personal history**. Life history regards the life of the individual as just as valid a place on which to base a study of society or history as the more traditional approach which may start with a collective study of social structures and historical events.

Life history has also been shown to be of particular value in exploring previously taboo or very personal aspects of individual

experience, in particular, sexuality.³⁶ Plummer argues the merits of using life history methods, until then 'a minor tradition of research', to study the social construction of homosexuality, for its ability to take into account 'the societal level, the situational level and the personal level.'³⁷ Plummer sees the life history approach as being able to grapple with the inner experience of individuals and their 'subjective meanings.' It is a dialogue that can 'focus on process and ambiguity':

The life history technique is peculiarly suited to discovering the confusions, ambiguities and contradictions that are displayed in everyday experience.³⁸

It is also a technique that can 'focus on totality':

The autobiography is unique in allowing us to view an individual in the context of his (sic) whole life, from birth to the point at which we encounter him. Because of this it can lead us to a fuller understanding of the stages and critical periods in the process of his development. It enables us to look at subjects as if they have a past with successes as well as failures, and a future with hopes and fears. It also allows us to see an individual in relation to the history of his time, and how he is influenced by the various religious, social, psychological and economic currents present in his world. It permits us to view the intersection of the life history of men (sic) with the history of their society, thereby enabling us to understand better the choices, contingencies and options open to the individual.³⁹

Furthermore, life history methods permit the uncovering of previously hidden or private or stigmatised areas of personal experience and to discover the attitudes and feelings of the

informants about it. Faraday and Plummer found this to be the case in their study of paedophilia and transvestism.⁴⁰

There were similar requirements in this study, with its emphasis on age and sexuality, which suggested that life history interviewing was a particularly suitable exploratory method with respect to structure, form, content and scope. Its overall framework precisely encompasses the individual life span. It can be structured to cover different areas of experience with different degrees of emphasis as dictated by either the researcher or the researched. Thus it can focus on work or family life, or relationships or politics within the context of the whole life trajectory. It includes an integral flexibility so that the balance of emphasis can vary in relation to the different experiences of different individuals. Thus, in a study of women and age, marriage may emerge as a key factor for one informant, while work or sexuality or appearance might be the major issue for others. According to Becker:

... to understand why someone behaves as he does, you must understand how it looked to him, what he thought he had to contend with, what alternatives he saw open to him: you can understand the effects of economic structures, delinquent subcultures, social norms and other commonly invoked explanations of behaviour only by seeing them from the actor's point of view.⁴¹

Life history methodology is multi-dimensional as well as linear. It can relate one area of experience - or life sphere - to another. It can include what has happened to an individual, the events: a

factual dimension. It can include what the individual felt at the time about the events of their life and what they feel about what has happened retrospectively: **an emotional dimension.** And it can include their thoughts or understanding about their life experience: what they thought then and what they think now: **an evaluative dimension.** Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for an individual to express opinions and views about themselves in relation to society and historical contexts as they perceive them. So there is **an analytical dimension.** In its multi-dimensions are untapped possibilities for collecting data on attitudes and ideology: what people feel, think, believe, and why. Insofar, as it is concerned with the interaction between 'individual time' and 'historical time', the life course approach is historical by its very nature.

Life history appeared - for all the reasons outlined here - to be a particularly suitable methodology for purposes of this study whose aims were:

- to collect data on the experience of age and ageing of women individually
- to look at the experience of age and ageing over the life span of individual women of different ages
- to explore what might be common to women's experience of the life cycle generally.

These were the **factual dimensions**. With respect to the **emotional dimensions**, the goal was:

- to discover how women felt about age, and the process of ageing and its meaning for them.

With the **evaluative dimension**, the goal was:

- to collect data on attitudes to age, in the present, retrospectively and with regard to the future.
to analyse any changes that might have occurred as a result of a decade of feminism

And in the **analytical dimension**, the goal was:

- to find out what women think about their situation and that of other women, how they understand their lives.

There can be problems in ethnographic research in the interpretation of data: for example, what people say about what they do - and how they perceive and communicate their actions, attitudes and beliefs - may differ from their actual behaviour and beliefs. It is necessary to be aware of the possibility of discrepancy between experience as reported and experience as it occurred, and to take this into account in evaluating meaning. However, Thompson has pointed out that data is not invalid simply because it may not be literally true:

'He may have been mistaken in believing his story to be literally true, but this cannot diminish its symbolic force as an answer'.⁴²

It is also necessary to be aware of the probability that individual perceptions and perspectives and accounts will vary and change over time. This does not invalidate the account provided at any given time, but may restrict the scope of generalisation.

Life history was also a particularly suitable methodology for theorising about the life cycle itself. By its very nature it would enable comparison of the experience of women at different stages of the life course for similarities and differences, and for evidence of the construction of identity and opportunity. It would encompass description, definition and explanation, and form a basis for the generation of theory. In this model, a significant proportion of the interpretive function of the research can derive from those being researched, thus limiting the power of interpretation - or misinterpretation - by the researcher. The interpretive function of the researcher is most likely to operate in providing a political explanation of the personal experience of the researched. But even in this endeavour, the meaning of experience can, and - insofar as possible should - be drawn from the researched themselves.

In this study, the forms of interviewing developed in precisely the way grounded theory had suggested they should and would do: in response to the information, ideas and theory being generated by the field work and in response to emergent and developing hypotheses. The schedule was adapted and allowed to change in response to the data that was collected. The *process* of

interviewing succeeded in documenting the trajectory of women's lives: what they did and why, what they knew, what they felt and what they think and believe. From this process emerged a picture of the effect of age and sex divisions in the lives of the women interviewed: how they had negotiated their lives within the boundaries of these divisions, the restrictions imposed on women's lives by the divisions, women's compliance and then women's resistance to them, how women under the influence of feminism were able to change their lives: their attitudes and beliefs (identity) and behaviour (opportunity). It eventually became possible to theorise about the systematic social construction of opportunity and identity based on the interaction and interconnection of age and sex divisions throughout the life span of women as individuals and women as a group.

III. THE SCHEDULE AND INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

Life history interviews can take different forms, from the complete free-form unstandardised interview to a formally standardised structure in which the exact wording of questions and the sequence in which they are asked is pre-determined. In between, is the non-schedule standardised interview used by Brown and Rutter and by Boulton.⁴³ In this case, the topics and issues to be covered are standardised and key questions are noted, but no particular questions are asked in any particular order and the actual questions asked are determined by what is appropriate to collecting information from each individual informant. The questioning continues on each topic or issue until there are no remaining ambiguities. This form of interview has been used in studies of women's experience of depression and mothering.

There have been other, specifically feminist, studies of women, where variations of unstructured interview formats have been selected as most suitable to the research topic and the people whose experience was being researched, and where the issue of awareness or consciousness, or consciousness-raising or attitudes and feelings were also integral to the research topic:

... we entered our interviews in an unstructured way, getting women to talk about the changes occurring in their lives, leaving the definition of consciousness as an emergent knowledge that would come out of the discussions. This would allow us to develop a more thorough understanding of the women's own perspectives as well as get unanticipated information about events and problems.⁴⁴

This research on the 'experience of women who had been primarily mothers and wives and who were attempting to move into the labour market' followed a group of 65 women over a period of four to five years:

We tried not to impose our ideas about what was important; our intention was to let the concepts, explanations and interpretations of those participating in the study become the data we would analyse.⁴⁵

With the goal of studying the 'relation between changes in the structural situation of women and changes in consciousness', the researchers raised questions which did not automatically emerge in the interviews:

The areas most likely to be unmentioned were the women's movement, feelings about ageing, and sexuality.⁴⁶

These, significantly, were three of the main areas of investigation in this study, and this suggested the need for a more directed form of questioning on these topics. This was, in fact, what happened in the previous study:

For example, after discussing present life situation and changes, we asked about past history beginning with adolescence unless the interviewee herself initiated the subject of earlier experiences. We got accounts of significant childhood experiences, as the women perceived them in the present. We also gathered information on education and work experience, on relationships with parents, husbands, children and friends, and on their aspirations and hopes for the future.⁴⁷

Second and subsequent interviews filled in gaps as well as monitoring changes. All interviews were taped and transcribed.

For purposes of this study a completely unstructured interview was regarded as unnecessary given the 'sensitising concepts' that were available initially, and a formally structured interview was regarded as inappropriate to the aims, which like the study referred to above, involved looking at the 'relation between changes in the structural situation of women and changes in consciousness.'

For the initial interviews a life history interview schedule was devised, based on the schedule developed by Paul Thompson for his study of the Edwardians, using his 'Model Questions' as a framework.^{4a} Key questions were borrowed from Thompson's model, covering the major areas of life experience: parents' education and occupation and marriage and then the informant's education, employment, marriage and motherhood. There were also questions on religion, politics and social class. In addition, a technique was used to help to focus and structure the interview at the beginning. This involved asking informants to choose the key events from their lives that would have to be covered if a TV documentary was going to be made about them. This was also useful in giving each interviewee an idea of the important areas of their experience to explore in more detail.

Not all of Thompson's 'model questions' were relevant, however, and it was necessary to add additional questions on early childhood and adolescent socialisation, on sexuality and sexual experience, and on marriage. These questions covered the **factual dimension** of informants' experience in key spheres of their lives.

The interview schedule was designed to be used not as a formal questionnaire, but as a guide, giving informants the opportunity to expand and talk at length on aspects of their personal experience that might prove to be particularly relevant. It also was designed to function as a 'prompt book', for probing more deeply when relevant and as a 'checklist' to ensure that no area of experience was omitted. According to Becker, the task of the sociologist in gathering life history is taking steps to ensure:

... that it uncovers everything we want to know, that no important fact or event is slighted, that what purports to be factual squares with other available evidence, and that the subject's interpretations are honestly given.⁴⁹

These steps were taken meticulously in the collection of the life history data of this study.

The interviews lasted between two and five hours: on average, three hours each. In most cases they were conducted in one session and took place in the informant's home, unless this was not possible, i.e. the informant preferred for personal reasons not to be interviewed at their home. In these cases, the interviews took place at the home of the researcher. The place in which the

interviews took place was not regarded as generally significant to the study.

After the first three interviews, it was obvious that the schedule worked very well in eliciting information about events (the **factual** dimension), but that it was failing to collect effectively information either about attitudes or about the informant's understanding of their experience: their evaluation or analysis. So two additional sections were added to the interview schedule, one at the beginning and one at the end which asked questions specifically aimed at collecting information about the **emotional, evaluative and analytical** dimensions of experience.

At the beginning informants were briefly told the aims of the study and then asked an open-ended question about whether they had ever been aware of age in their lives and in what ways. The question was repeated until informants could no longer think of any other examples, and this question could take up to half an hour of interview time. Informants were then asked if they thought the experience of age was different for women and men and in what ways. This, again, was intended to be an open-ended non-directive question with the purpose of prompting evaluation and analysis with the interviewer probing and prompting until the informant's responses were exhausted. These questions succeeded in eliciting data on attitudes and stereotypes and fulfilled the aim of obtaining informants' thinking about the issues being explored in the study: **the analytical and evaluative-dimensions.**

At the end of the interview, sets of specific questions were added covering appearance, health, sexuality, media, age discrimination, the influence of feminism the Women's Movement, and retrospective re-evaluation of life experiences. Some of these questions were adapted from questions used in the 200 interviews with mothers from the Jersey State College project on 'Mothers & Daughters'. These questions went some way towards collecting useful data about attitudes and dealt with the emotional dimension of experience.

The final interview schedule was a three part questionnaire. [It is reproduced in full in Appendix III]. Part One was a general open-ended discussion of the issues of age and gender. Part Two was a traditional life history interview. Part Three asked specific questions about attitudes to age and ageing, sexuality, discrimination and the media.

IV. FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODS

Feminist research has raised the issue of 'ethics' in the relationship between researcher and subject: the extent to which the very nature of the research relationship may exploit the experience of the researched. Establishing a rapport and a relationship of trust with the people being interviewed is important in dealing with such sensitive issues as sexuality and self-esteem, and to attempt to explore possibly painful areas of personal experience raises questions of ethics. In this respect, feminism has made a significant and relevant contribution to methodology, by identifying the 'masculine bias' in traditional models of interviewing in sociological research:

... the assumption that the researcher must and can strive to be a neutral observer standing outside the social realities being studied is made by many who use quantitative and qualitative methods in a natural science model. This assumption is challenged by the feminist critique of social science that documents the male bias of theory and research which has previously been taken as a neutral account of human society. A feminist methodology must, therefore, deal with the issues of objectivity in social science, and in the process, deal also with the issue of the relationship between the researcher and the researched.⁵⁰

Oakley attacks the paradigm of the social research interview in methodology textbooks which emphasises:

- a) its status as a mechanical instrument of data collection;
- b) its function as a specialised form of conversation in which one person asks the questions and another gives the answers;
- c) its characterisation of interviewees as essentially passive individuals, and

d) its reduction of interviewers to a question asking and rapport promoting role.⁵¹

Oakley objects to the pretense that interviewer and interviewee are 'depersonalised participants in the research process' and makes the case that when a feminist interviews women:

- 1) use of prescribed interviewing practice is morally indefensible
- 2) general and irreconcilable contradictions at the heart of the textbook paradigm are exposed and
- 3) it becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.⁵²

Not only is it 'morally indefensible' for interviewers to 'define the role of interviewees as subordinates', but:

... the convention of interviewer-interviewee hierarchy is a rationalisation of inequality...⁵³

Feminist methodology therefore regards it as appropriate interview practice to establish a non-hierarchical peer relationship between interviewer and interviewee and for the interviewer to identify with and participate in the relationship. Oakley refers specifically to the situation of interviewer and interviewee sharing 'the same gender socialisation and critical life experiences' and the significance of 'a feminist interviewing women' being both 'inside the culture and participating-in-that

which she is observing.' This would traditionally have been regarded as problematic in sociology, calling into question the objectivity of the social *scientist*.

But, feminist methodology also argues for a reflexive sociology - 'in which the sociologist takes her own experiences seriously and incorporates them into her work'- in the belief that this predisposes the collection of 'less biased data'. This perspective is particularly compatible with the tenets of theoretical sampling, in which the 'personal reactivity' or bias of the researcher has been regarded as problematic. For it would suggest that the reverse might be true: that the personal experience of the researcher, if it is acknowledged and awarely incorporated into the research process, can constitute a valid and valuable part not only of the research process, but its results. In this sense, feminist theory and grounded theory are in agreement in seeing:

... experience and practice as the basis of theory, and theory as the means of changing practice - we feel that it is inevitable that the researcher's own experiences will be involved in the research process as much as they are in life, and we shall argue that all research must be concerned with the experiences and consciousness of the researcher as an integral part of the research process.⁵⁴

This position - of personal involvement in whatever appropriate way by the woman researching women - has been open to criticism for 'a lack of objectivity from those of their male colleagues whose sociological insight does not enable them to see that their own work is affected in a similar way by *their* experiences and their

view of the world as men.⁵⁵ Rich points out that "objectivity" is, in fact, the word used by men to describe their own 'subjectivity':

Masculine ideologies are the creation of masculine subjectivity: they are neither objective, nor value-free, nor inclusively human.⁵⁶

There is also an issue of power when a researcher exercises the privilege of commenting on or analysing the personal experience and behaviour of those studied. In this case, it is not so much a matter of 'personal' bias (or reactivity) but of 'political' bias: the implications of middle class researchers interpreting the behaviour of working class subjects, or men of women (even women of women) and white people of black people. It is in the context of the bias of racism and imperialism that the value and validity of certain key anthropological studies is now being questioned.

Rowbotham emphasised that:

... there is no such thing as an empirical study that does not come from a particular vision of the world. 'Unbiased' history simply makes no declaration of its bias, which is deeply rooted in existing society, rejecting the views of the people of influence.⁵⁷

Both feminist methodology and the methodology of grounded theory concur in the value of 'naming' the obscured subjectivity in any research methods, quantitative as well as qualitative, and also of 'exploiting' it to the advantage of the research process. Having identified the 'obscured subjectivity' in the apparently-----

'objective' research of male (and also middle class) sociologists, Oakley points out the advantages of 'shared experience', as did the feminist sociologists who researched the 'middle-aged' women who'd spent most of their lives as mothers and with whom they had many experiences in common:

The fact that we, the interviewers, were women who have been married, divorced and had children (one of us had a baby after the study began) increased the validity of our data. We did not have to go through the process of getting to know the special perspectives and nuances of meaning of those we were studying - a process that is often identified as necessary if the qualitative researcher wants to avoid errors that simply come from ignorance ... A faithful account is best pursued, we are arguing, in research such as ours where changing consciousness is the central question, through the close and sympathetic involvement with the informant rather than through distancing and objectifying.⁵⁸

This study of age and gender was carried out by a researcher who has been identified as and who has identified herself as a feminist. It was furthermore a study of women by a woman who will have shared many specific life experiences with the women being interviewed and also be at a life stage (between the ages of 37 and 44 during the extended course of the research) in which the pressures of age and gender divisions were forcing a re-evaluation of life experience and transitions, and providing a motivating force to the research. Thus the personal experience of the researcher will have *obviously* informed the research topic, the research questions and the research process in precisely the way that in grounded theory and feminist methodology it is not only presumed, but favoured to do, and which it has been demonstrated to

do in less obvious and often obscured ways in the more traditional and apparently objective sociological methodologies. The 'subjective bias' is acknowledged here. The research was carried out in full awareness of its existence and with the conviction that it benefited the collection of data and the discussion in this dissertation.

V. THE SAMPLING PROCEDURES

1. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION - NORTH LONDON OLDER WOMEN'S GROUP

Participant observation took place with the North London Older Women's Group over a period of two years. The method of observation employed here was Gold's second type:

The participant as observer who makes her/his presence known, but attempts to integrate as fully as possible into the group.⁵⁹

'Researcher reflexivity' was an issue, and it required remaining aware of the process of learning that took place in the process of participation, and then actually developing this self-awareness in the data collection and analysis.

The North London Older Womens Group had been started in 1979 by Alison Hall in response to an advertisement she had placed in *Spare Rib*, the feminist magazine. The group had been meeting for 3 years, when I initially joined them in January and February 1982 for discussion sessions on age and gender.

I heard about the existence of the group through feminist networks. I made contact with some information about the general aims of my research project and asked if they wanted to participate in contributing to the research. They were interested, we met and I was invited to join the group as a 'temporary' member. (I was later invited to join on a permanent basis, but declined for reasons of maintaining a workable research relationship). The group met monthly

to discuss issues of common concern. Its function was as a support and 'consciousness raising' group for its members who achieved this through the sharing of experiences. There were 12 women all together, ranging in age from 43 to 60. There was a solid core group of half a dozen who met regularly and who were very committed to the group and what they got out of it.

I went to some of the regular meetings and participated in the general discussions. Some meetings were then set up specifically to discuss particular issues related to the concerns of the group and the goals of the research. These included discussions on marriage, motherhood, work and sexuality. These discussions were 'informal' and conducted like a normal meeting of the group, but they were tape recorded (and later transcribed). In the context of the discussions, I asked questions of the other women, but they also asked questions of each other and of me. I answered questions and contributed from my own personal experience as a 'peer participant', which I was, as a woman with similar experiences and faced with the same or similar dilemmas and issues. I was younger than the women in the group (between the ages of 37 and 39 at the time of participating, but approaching 40, the lower age requirement for membership in the group). Obviously, I was both personally and professionally interested in the issues of being female and growing older which was the group's *raison d'etre*.

As researcher I could both contribute to and 'control' the discussion, by introducing the 'sensitising concepts' or issues of

this research then listening to what was being said, sifting and analysing it, responding to it and generally developing the discussion to assist the *generation of concepts*: by paying attention to the content of the discussion, conceptualising what was said and throwing it back for further analysis by the group. It was effectively a process of *thinking with* this group - recognising the emergence of hypotheses, pulling them out for further scrutiny and discussion and putting them back for testing. It was an extremely effective process which succeeded in generating some useful concepts and hypotheses about sex roles and age roles, sexual divisions, sexuality and the social control of women which were then tested in the life history sample, used in generating theory and in determining the structure of this study.

2. THE LIFE HISTORY SAMPLE

The life history sample consisted of 46 tape recorded and transcribed interviews with women between the ages of 15 and 72, conducted between January and December 1983. The final size of the sample was determined in part by what was small enough to be manageable for one researcher on an ESRC grant, and in part by what was large enough to reveal patterns of experience, behaviour and attitude. While the sample was not representative, nor large enough to generalise statistically, the aim of the research was, in any case, the generation of theory rather than generalisation. Furthermore, small samples have proved to be invaluable in 'mapping out an area, describing a field and connecting events, processes or characteristics which appear to go together'.⁶⁰ The ultimate factor in concluding the

final size of the sample was Glaser and Strauss's principle of 'theoretical saturation', which Bertaux describes in terms of his research on French bakers:

We interviewed about 30 bakery workers, as many bakers and bakers' wives, and apprentices - a total of about 100 life stories, focused on work life (but not restricted to it). Compared to the usual sample sizes in sociology, this is small but ... We noticed that if the first life story of a bakery worker had taught us a lot; if the second and third and fourth had also brought new information and, by the mere effect of repetition, had stressed some crucial points that were present in the first life story but lost in the narrative; if each subsequent bakery worker's life story had something to add, especially about new topics such as family life and union life (which we were introducing because we felt much safer about our own understanding of the logic of work life); if, therefore, every new life story brought something new, the proportion of the new versus the already known was getting smaller all the time. After about 15 life stories, we were pretty certain that we had a clear picture of the basic structure of the work life, whether weekly or across the life course.⁶¹

In line with grounded theory methods, Bertaux made decisions about the size of the sample in relation to the theory it generated:

When the interviews bring again and again the same elements of recognisable pattern, when subsequent interviews with new persons confirm its presence in every life, then the pattern may be considered not merely fantasy of the researcher (in social-scientific language - mere hypothesis) - but a structuring feature of the actual processes.⁶²

This was the point of saturation in Bertaux's study, and a similar point of theoretical saturation was reached in the interviewing in this study. Bertaux takes grounded theory a step further than Glaser and Strauss by claiming that the material generates not just patterns and hypotheses, but a reflection of the structural processes and systems that determine the patterns and suggest the hypotheses.

In this study of women's experience of and attitudes to age, a form of strategic sampling was used to create a quota sample, or 'list of categories of various proportions into which people had to fit in order to be counted.'⁶³ The first criterion for selection was that the women interviewed should be drawn from all ages and stages of the life span in order to be able to explore the extent to which attitudes might be constructed early in life and then operate within the lives of individual women through the process of physical and chronological ageing. Women at each stage would be asked to look back at their past, to look at themselves in the present and to look forward to the future. This methodology was designed to present the opportunity to ascertain the acquisition of attitudes and to assess the ways in which attitudes might have influenced past and present situations, how they might be operating in shaping or determining the future, how they were subject to change over time, and particularly under the influence of a decade of feminism.

With the goal to explore attitudes based on women's experience of age, it proved necessary to select women who might for some reason or combination of reasons be in a position to be aware of attitudes they might hold, even (as often proved to be the case) 'against their will' (i.e. 'feeling' something which is negative and which they know to be oppressive to themselves or others, not even 'true', but nevertheless feeling it). This was based on the assumption that it is in the nature of internalised attitudes often to be 'unawarely' held.

The first and most important category concerned with awareness was the selection for interview of women 'influenced by feminism'. All the women interviewed came into this category which was self-defined by the informants and not by the interviewer. Many of the women interviewed defined themselves as feminists and the remainder were aware of feminism and its influence on their lives. Having been influenced by feminism or identifying as a feminist suggested, at least, that the women concerned would have had a 'raised consciousness' and awareness of how sexual divisions operated in society and in their own lives. It suggested some personal and/or political understanding or awareness of the 'oppression of women' and the system known as sexism. And it suggested an openness to change: that if feminism had influenced the lives of women, it would have been most likely to influence the lives of women who identified as feminists, or were sympathetic to feminism. The influence of feminism suggested that there might also be awareness of age and ageism.

Within the life span criteria was a slight over-sampling of women clustered in the age groups 35-45 and 55-65. Those in the 35-45 age group were chosen because they were approaching the end of their reproductive years or passing through the mid-life period of re-evaluation or even of mid-life crisis.⁶⁴ The 55-65 age group of women were approaching or passing through the period of compulsory retirement from employment, when, like men, they are forced by circumstance into an awareness of age. It was assumed that both the points of 'retirement from reproduction' and 'retirement from production' (employment) would heighten awareness of age and age

divisions, as well as sexual divisions: i.e. increase awareness of the oppression and internalised oppression, and possibly to contribute to a desire and a strategy to get out from under it.

The sample was obtained through a variety of feminist organisations and networks and through advertising in feminist publications. These included the University of Kent and the Polytechnic of Central London Women's Studies courses, the Older Feminists Network and its newsletter, the Postgraduate Feminist Research Group, the South London Women's Centre, the North London Older Women's Group, the Early Menopause Support Group, the Re-evaluation Counselling Women's Support Group, the Women's Media Action Group, The Women's Resource and Research Centre Newsletter and *Spare Rib* magazine.

Once access was obtained with individual women, a system of 'snowball sampling' was used whereby further contacts were made through personal contacts, networking and grapevines of women who knew women in the right categories. This was the system used by Bertaux in his study of bakery workers:

... we did not choose our interviewees through a random process. Instead we moved from one to the next, following threads of acquaintance relations among the bakers themselves and among bakery workers. We tried to reach representativeness by diversifying our networks ... Despite this seemingly erratic character of our sample, we are now pretty sure of our sociological conclusions about the artisanal bakery.⁶⁵

Bertaux believed that his sample was representative, 'not at the morphological level (at the level of superficial description) but at

the sociological level of socio-structural relations'.⁶⁶ Obtaining access to older and younger lesbians proved difficult, so once contact was made with one or two women through feminist organisations or in response to advertising, a process of 'snowball sampling' was used, again, to obtain introductions to other women in the correct categories.

The sample was concluded when no new substantive concepts or theories were being generated, when the similarities in each interview were more significant than the differences with regard to the subject being studied, when the *patterns* were emerging with predictable repetition. Of course, each individual's life story was, at the same time, utterly unique and fascinating. The criteria used for the categories of selection in this quota sample, and also the use of a 'snowball sampling' method were entirely consistent with the aims of the grounded theory approach and its methods of theoretical sampling.

3. CONTENT ANALYSIS OF 'WOMAN' MAGAZINE

'Analysis of documents' is, with life history interviews and participant observation, the third research method available to the grounded theory approach. In the case of this study, some of the interviewees volunteered personal documents such as letters, diaries or poems. These were interesting in their own right, but added little to the interview data. The document analysis that was regarded as relevant to this study, however, was a content analysis of a popular woman's magazine, intended as part of the discovery and development of theory about internalised attitudes.

It became clear that the women in both the life history and the participant observation samples had indeed internalised negative attitudes about themselves and other women. They indicated that they had picked up these 'ideas' through 'society' and some suggested that it was partly, perhaps significantly, through representations of women in the media (school books, literature, advertising, TV, women's magazines) that they had acquired 'distorted' pictures of themselves and each other and negative self-images. Whilst it was not possible within the scope of this study to find evidence of causal links between specific aspects of the media and the process by which any one individual acquired her attitudes, (a subject for further research), it did seem valuable to look at the available literature on ageism and sexism in the media. Since women's magazines play such a significant part in women's culture, it was decided to conduct a content analysis of a major women's magazine over a limited period to discover exactly what the representations of women were, and what they communicated.

Content analysis is the accepted method of analysing communication content within the social sciences. Ferguson, in her study of women's magazines and the cult of femininity stated that:

'Content' refers to meaning, to what is 'said' in a given unit of communication. As such its analysis implies three general assumptions: that valid inferences can be made between content and intended effect; that the study of manifest content is meaningful to communicator, audience, and analyst - or in Berelson's terms that 'there is a common universe of discourse among the relevant parties'; and that the frequency of occurrence of various content characteristics is in and of itself meaningful.⁶⁷

Content analysis is 'any technique for making inferences by

systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages.⁶⁸

Ferguson used both qualitative and quantitative methods of content analysis and quoted Berelson:

Qualitative analysis focuses on the intentions of a communicator or the effects upon the audience and uses the content as a spring-board to them. Quantitative analysis is more likely to focus first upon the straight description of the content itself, if for no other reasons because of the energy devoted to the counting procedure.⁶⁹

This study too includes a degree of quantitative analysis - of counting. But the main aim here, as with Ferguson, is qualitative analysis:

... concerned less with content *per se* than with content as a mediator or reflector of less manifest, more latent cultural phenomena. Thus, qualitative analysis allows the investigator to investigate more complex themes - such as *goals or values* - which are not easily categorised or readily quantified: the aim was to work with emergent categories of analysis.⁷⁰

Thus, again, in line with the grounded theory approach, and like the other research methods used, the content analysis too was concerned with emergent hypotheses and the generation of theory. For this dissertation a content analysis on the lines described above was carried out over the 6 month period of January to June 1983 of each weekly edition of *Woman* magazine.

VI. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

The sampling procedures were based on the need to study attitudes as well as experience over the individual life course, and to identify changes that might have occurred as a result of a decade of feminist influence. The prerequisite therefore to select on the criterion of 'feminist influence' and 'awareness' women at all stages of the life cycle produced (as might have been anticipated) an unusual and unrepresentative sample from the points of view of social class, race, sexuality and indeed nationality.

AGE

The 46 women interviewed ranged in age between the ages of 15 and 72. It was initially the intention to have rigidly defined age categories and to find women between the ages of, for example, eighteen to twenty, twenty-eight to thirty, thirty-eight to forty and so forth up to age eighty-eight to ninety. This was based on the assumption that the ending of one decade of life and the approach to a new decade would be likely to increase the informant's awareness of age. While this often proved to be true, other factors determining awareness of age were discovered to be more significant and useful in uncovering attitudes. Inclusion in these particular age categories did not in itself prove to be significant to the information being collected and they were abandoned in favour of the criterion of at least two to three women in each decade (i.e. teens, twenties, thirties, etc). In practice there were often more than two, following

Bertaux's saturation principle, and there were in the end the cluster of women between the ages of 35 and 45 and between the ages of 55 and 65.

The data suggested that women at all these ages experienced a similar kind and combination of pressures with regard to age and gender: that age was a factor in determining identity and opportunity at all ages and stages. There were differences in degree of pressure at different ages, and the pressures affected women in different ways at different life stages.

The sample was concluded with women in their seventies because the sampling procedures did not produce women over the age of 72 in the category of 'women influenced by feminism'. Further research on women in this category and age range of 70 to 90 would be required to ascertain whether the same patterns and principles discovered in this sample continued to apply (although there was no indication to suggest that they would not) and what differences might be discovered through older age.

RACE

4 of the 46 women interviewed were black, 3 of Afro-caribbean origin (aged 19, 30 and 35) and one of Arabic origin (aged 43). 7 of the women identified themselves as Jewish: aged 15, 28, 38, 50, 54, 60 and 61. 5 of the 46 women were Irish: aged 18, 38, 38, 38 and 61. The data suggested that there were differences in the experience of age for the black women interviewed, and in their attitudes to age:

specifically that the experience was easier and their attitudes more positive. However, the sample of black women was primarily limited to Afro-Caribbean women, and was also limited in numbers.

The grounded theory principle of theoretical relevance (i.e. extending the sample until new concepts or properties emerged) should have been applied to the sample of black women, sampling over the full life span and from different black cultures (e.g. Asian and African, as well as Afro-caribbean and Arabic). This was beyond the resources of this research project, so differences could only be indicated. Further research would be required to generalise about racial differences in the experience of age and gender.

No significant differences in the experience of ageing of Jewish and Irish women emerged from the data, except for the pressures on them to marry men from the same cultural background. Jewish women might have been expected to have identified with the stereotype of the Jewish mother (a classic age/gender as well as racist stereotype), or for their mothers to have done so. This proved not to be the case. In fact, two of the Jewish women volunteered information which suggested the opposite. One said that her mother did a wonderful job of mothering, but never "looked the part". The other said her mother knew of her Lesbianism and therefore had expressed reservations, in a constructive way, about her proposed marriage.

DISABILITY

One woman was severely disabled (as she defined herself). She

was a wheelchair user and required care and assistance to carry out activities of daily living with regard to mobility. Although there was only one disabled woman in the sample, it is suggested that her experiences may be representative. She found the experience of age and ageing no different from and very similar to her life long experience of disability, suggesting that the negative impact of age on women at all life stages was comparable to having a disability, even a severe disability. However, further generalisations about disabled women's experience of age would have to be based on additional research.

NATIONALITY

The sample was characterised by geographical mobility, both in the immediate generation of women interviewed, and also in the previous parental generation. Only 29 of the 46 women interviewed were born in England and of these, one or both parents of 11 of the women interviewed were born elsewhere and had emigrated to England from Russia or Jamaica or South Africa, but especially from Ireland. Only 18 were born in England of parents born in England (See Table 2).

13 of the women interviewed had been born outside the country and had emigrated to England. Countries of origin included Jamaica, Australia, Canada, Ireland, Scotland, Egypt, Germany and the USA. Some of these had come as political refugees from Hitler's Germany, some had come from 'Commonwealth' countries for economic reasons and some were 'cultural refugees' (from the USA and Australia). 4 of the women interviewed were born and permanently resident in the USA and

were temporarily resident in England at the time of the interviews. The sample was, therefore, extremely 'cosmopolitan' and geographically mobile. It is suggested that this particular kind of mobility may have been a contributing factor in their capacity for self-awareness and therefore in their awareness of gender and age, and would explain why they appeared in the 'influenced by feminism category' from which the sample was selected.

The North American informants (the transient USAers and the immigrant Canadians) appeared to have experienced the pressures of age and gender in cruder and more extreme forms and responded accordingly in concrete and unequivocal ways. They included the 2 women who had used cosmetic surgery to 'improve' their appearance and to maintain their sexual eligibility. Consequently they had a heightened awareness and understanding of age/gender oppression.

There was also a diversity of national and cultural background in the sample and this enabled some tentative cross-cultural comparisons which contributed to the generation of theory about what WOMEN AS WOMEN had in common, as distinct from the racial, social class or national differences. The data in this study suggests that there are common experiences of age/gender oppression which women share, regardless of other differences.

SEXUALITY

The initial sampling procedures produced a number of lesbian women, and while other characteristics of the sample (such as

nationality and social class) seemed to produce more similarities than differences in experience and attitude, the opposite was the case with the lesbian women. When the initial interviews with lesbians started to generate totally new concepts with regard to age and gender, the sample of lesbians was extended until the new concepts were fully explored through the whole age range from teens to seventies. The attitudes and experiences of lesbian women influenced by feminism proved to be quite different from that of heterosexual women. The reasons for this, and the theory on sexuality and heterosexuality which was generated by the data is fully explored and discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. A number of women in this sample were 'sexually mobile', i.e. having moved from heterosexuality to lesbianism.

SOCIAL CLASS

Social class has traditionally been defined for both census and academic purposes by occupational or socio-economic status: by occupation, industry, employment status and whether or not economically active. The Registrar-General uses occupational data to categorise 'socio-economic groups' and 'social classes' (based on levels of occupational skill). The latter are the familiar social classes one to five which refer to 'professional occupations' (social class 1), 'intermediate occupations' (social class 2), skilled occupations (social class 3), partly skilled occupations (social class 4) and 'unskilled occupations' (social class 5).

Academic contributions to social classification systems have included Goldthorpe's combination of the Registrar-General's two

categories of social class and socio-economic status into 7 class categories, and Osborne's composite Social Index of 7 social factors.⁷¹ But in each case, classification has been based either solely or primarily on the occupational status of men - of husbands or heads of households (in the case of married couples, the male). In the Registrar-General's classification 'housewives' are classified (along with the sick, disabled and retired) as 'economically inactive'. Married women are categorised by their husband's occupation.

The failure to account for the social class of women separate from the men they are attached to (husbands and fathers), in relation to their own occupational status, and taking into account their movement in and out and up and down in the labour market, and their unpaid work as wives and mothers has been challenged. Stanworth has exposed the flaws in Goldthorpe's system for its inclusion of women in the category of men.⁷² Delphy has pointed to the fundamental contradictions of using marriage to determine social class position for women: 'no man is classified according to his wife's occupation, even when he himself has no occupation.'⁷³ And even when women do have an occupation of their own, they are nevertheless usually classified by their husband's occupation.⁷⁴

Alternative classifications for women have been proposed. Dale, Gilbert and Arber have developed a scheme which differentiates women's occupations and distinguishes between full and part time work.⁷⁵ But they only classify on the basis of paid employment and exclude the 50%

of 'women who do not work' (ie who work unpaid as wives and mothers).⁷⁶ Roberts is developing a scheme which aims to 'classify women on the basis of the work they do, paid or unpaid, full or part-time.'⁷⁷ This 'City Classification Scheme' also takes into account and distinguishes between 'domestic responsibility' and childrearing, paying attention also to the differences in stages of childrearing as determined by age of youngest child.⁷⁸ This approach reflects what Cunnison has identified as the 'three working lives of women', and the fact that women move in and out of paid employment at different stages of the life cycle.⁷⁹

It was felt that the social classification of the women in this sample had to acknowledge the problems with existing social stratification systems that either render women invisible (economically inactive), subsume women within the category of men (class them according to husband's), or ignore women's unpaid work as wives and mothers and their movement in and out of the labour market, into and out of full time and part-time paid employment over the life course. The 46 women in this study were therefore classified according to six different and mutually exclusive criteria:

- 1) father's occupation
- 2) informant's education
- 3) informant's occupation (including variations at different life stages)
- 4) husband's occupation

5) motherhood

6) self-definition

The results of these different classifications were then compared to identify variations in social classification produced by the different criteria.

1) FATHER'S OCCUPATION

Using the Registrar General's socio-economic classification by occupational status, 18 of the women interviewed would fall into social classes 1 and 2 (professional and intermediate occupations) and 28 into social classes 3 to 5 (skilled, partly skilled and unskilled occupations). For purposes of this study social classes 1 and 2 are referred to as 'middle class' and social classes 3 to 5 as 'working class' (See Table 3). It should be noted that in 6 cases, the occupational status of informants' mothers was below their fathers', indicating marriage as an avenue of upward mobility for some women in the parental generation. In any case, mother's occupation on its own is a misleading indicator of social class as 25 of the interviewee's mothers had stopped work completely on marriage. It was, in some cases, a requirement of their employment, as teachers, for example, that they leave employment on marriage. A further 13 had stopped work completely on the birth of their first child. (See Table 5). As 'housewives' these 38 women (38 of the 46 mothers) would be designated as economically inactive and have no social class categorisation in their own right. They would be categorised by their husband's occupation. It should also be noted that in six cases, the

informants' fathers were themselves occupationally upwardly mobile during the informant's childhood.

CONCLUSION: Based on father's occupation, 18 of the women interviewed were middle class and 28 were working class (Total 46).

2) INFORMANT'S EDUCATION

Table 4 shows the age at which each of the women interviewed left school - what's referred to as the school leaving age. 6 of the women left school at the age of 14 (all of these were women over the age of 60 at the time of interview), 11 at the age of 16 and 6 at the age of 18. One was still at school at the time of the interview.⁸⁰ 23 women (or half the sample) had further or higher education, and 14 women 'returned' to higher education 'later' in their lives. 8 of these were women who had earlier left school by the age of 18 and 8 were women who 'returned' to postgraduate study or professional qualification. (See Table 4) This sample was unusually and unrepresentatively educationally mobile (i.e. in returning to education) and upwardly mobile educationally. This may have contributed to their appearance in the category of 'influenced by feminism' and may also have contributed (because of their experience and awareness of social class differences) to their awareness of age and gender differences.

School leaving age is sometimes used as measure of social class.⁸¹ This sample indicates the problems of using school leaving age in the social classification of women, who because of female socialisation and the sexual division of labour, often move out of

education 'early' and return to education 'later'. 21 of the women interviewed (or nearly half the sample) were upwardly mobile through education from their family of origin (based on father's occupation) and a further 14 (making a total of three-quarters of the sample) were also educationally upwardly mobile as 'returners'.

CONCLUSION: If further and higher education is used to indicate class status, then 31 of the women interviewed were 'middle class' and 14 were 'working class'. Education as a measure of social class provides a different profile than father's occupation (which produced 18 women categorised as 'middle class' and 28 as 'working class').

3) INFORMANT'S OWN OCCUPATION

Using the informant's own occupation as a measure of social class, 28 of the women interviewed came into the occupational social classes 1 and 2 (middle class) and 15 into social classes 3 to 5 (working class), 4 were economically inactive and still at school. (See Table 6). Occupationally 21 of the women were upwardly mobile from their family of origin (father's occupation), largely through the education system. 22 were laterally mobile (ie on the same level of occupational status as their father), 2 were downwardly mobile (ie in lower class occupations than their father). The sample was not representative in this respect: that is, it was much more upwardly mobile than one would expect to find in the general population, where because of the fact that women predominate in low status, low paid work, they would be likelier to be occupationally in a lower social class than their fathers or their brothers. There is generally a close connection between social class status as defined by education

and by occupation, but it is not absolutely reliable with regard to women because some women give up work on marriage. In this sample, three of the women had given up work completely on marriage as compared with 25 of the mothers of the women interviewed, which indicates a significant change between generations in this respect. Where in earlier generations, it was expected that women would leave paid employment on marriage (and indeed there were marriage bars in some occupations), in 1980 a major national survey of women's employment found that marital status had 'no significant effect at all' as to whether women worked.⁹²

CONCLUSION: If informant's own occupation is used as a measure of social class, then the profile of the sample is again very different than if father's occupation is used as a measure, for nearly half the sample (22 women) were occupationally upwardly mobile from their family of origin.

4) MARITAL STATUS AND HUSBAND'S OCCUPATION

It is often said that women 'marry up', that women obtain upward mobility through marriage. This could be said to have been true of only 5 of the women interviewed in this sample, and this was nearly the same as the number of their mothers (6) who had been upwardly mobile through marriage. Thus, where there was an enormous generational difference in women giving up work on marriage and motherhood, there was little difference with regard to 'marrying up'. Of the total of 32 women in this sample, who had married at all, most (24) married men in the same social class as themselves (as defined by own education and occupation), and were therefore what this study

refers to as 'laterally mobile'. The picture is complicated, however, by the fact that 14 of the husbands could be said to have been upwardly mobile during the marriage, as when the man and woman came from a working class background as defined by father's socio-economic status, met and married while students and then were occupationally upwardly mobile during the marriage (See Table 7).

A larger proportion of this sample (14) had never married than one would expect to find in the general population. This was due to the over sampling of lesbians. A very large proportion, 22 of the 32 married women interviewed, had divorced. It is a matter of conjecture as to whether this will have determined the fact that they were found in the category of 'influenced by feminism', or whether the 'influence of feminism' will have determined the fact that they were divorced. But the proportion of divorced women in this sample was reflected in national trends: the number of divorces more than doubled between 1971 and 1986.^{ea} Of the 21 divorced women in this sample, half could be said to have been downwardly mobile as a result of marriage and divorce. This is discussed in Chapter 4. This pattern of downward mobility also occurs when women become mothers.

CONCLUSION: 25 of the women had married men in social classes 1 and 2, 14 of whom had been themselves upwardly mobile during the period of marriage. One of these women had worked to support her husband's Ph.D, thereby assisting his upward mobility at the expense of her own. She was one of the most downwardly mobile of women on divorce at the age of 50. 5 of these women could be said to have been upwardly mobile through marriage. 24 of the women were laterally mobile in marriage, marrying men of the same social class as themselves (based

on own education and occupational status). 6 of the women had married men in social classes 3 to 5. 14 had never married and 22 had divorced.

Overall, this sample could be described as remarkably 'maritally mobile' in ways that probably will have increased their awareness of their 'roles' and position as women in society. Husband's occupation is the standard measure of social status for women. The non-marriage and movement in and out of marriage in this sample would suggest that husband's occupation to be a thoroughly unreliable measure of social class for women. Women's social class status in this sample is more reliably predicted by the woman's own education and occupation than by her husband's when she had one. Indeed, this sample illustrates the problems of categorising women by husband's occupation.

5) MOTHERHOOD

In this sample, by far the most negative influence on women's social class status, whether it was defined by their own educational or occupational status, or by their father's or their husband's socio-economic status, was motherhood. 26 of the women interviewed were mothers. This was proportionally less than would be found in the general population, because of the over-sampling of lesbians, although 7 of the lesbians were also mothers. All of these women were occupationally downwardly mobile on motherhood. (See Table 8) The 1980 national survey of women's employment also showed downward mobility: 'the presence of dependent children, and particularly young children has a major effect on the economic activity of many women.'²⁴ Downward mobility on motherhood is discussed in Chapter 4.

6) SELF-DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL CLASS

Given the many anomalies, ambiguities and the misrepresentation of women in traditional social stratification, it was decided to ask the women interviewed to indicate with which social class they identified themselves. This process of self-definition for social class produced the categories in Table 9. 22 women identified themselves as working class and 22 as middle class (in other words about half of the whole sample in each category). Of the 23 women who identified as working class, at least 12 were themselves currently in middle class occupations in their own right and/or their husbands were in middle class occupations. Their social class identification therefore derived from their family of origin.

While this self identification is related to father's occupational status, it does not appear to be directly because of father's occupation. The self-identification appears to relate to the social class **EXPERIENCE** of childhood and the social class identity 'learned' and internalised in childhood, when it is argued in Chapter 8 of this dissertation that all attitudes and behaviour are internalised: gender identity, age identity, social class identity, racial identity, and so forth. Given that women's employment position is so fluid during the life course, it is not surprising to find that women's identity is not necessarily attached to their occupational status, nor even to husband's

occupational status. Nor is it surprising that women would, whatever their patterns of adult socialisation and their paths of social mobility, continue to identify with the identity they had internalised in childhood. If we take seriously the power of gender - and age - socialisation, then we must take equally seriously the power of social class socialisation. The social class into which a person is socialised in childhood will never be erased by educational or occupational mobility, in spite of cultural pressures exerted on individuals to assume that social class identity is any less effectively or permanently internalised than gender identity, and in spite of the weight of denial and pretense that exists with regard to social class and social mobility.²⁵

Two additional factors emerged in this sample to indicate the significance of childhood social class socialisation. At least 2 of the women interviewed identified their own social class, not with their parents (who had been upwardly mobile from their own childhood social class background), but with their working class grandparents. And 2 of the women interviewed who had been downwardly mobile educationally or through marriage and were categorised as working class by their own or their husband's occupation, still identified themselves as middle class according to their family of origin.

7) CONCLUSIONS

The main characteristic of this sample was its **MOBILITY** - in

every respect. It was geographically mobile, educationally mobile, occupationally mobile and maritally mobile through divorce. (See Table 11). Socially the sample was characterised by working class upward mobility through education and occupation. It was therefore an unusual and unrepresentative sample in terms of the general female population, but it was particularly representative of a population who was and would be expected to be aware of social and sexual divisions in society, precisely because of their own experience of mobility. Because the sample as a whole covered all ages in the life course and stages in the life cycle, it also represented mobility with regard to age. In the case of each individual woman, 'age mobility' could be measured by length of life so far lived. The sample as a whole represented age mobility with respect to life stages for women as a group. It was therefore the sort of sample that would be likely to be effective in generating theory about the effect of age and gender divisions on attitude and behaviour, on opportunity and identity.

None of the various indicators of social class discussed here (ie father's or husband's occupational status, or own education or occupation) appeared to have any direct or significant bearing on women's attitudes to age or ageing. Insofar as it is currently possible to categorise women's social class in any meaningful way, there appeared to be little social class difference with regard to attitudes to age in this sample. But this analysis has suggested that in the absence of the kind of sophisticated system of classification that includes women's part time as well as full time

employment, and their unpaid work as wives and mothers which is being developed at the City University, a meaningful categorisation of women according to social class is not possible, and this might explain the absence of social class differences in attitudes to age. The working class upward mobility of the sample might also have reduced the impact of social class differences in this sample.

In fact, it was precisely the characteristics of women's lives which would form the basis of their social classification - women's part-time employment, marriage and motherhood (women's work as wives and mothers) - which emerged as having a direct connection with attitudes to age and ageing. One significant factor was being IN employment and economically independent of men, rather than what kind or what level of employment. The significant factor was whether women were working and the meaning of work in women's lives (whether they were doing the work they wanted to do) rather than the STATUS of the occupation. Interestingly, the 1980 DOE of D/OPCS survey of women's employment also found that a majority of women had other priorities in evaluating their employment. These included 'convenience of hours' and whether they 'enjoyed' the work. Most said they worked for 'social' as well as financial reasons.²⁶ This is discussed in Chapter 4.

Another significant factor was the downward mobility of motherhood shown in this study to have a similar impact on women whatever their occupational status. It was also access to work rather than occupational status that had a bearing on attitudes to

sexuality and sexual value. The market situation of women therefore had a significant bearing on their attitudes to age and ageing and all life stages.

For married women, age at divorce was also a factor in attitude to age, but this was also directly related to their market situation, for it was women who had become economically dependent during marriage and motherhood, who did not have their own work and economic independence, who were most vulnerable in middle age, when marriage ended and their opportunities in employment were limited. Age at marriage and age at birth of first child were also factors in attitudes to age insofar as they removed women from employment or moved women from full time to part time employment.²⁷ 'Early' marriage and motherhood may have conferred 'adult' status and a 'mature' identity on younger women, but it also handicapped them with regard to paid employment in both the short and the long term. This is discussed in Chapter 4.

The other most significant factor with regard to attitude to age and ageing - in addition to market situation - was sexuality, that lesbians were more positive in their attitudes. But this too was at least partly related to employment and women's position in the labour market. For lesbians were economically independent and not dependent on men economically or emotionally. Age and sexuality is discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6. Race also appeared to be a significant factor with regard to attitudes to age and ageing,



but the sample was not large enough to generalise. The issue of race and age needs to be explored in further research.^{ee}

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER TWO

1. Leigh, S. (1987) pp. 20-23
2. Henderson, J. (1987), p.1
3. IBID.
4. Blumer, H. (1969); Denzin, N. (1978)
5. Blumer, H. op cit. p. 39.
6. Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967)
7. Henderson, J. op cit. p. 4
8. Glaser & Strauss, op cit, p. 6.
9. Henderson, J. op cit.
10. Glaser & Strauss, op cit. p. 3
11. IBID. p. 45. Formal theory is defined as 'that developed for a formal or conceptual area of sociological inquiry, such as stigma, deviant behaviour, formal organisation, socialisation, status congruency, authority and power, reward systems, or social mobility.' (p. 32).
12. Henderson, J. op cit.
13. IBID.
14. Denzin, N.K. (1970), p. 15.
15. Henderson, J. op cit. p.3
16. IBID.
17. Glaser & Strauss, op. cit. p. 40.
18. Henderson, J. op cit.
19. IBID.
20. IBID, p. 13.
21. Wiseman, J. (1974) p. 119.
22. Denzin, N.K. op cit. p. 183
23. Gold, P.L. (1970)
24. The samples in this study were selected on this principle.

25. Neugarten, B.L., (1968); Laventhal, M. et. al., (1975); Shanas, E. et. al. (1968).
26. Johnson, M., (1982) pp. 99-113.
27. Goffman, E., (1959); Becker, H.S., (1963); Stebbins, R.A., (1970); Glaser, B. and Strauss, A.L. (1965).
28. Bertaux, D., op. cit., p. 129.
29. Rosenmayr, L., (1982), p. 40.
30. Ibid, pp. 29-30.
31. Oakley, A., (1981), pp. 30-62; Roberts, H., (1981), pp. 7-30.
32. McGrindle, J. and Rowbotham, S., (1979); Itzin, C. (1980); Hemmings, S., (1985).
33. Gilligan, C., (1982), p. 2.
34. Acker et. al., (1983), p. 431.
35. Thompson, P., op. cit.
36. Kinsey, A.C. et. al. (1948); Plummer, K. (1979); Plummer, K. (1981); Faraday, A. and Plummer, K. (1979); Hite, S., (1976) and (1988).
37. Plummer, K., (1981), p. 19.
38. Ibid, p. 23.
39. Bogdan, R., (1974), p. 4.
40. Faraday, A. and Plummer, K., op. cit., p. 775.
41. Becker, H.S. op. cit.
42. Thompson, P. (1978), p. 108.
43. Brown, G. & Rutter, M. (1966); Boulton, M.G., (1983).
44. Acker, K. et. al. op. cit., p. 426.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid, p. 427.
48. Thompson, P., op. cit., pp. 243-252.
49. Becker, H., op. cit., p. 64.

50. Acker, K. et. al., op. cit., p. 425.
51. Oakley, A., (1981), pp. 36-37.
52. Ibid, p. 41.
53. Ibid, p. 40.
54. Stanley, L. and Wise, S., (1983), p. 48.
55. Roberts, H., (1981), p. 16.
56. Rich, A., (1979), p. 207.
57. Rowbotham, S., (1983), p. 174.
58. Archer, K. et. al., op. cit., p. 432.
59. Gold, P.L. (1970), p. 28.
60. Oakley, A. (1974b), p. 33.
61. Bertaux, D., op. cit., pp. 132-133.
62. Ibid, p. 134.
63. Thomson, P., op. cit., p. 123.
64. Sheehy, G., (1976).
65. Bertaux, D., op. cit., p. 132.
66. Bertaux, D., (1984) p. 37.
67. Ferguson, M. (1983), p. 212.
68. Ibid, p. 213.
69. Berelson, B., (1952), p. 122.
70. Ferguson, M., op. cit.
71. Osborn, A. (1987), p. 429.
72. Stanworth, M. (1984) p. 159.
73. Delphy, C. (1984) p. 37
74. IBID.
75. Dale, A et al (1985). pp 384 -409

76. Delphy, C. op cit. p. 30. Delphy refers to the 50% of women in 'modern Western societies' who are economically inactive. In the UK, the figure is 35% (cf. Martin, J. and Roberts, C. 1984, p. 10).
77. Roberts, H. (1987) p. 41
78. IBID, p. 43.
79. Cunnison, S. (1987), p. 138.
80. All totals in subsequent categories are based on 45 informants, excluding the one who was still at school, who had therefore not reached further or higher education, or an occupation or marriage or motherhood.
81. The University of Essex/ESRC Families and Social Mobility 3 generational study based on a random national sample used school leaving age as one criterion of social mobility.
82. Martin, J. and Roberts, C. (1984), p. 15.
83. HMSO (1988), p. 6.
84. Martin, . and Roberts, C. op. cit. p. 13.
85. Informants in the University of Essex/ESRC Families & Social Mobility study were asked about their perceptions of social class and many said they thought class divisions no longer existed, although historically this is a period of ever more pronounced social class divisions.
86. Martin, J. and Roberts, C. op. cit. pp. 77-78.
87. IBID, pp. 13-15.
88. There is now some literature on race and old age: Norman, A. (1985); Glendenning, F (1979).

PART TWO - INTERNALISED OPPRESSION

CHAPTER THREE

THE FEMALE CHRONOLOGY:

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

I. DOUBLE STANDARDS IN ATTITUDES TO AGE

Ruth Jacobs refers to the 'double standard of ageing' where 'men stay young and women grow old and where 'being an older woman in a youth oriented, male-dominated society can be a debilitating experience.' Susan Sontag also describes this 'double standard of ageing' as 'less profoundly wounding for men', allowing men 'to age without penalty in several ways that women are not' and "denouncing women with special severity".² Members of the North London Older Women's Group described the double standards as they saw them:

Helen: What I find very hard to understand is that a man of 50 or (44) 60 going grey or white, in a work role or any other, is valued for his maturity, his experience, his ability, his wisdom, the grey in his hair, the lines on his face. A woman is regarded at 50 or over, even in working situations, as - about time she gave up, isn't it? A bit past it, or she's over the hill. I cannot understand why when you reach 50 and over, a man is seen as mature and experienced, seen positively, and a woman is seen negatively.

Kath: The qualities that men are supposed to be valued for, don't (43) diminish, at least not 'til a much later age. When they're 60. I mean, qualities of intellect, rationality, which men are supposed to have. The qualities that women are valued for - end very early on in life. That's why we're looked on so very differently.

Helen: The qualities men are valued for are enhanced by having a look (44) of experience. Until his mid-50s his lines enhance his look of being able to cope and be active and intelligent. A woman is really valued more for her juvenile seductiveness and that is harmed by having lines. Lines show intelligence and experience. They are not childish or infantile. Lines show experience and life being lived and those are not the qualities which women have been valued for.

Carla: A man in his fifties is in his prime, but a woman of 45 (50) upwards, well she's had it. I meet it every day not only in marriage and love and sex, but work as well.

These 'older women' felt particularly vulnerable with regard to their sexuality.

Alison: Because men often think that older women are no longer sexual (60) or sexually attractive or sexually viable, we are quite anonymous to them. They don't see us in a sense. Quite often as an older woman, I'm put just beyond the pale.

Adams and Laurikietis describe how the double standards operate against women:

Many of the trials surrounding *growing older* are ones that women feel more than men. Women are actually ashamed of growing older before they're anywhere near old age. Once they've reached their mid twenties, women are generally reluctant to reveal how old they are ... Growing older for the vast majority of women purely and simply means becoming less attractive. Ageing in a woman is seen as making her not only unattractive but repulsive and almost obscene to the world. Sexually women are considered less desirable, which is reflected in their chances of marrying or remarrying after they are forty ... Fame, money, power - all make a man more sexually attractive, and these often increase with age. But they don't make a woman more attractive. What she has to do is to keep young.³

Sontag also cited physical beauty as counting much more in a woman's life and 'being identified, as it is for women with youthfulness,' not standing up to age. She suggested that:

The double standard about ageing shows up most brutally in the conventions of sexual feeling, which presupposes a disparity between men and women that operates permanently to women's disadvantage ... Women become sexually ineligible much earlier than men do ... Thus, for most women, ageing means a humiliating process of gradual sexual disqualification.⁴

The double standard whereby 'middle-age men fare ... better than women as far as sexual opportunity is concerned ... allowed to seek out companions considerably younger than themselves - a prerogative not granted women' has also been noted by social gerontologists.⁵

This double standard with regard to age and sexuality is illustrated by an advertisement which appeared in a women's magazine in 1983.⁶ A middle aged man (greying hair, lined face) is speaking in the foreground to a much younger woman while a woman of a similar age to him watches from the background with a worried look on her face. The caption on the picture reads: 'Nobody minds if your husband looks his age.' Between the lines is the message: '... least of all the younger woman who flirts with him and competes for his attention.' The text then continues: 'Men are lucky. They needn't look young to still be attractive. They often get better looking over the years. Unfortunately, the same can't be said for us women. From the first moment a tiny line appears, we need to take extra care of our skins.' The advertisement was supposedly selling moisturising cream to women. In fact, it was advertising the threatened loss of women's sexual viability in middle age. It was advertising fear of ageing and appearance anxiety. It was also communicating that women are a threat to each other in their competition for men, younger women posing a special threat to older women. Its message was a very bald statement that men increase - or at least maintain - their 'sexual value' as they age from middle age, and that women decrease in 'sexual value' as they get older.

The message that women are 'past it' sexually as they age is also communicated in that genre of crudely ageist and sexist birthday card. For example: 'To a great gal, enjoy your birthday and don't worry about getting older. A woman is like a bustline ... not interesting until she gets past 34.' Or: 'Another birthday? Think of

it this way ... You're not ageing ... you're ripening.' Or: 'Don't worry about having another birthday. You're still in the prime of life ... it just takes longer to get primed than it used to.' And: 'Why worry! Having grey hair is normal at your age ... as long as it's just on your head.' The messages are entirely concerned with women's sexuality - sexual vitality, sexual viability, sexual attractiveness and sexual availability - with the strongest possible warning that with age (age unspecified), women will be 'past it' sexually. The idea of sexuality and sexual activity in 'older women' (age unspecified) is presented as ridiculous, and indeed the images on these cards invariably involve the sexual objectification of women, as 'sluts' or 'slags' or 'old bags'.

The double standards are usually associated, as we have seen in these examples, with middle age, with 'older women' and with sexuality. But it is not simply a matter of being regarded as 'past it' sexually, nor is being regarded as 'past it' simply a problem for women over 40. The same kind of double standards operate later in life. The messages communicated in these representations of women - of mid life rejection, redundancy and sexual disqualification - are true for old women as well as women growing older. Research on 'elderly people' has demonstrated the disadvantage they experience: what a significant proportion of the population they constitute,⁷ the size of the problems they experience,⁸ the poverty,⁹ the neglect in health and social services provision,¹⁰ and also the negative attitudes (disgust, pity, contempt, fear) associated with old age generally, and old women in particular.¹¹ Yet even in the context of

the overall disadvantage and denigration of old people, double standards still operate. Elderly women outnumber elderly men, and are likely to be even more neglected and negatively stereotyped. The object of greatest ridicule, contempt, callousness and/or patronisation is likely to be the 'little old lady,' the 'old dear', or again the 'old bag'.

Not only do double standards operate in mid-life and later life, they also operate earlier in life, particularly with regard to marriage. Thus a woman entering marriage at the age of 28 is described as 'no spring chicken' when the man she is marrying is 45 and not regarded as at all 'past it', indeed as in the prime of his life. There is a sense of shock, of shame, disgust, transgression when an 'older woman' marries a 'younger man' - the greater the age gap, the greater the taboo. At the same time men have license to marry women very much younger than themselves - 10, 15, even 20 or more years younger. This is common, very much condoned and quite a signification of male virility. This double standard in attitudes to age differences in relationships applies whatever the age of the woman, so long as she is older than the man.

All of the women who participated in the life history interviews were asked if they had ever been particularly aware of age at any time in their life. Everyone - regardless of their age - had been, and gave specific instances. Many referred to age bars which restricted their access to cinemas, pubs and clubs during their teens. One referred to having been below the legal age of sexual consent when she

first had sex, another to having to wait for the legal age before she could marry. Elaine (24) described the difference between her chronological age and the 'age she feels', the sense of things she 'ought' to be doing which were related to her age. The pressures and the anxieties were apparently related to attitudes and expectations rather than actual age, for women felt the same anxieties about the same things at all ages. There was the generalised fear of death at any age, and a fear of disability, dependency and loneliness in old age. But the specific fear was of being 'past it'. 'It' could mean almost anything: marriage, motherhood, appearance, relationships and work as well as sexual attractiveness and sexual activity. And the age at which 'it' occurred could be almost any age.

Thus, Elaine, at 24, felt at risk of being 'past it' with regard to marriage:

Elaine (24) As far as marriage is concerned there is a lot of pressure - about being left on the shelf. Someone at work said that about me last week - a man had come in and some women said 'Isn't he nice' etc., but I had just carried on with my work. Then someone said, sort of pitying, 'Well, don't worry, you won't get left on the shelf'. Possibly they presumed that underneath I was thinking 'Why didn't he fancy me?'

Valerie at 38 had felt 'past it' on several occasions with regard to motherhood:

Valerie (38) When I was in hospital having my son, when I was 32, and someone said, 'Gosh d'you know how old she is - I thought she was only 19'. And I thought, well I don't look as old as I am, and also, I'm getting on a bit to have a baby. Those mixed feelings are still there, and are symptomatic of all I feel about age, i.e. there's a voice inside me that says 'Yes, it's good to look young, not your age'.

But she'd been aware of pressures in connection with age and motherhood in her twenties as well as her thirties:

Valerie (38) When I was 27, was the first time I thought seriously about having a child. And I wasn't in a stable sexual relationship, and I thought, I'm getting old, I'd better make up my mind what I'm going to do. And I decided that if by 30 I hadn't found someone with whom I wanted to share a child, I would get pregnant and have one myself. Because 30 was a marker. In fact, by 30, I was in a stable relationship with a man, and 30 came and went and I wasn't too bothered - because I felt we would have children together at some point in the not too distant future.

Julie, at 45 was under pressure to feel 'past it' with regard to employment:

Julie (45) I find myself becoming quite consciously oppressed by ageist attitudes around me, and I have to remind myself that I'm still a young woman. When I'm in my proper calm state of mind, I think, I've still got my life ahead of me - I haven't missed out on anything, I had the kids early, and I'd ~~make~~ *make the same choices again* - so I could still think in terms of being a doctor - 7 years - nothing! And that is how it should be and how I want to keep being. But every now and then I get beaten back into feeling - hopeless. I reckon I have a good 20 years of working life, but when I look at the real possibility, like what new directions are available to women - like when you look in the newspaper at the ads, I feel immediately excluded - because of my age. A lot specify age - 25-35 yrs, for 'women's jobs'. Not being trained for anything else, the jobs I have to look for are administrative and service or community jobs

And **Martha**, at 59, feared she was 'past it' in terms of sexual attractiveness to men:

Martha (59) I've always been very conscious of ageing - from about 45, I separated in my 40s and had almost a second adolescence by going out with a lot of people, men, and having a much better sex life than when I was married. But after 50, up to now, I'm 59, I've been terribly conscious of it. It is most difficult not to act as though I am younger than I am - because I might look at a young man and think, nice - but really, nice for my daughters only. I see my flesh ageing. I'd like to go without tights, but my legs are not young any more and I've got varicose veins. I shouldn't feel like this, but I do. Because to me 59 is old, unfortunately.

The data in this study suggests that women of all ages and all life stages feel 'past it' - not just sexually, but with regard to marriage, to motherhood and to paid employment. Women can feel 'past it' sexually at 18, and 28 as much as 48 or 58 or 'past it' with regard to marriage or employment at 28 as well as 48. Double standards, disadvantage, denigration and discrimination with regard to age relate not just to older women and old women, but to all women. Members of the Older Women's Group had developed an awareness of the extent to which age and gender had been inextricably linked in their lives at all ages. "I can no longer see sexism as separate than ageism," said Alison (60).

Valerie (38) described the feelings of being 'past it' as 'mixed and ambivalent'. She had internalised the belief that she should have children before the age of 30 or it would be 'too late', but equally '30 came and went for me and in the event had no bearing on whether I had a child then or not'. It was before she reached that marker that she felt anxious. And indeed she had gone on to have two children in her mid-30's, and could have gone on to have two more at the age of 40 or beyond as many women do. There was thus a discrepancy between her feelings, the internalised attitudes, and what was actually possible. Valerie was aware of the limitations that would have been imposed on her life had she acted on her feelings of being 'too old' to have children when in fact she wasn't. She wouldn't have had them. But she was also aware that as she got older, her physical stamina had diminished (another 'reality') and that she might therefore prefer not

to have a child beyond the age of 40. 'Feeling past it', she said, 'probably contains a small germ of truth inside a larger lie.'

When Julie (45) talked about feeling 'past it at 45 with regard to employment, she made a distinction between a) the structural barriers to her employment which resulted from age and sex discrimination in the labour market; b) the attitudes and feelings held about her and which she held about herself with regard to age and c) her actual abilities - what she called 'reality'. She was aware of the immense discrepancy between her abilities (which were actually greater at 45 than 25) and her limited opportunities for employment - which was another 'reality'. There was a similar discrepancy between 'reality' and feelings described by Martha (59) with regard to women's sexuality. Far from being past it sexually as they grow older, 'physically women retain their capacity to enjoy sex far more satisfactorily than men.'² Although these women were still economically and sexually viable - if they had the opportunity - the opportunities were limited and they had all to some extent also succumbed to the power of the stereotypes to influence their identity. They had internalised at least some of the stereotyped views and negative attitudes and expectations about themselves, whether it was with regard to sexuality, or marriage or motherhood or work.

II. The Male and the Female Chronology

Women's experience of age and ageing appears to be sufficiently different from and less favourable than men's to suggest the need to reconceptualize the lifespan in gendered terms, to reconceptualize gender with generation, to identify a *male chronology* and a *female chronology*. Bernard has identified two marriages: his and hers.¹³ Oakley has identified two families: his and hers.¹⁴ Likewise, there are arguably two life cycles, his and hers.

Where male chronology is primarily pivoted on employment (labour), the female chronology is hinged on marriage and motherhood (domestic labour) in ways in which both age and gender are factors. This would explain why it is that women, but not men, tend to define their age status in terms of timing of events within the family cycle and why it is that men perceive a close relationship between life-line and career-line.¹⁵ A man's life is largely defined by and takes its meaning and value from his work, and his life develops through stages marked by progression in employment from leaving education until retirement: from 15 to 65. This seems to be true whether or not he marries or has children.

There are obvious social class differences, including the age at which a man finishes education and enters employment, how high up the income hierarchy he can rise and whether he is made redundant or becomes unemployed. The model for middle class males is considerably more incremental than for working class males, as middle class males are likelier to be valued for intellectual abilities (which diminish

very little with age) and working class males are likelier to be valued for physical or manual abilities (which decrease more noticeably with age, although less dramatically than the stereotypes of ageing often suggest). The pattern of male employment is also affected by economic factors, and in times of recession or depression middle class males who otherwise could expect to develop their careers incrementally can find themselves prematurely redundant or retired. Given the extent to which male identity and value are defined by work, unemployment is a major disruption in the life of a man: often the cause of an 'identity crisis' of the sort that is more 'typical' of women's lives. Thus within employment, the power and value of middle class males usually increase over the period of a working life, often with age/wage structures which provide increases in earnings and status. The power and value of working class males may increase to middle age and is then likelier to be maintained until retirement. Within this male chronology the social power and value of males usually only decrease in the absence of paid employment.

The female chronology follows a different pattern. Most conceptualisations of the life cycle of women have been in terms of childrearing:

A woman's life was divided into premenarchical years, child-bearing years, and postmenopausal years.¹⁶

Or in terms of marriage and motherhood, in the five adult stages delineated

... the stage of becoming a wife and housewife, becoming a mother, a full-horse plateau with increasing community

involvement, shrinking circle stage when children leave home and gradual disengagement.¹⁷

Or in terms of sexuality: of sexual availability, sexual activity, sexual usefulness:

'... a woman was a maid, that is, a virgin, or she was not, for sociologically if not biologically, the sexual initiation of a woman marked one of the most significant transitions of all for her. And even this criterion for demarcating stages was indirectly related to childbearing.'¹⁸

In this sense, a woman's life is measured from menarche to menopause. Insofar as it is defined by and supposed to take its meaning from marriage and motherhood, it will be valued according to sexual attractiveness, sexual availability and sexual usefulness: the reproductive years which end with the menopause and the stage at which children leave home (in both cases on average at age 49). This appears to be true whether or not a woman is in paid employment or has a career or whether she is working class or middle class. This data suggests that women perceive their value and power decreasing beyond the reproductive and child-rearing years.

Statistics from the New Earnings Survey 1987 show the different patterns of the male and the female chronology reflected in the average weekly earnings of male and female manual and non-manual workers over the lifetime:

Almost immediately young men begin to earn more than young women. Women manual workers reach their maximum earnings in the 25-30 age band, and the earnings of older women decrease slightly. Male manual workers' earnings increase more sharply with age than do women's and do not reach a maximum until their mid-forties. For non-manual workers the

increase in earnings with age is greater for both men and women and a wider earnings gap opens up. Average earnings peak later for non-manual workers, in the 35-40 age band for women and around the age of 45 for men.^{18a}

Thus, women's perceptions of their social value over their life course can be seen to be based in their relatively lower economic value in the labour market. These earnings profiles also indicate the social class differences in the male chronology described above.

The female chronology thus defined ignores the 25 years of productive working life that is possible after child-bearing and rearing. It ignores the fact that a majority of women with children (76% with children age 11-15, 64% with children 5 - 10, and 27% with children under 5) are in fact in paid employment.¹⁹ And it ignores the fact that from the age of 40 women's life expectancy is about another 40 years. But however much they do work, however much they may need to work, or want to work, women generally are not defined in relation to their employment, identified with it or valued for it. They are more likely to be defined and identified instead in terms of their sexuality, or their work as wives and mothers or even their husband's employment. Cunnison describes the effects of this 'fractured identity' on women's lives:

The meaning or sense of identity which attaches to women's working lives is fractured and contradictory. It is located in three basic areas: in the family, and in their own and their husbands' paid employment... A married woman often has two employment identities: a direct one of her own and a vicarious one deriving from her man. Because men are the major source of income, her vicarious employment identity is often more closely linked to the family identity than is her own employment identity. Her three identities are not alternatives, but exist in uneasy cohabitation.²⁰

Being this defined primarily in relation to sex and reproduction, women's value would tend to decrease when they 'retire' from reproduction (at menopause) and become 'redundant' from child rearing (in middle age).

In summary, women's social and sexual value appears to be lower than men's throughout the life cycle, with an even greater discrepancy between women and men as they age. Some men increase in value economically and sexually and most men at least maintain their value economically and sexually. Women generally tend to decrease in value sexually whatever their value economically. Women are marginalised in the labour market throughout life and they are marginalised sexually later in life. Sontag suggests that even women who manage to maintain their value in the labour market, do not maintain their sexual value: 'her achievements, if she has a career, are no asset. The calendar is the final arbiter.' At the same time, men who become economically disqualified, do not seem at the same time to become sexually disqualified.

In the context of the female chronology, thus constructed, women would 'inevitably' feel 'past it' sexually as they age. And if their identity and value were defined by their success in complying with the female chronology, women would inevitably feel anxious or 'past it' at all ages if they were not conforming to it. Betsy (28) described as a myth the belief that 'men age gracefully and are said to be distinguished, whereas women become less attractive'. The real issue, she thought, was power.

Betsy Men gain more power, personal power, whereas women's power
 (28) seems to diminish when their children grow up - they're not mothers any more. Mothers have power, they raise the children, so when a woman is still in her childbearing years or her children are still at home - when she still is the mother she is quite powerful. But once that time in her life is over - unless she has forgone the childrearing and developed a career, unless she has let that part of her life go and gone on to other things - there's not much. A lot of women go through a big crisis at that time in her life. So by 45-50 the men would just be getting to a point in their lives where if they are going to have succeeded, they will be well on their way or up there, in their work - which is where their power comes from. So while their life is going up, a woman's life is going down.

The devaluation of women as they age would therefore seem to have less to do with appearance than with the actual material circumstances of women's lives: the sexual division of labour, in their short-term value as mothers (or with the potential to be mothers) and their relative valuelessness in the labour market. In *this* sense, men as they get older would increase in value, while women as they get older would decrease in value. Value in capitalist society is not an abstract or aesthetic quality: it is measured by money and power, to which men of all ages have greater access than women.

Jane A man of 50 is probably still very attractive to his secretary,
 (23) but a woman of 50 probably hasn't got a secretary.

III. AGE/SEX STEREOTYPED REPRESENTATIONS AND THE SOCIALIZATION OF WOMEN

Julie (45) believed that the stereotypes of women as wives and mothers, and as sexually objectified contributed to creating and maintaining her exclusion from employment. Members of the Older Women's Group had also become conscious of the part played by stereotyped representations of women in influencing their attitudes (identity) and behaviour (opportunity):²¹ in constructing and maintaining the female chronology and their compliance with it. They saw the double standards in attitudes to age reflected in representations of women, and had become aware of the extent to which gender stereotypes were also always age stereotyped.

Sexual objectification and sex stereotyping of women in the media is well documented. In a survey of 16 national newspapers conducted in 1983 the Trades Union Congress found:

53 pictures showing women in glamour poses emphasising female sexuality. There were 58 news and feature stories which portrayed women in terms of their sexuality, appearance and domestic relations, concentrating on women as housewives, prostitutes, rape victims or divorcees. There were 17 overtly sexist cartoons providing images of women which were denigrating and degrading e.g. nagging mothers-in-law, simple minded housewives, 'silly blondes', or women as sex objects with no other role or function in society. There were seven advertisements which portrayed women in traditional domestic roles, or taking a 'back seat' to the men in their lives, whether husbands, sons or colleagues.²²

Only 47 stories portrayed women as workers and professionals with a contribution to make to society.

The TUC survey identified certain key sex-role stereotypes: women as the sex symbols of a consumer society (in advertisements and in the emulation of pop and film stars), 'women whose only concerns are the welfare and needs of their immediate families', and a systematic concentration on 'appearance, sexuality and domestic relations'. A similar pattern of sex-role stereotyping was documented by the Women's Media Action Group (WMAG) when they monitored the media over the years from 1981 to 1983 and found eleven categories of gratuitous sexualising and sex-objectification.²³

An Equal Opportunities Commission survey of sexism and advertising produced an armoury of statistics on the sex-role stereotyped portrayal of women in advertisements and concluded that in TV commercials women are 'predominantly portrayed in the traditional roles of housewife and mother, as being essentially dependent or in need of men's protection or, of course, simply as sexual objects.'²⁴

In a content analysis of the three best selling women's magazines (*Woman*, *Woman's Own* and *Woman's Weekly*), covering the years 1949-1974 and 1979-1980, Marjorie Ferguson identified the major themes, roles, values and goals represented to women. Well over half of the themes were concerned with getting and keeping a man and maintaining a happy family (67%). Just under half (46%) of the roles represented for women were that of wife and mother - or women trying to get married (the would-be wives). Only 3% of themes concerned 'working wives' and only 7% 'women with careers'. Only 12% of the content held out achievement in society as a goal for women.²⁵

Women's magazines are full of advertisements with headlines like: 'Look ten years younger'; 'Free yourself of ugly stretch marks from pregnancy, dieting, exercise, even ageing'; 'Ashamed of your appearance? Worried about wrinkles and lines? Worried by thinning hair? Lines around the mouth?'; 'How to look younger longer'; 'Do some parts of your body look older than the rest?' The message of these advertisements is: buy this or that product, do this and do that in order to 'stay young and beautiful'. The hidden agenda in these sex stereotypes is that the women represented are always young. Older women are largely invisible, and almost wholly categorized by exclusion in relation to romance, sex and leisure.

A content analysis of *Woman* magazine carried out as part of this research over a six month period for January to June 1983 revealed a heavy emphasis on age as well as gender. There was only one issue that did not make major reference to 'women and age' in some way; many issues had one or more feature articles. In addition, there were letters in almost every issue about age and attitudes to ageing, plus 'agony column' letters. There was also a close connection between the advertising and editorial content. There was for example, a feature described as a 'Health Exclusive' and headlined in what sounded like a positive tone, 'The Good News about Growing Old'. But the beginning of the article cunningly conjured up just the stereotypes it sought to banish:

You thought growing old meant getting wrinkled, waving goodbye to your bikini, watching your body - and maybe your mind - go slowly, sadly out of control? Well, now for the good news: the latest research reveals that this picture of ageing is totally wrong - if you really want it to be. Now

none of us have to give in gracefully to growing older - and we can all cheat the ageing trap.

The article was premised on precisely the fear that stereotypes always stimulate: if women were not terrified of the 'trap' they would not really 'want to cheat it'. They would not need the exhortation to 'stay young and beautiful' which is implied in the text.

The audience for women's magazines is enormous. At the time this research was carried out, they were read by 16 million women every week in the UK (1981 statistics).²⁶ Forty-nine per cent of the female population read a women's weekly and 45% a women's monthly in 1981.

The messages directly reach a female audience of millions and:

... to the extent that their female readers accept their messages, the influence of those messages can be multiplied many times through a mother's influence on her children, a wife's influence on her husband, a lover's influence on her partner, and women's influence on one another.²⁷

'Even if you don't buy them,' said Helen (44), 'you know what's in them. You've seen it. You know what it is exactly you must strive to achieve, but never measure up to.'

Ferguson described the content of women's magazines as representing the 'cult of femininity,' with its connotations of 'naturalness' and implications of 'passivity'. This is now more frequently defined as the very 'active' social construction of femininity. According to Ferguson, 'the fact that women's magazines exist at all makes a statement about the position of women in

society': about the position of women as subordinate. Women's magazines teach women 'what to think and what to do about themselves' and their relationships. The lesson is in passivity and submission to men who are portrayed as 'dominant, active and authoritative'.²⁸

Women's magazines are based on the assumption that:

... a female sex which is at best unconfident, and at worse incompetent, "needs" or "wants" to be instructed, rehearsed or brought up to date on the arts and skills of femininity, while a more powerful and confident male sex already "knows" everything there is to know about the business of being masculine.²⁹

Ferguson concluded that women's magazines act as 'agents of socialisation': 'with implications for how the gender characteristic of females are acquired, and how the position of women in society is determined.'³⁰ Goffman also analysed gender advertisements as representing 'male dominance' and 'female subordination'.

... affirming the place that persons of the female sex-class have in the social structure, in other words, holding them to it ... an alignment which does not merely express subordination, but in part constitutes it.³¹

Goffman sees advertisements not as a 'natural expression', but as artifice, a construction communicating stereotyped information about 'masculinity and femininity':

Because these stereotypes begin to be applied by and to the individual from the earliest years, the accounting it affords is rather well implanted.³²

Janice Winship, in an analysis of the same women's magazines for the Open University's 'The Changing Experience of Women' course, also

recognized the influence of the magazines in 'moulding women's experiences'. According to Winship:

... women's magazines provide what can be described as "mirror images" for women, i.e. public images of femininity against which women measure themselves, men judge women, and which are, therefore, formative in actually shaping women's experiences.³³

The important new perception is that they also inform women of **WHEN** they are useful, at what ages. There are two agendas, a double message: one of sex stereotyping and control of sexuality, the other of age stereotyping and age control. According to Goffman, 'Gender, in close connection with age-grades, more than class or other social divisions, lays down an understanding of what our ultimate nature ought to be and how and where this nature ought to be exhibited.'³⁴ Members of the Older Women's Group had concluded that age stereotypes and sex stereotypes operated together in constructing the identity and opportunity of women as subordinate. This study will examine the extent to which women comply with the age/gender constructions, and the extent to which they have resisted, particularly under the influence of feminism.

IV. CHILDHOOD AGE AND GENDER SOCIALISATION

Members of the Older Women's Groups were aware not only of having been conditioned for the female chronology by age/sex stereotyped representations, but also the part played in the conditioning of their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour by childhood socialisation. They described themselves as having been 'conditioned', their lives manipulated and controlled by forces outside themselves. They saw themselves as having been subjected to a process of systematic conditioning from conception onwards, a process of socialisation of them as females into the attitudes and behaviours of femininity, the construction of an 'identity' (self-image and expectations) to mould them to fit in with the opportunities that would be available to them as women.

'Systematic conditioning is required to produce individuals who consent to a role for which they have been destined before birth'.³⁵

The 'scripts' had been written before they were born. Conditioning in femininity for the female chronology was apparent in the accounts of early childhood provided in the open-ended interviews of the life history sample.

There has, historically, been a preference for the birth of boys.³⁶ The increased value placed on boys has been explained in part by their economic contribution to family life, and the fact that they have not incurred costs when leaving home (wedding expenses or dowry). But the preference for boys has existed - and still does - outside the circumstances of poverty that might have determined it, and even that

rationale has totally overlooked the economic contribution made by girls (and women too, of course) in housework and childcare within the family.²⁷ A number of the women interviewed were aware that at least one of their parents would have preferred them to be a boy when they were born.

Julie (45) Dad had wanted a son - and I became his 'little duck', i.e. asexual little pal.

Miriam (38) Mum wanted male children because she admired and got on better with men, thought them cleverer. Even after having one son, she wanted another but she had me, a girl then.

Miriam described being dressed in a particularly 'unfeminine' manner, because of her mother's preference for boys. Most of the women, however, described the expectations they faced to look and behave like a 'proper little girl', so they would grow up to be 'a lady'. But parental attitudes towards female children were at the best of times often ambivalent and contradictory.

Ros, (48), said: 'My mother dressed me in frilly dresses, but I did not think of myself as a female child'. Her family was poor, so she went barefoot, 'not noticing the dresses'. She liked playing outdoors with the boys whom she could 'outrun', and she was called a tomboy. She received mixed messages from her parents;

Ros (48) My parents hoped I would be a 'lady' - i.e. doing good and being good at all times - that was my mother's view. But it was contradictory, because at one time she really enjoyed the fact that I was a wild kid.

'Being good' was a theme that ran through the childhood stories of most of the women:

Debbie (40) My own mother's love was conditional on me being a good girl. I don't think she really ever understood who I was or what made me tick. Her ideal of a good girl was someone who helped mummy. I remember at about 6 her saying I used to be such a good girl because I would do the housework - but now I wasn't any more - because I had other things to do. It was a mixed message, but she had a very strong idea of what a girl should be.

Debbie's mother also had rigid expectations with respect to gender appropriate dress:

Debbie (40) I remember I used to play with the girl next door and we dressed up in shorts. But my mother forbade me to wear them. She once caught me in the garden with them on. I never understood what it was that I'd done wrong, except I knew I'd done something very, very wicked - because her face was completely furious - she *told me to take them off, and it was never talked about*. This was how she always controlled me - withdrew her love.

Debbie learned that it was 'wrong' not to be a feminine female. She also learned the necessity of 'pleasing' her parents rather than herself. And it was as early as the age of 6, that she was rewarded (validated) for being a 'good little housewife' and 'punished' (criticised/love withdrawn) for being 'independent'.

Eve (72) described learning to be 'ladylike' as a little girl:

Eve (72) We always had to be very quiet as girls. We had to be dressed up, our hair always had to be washed and combed and plaited. There was always a lot of bother about looking nice, putting your feet in the right position, looking pretty, and smiling, not looking sad. The image of a pretty little girl, it was important to convey that.

Eve was under 5 at this time. Liz (30) demonstrated how the messages not only get internalised, but handed on to the next generation. She had a baby - a boy - at the age of 17, as an unmarried mother, and she said:

Liz (30) I didn't want a girl because of the type of life I saw myself having - there wasn't any room to be nice to a little girl, and dress her up pretty and stuff like that. I wanted a little boy that I could tug along with me wherever I was going. If I had a little girl I'd be out of pocket buying nice clothes for her, whereas a little boy - just jeans and teeshirts and sweatshirts - that fits in with me - I haven't got time to press little girls dresses etc. But I have nothing against little girls, I like them. But I would treat them differently in respect of clothes.

Frances (39) experienced another aspect of being a 'good little girl', in the expectation that she would, as the eldest daughter, take on the role of 'little mother' to subsequent children. This started at the age of three:

Francis (39) I know I changed my sister's nappies when I was three - I mean, I was hardly out of them myself. I was out of them quite early because part of being good was that I was clean very early.

Being 'mother's little helper' involved a lot of work:

Frances (39) ... really heavy work - housekeeping. Cooking I liked - I was a better cook than my mother so I liked that ... A lot of shopping for my mother and other responsibilities too.

It was different for the boys in her family. They never did anything to help with the housework.

The experience of female socialisation volunteered by these women was entirely consistent with research on the gender-differentiated treatment of children, and its effects on their attitudes and behaviour. Hartley for example has shown how children are in the first five years, 'manipulated and moulded', ('fussing with a baby girl's hair and clothes and telling her how pretty she is'), directed to gender-appropriate objects and activities (the girls' toys - dolls, prams and tea-sets, and the boys' toys - cars, trains and chemistry sets), communicated with in gendered language and tones of voice ('how sweet', 'what a rascal', 'good girl', 'naughty boy') and required to rehearse the 'roles' they would fill as adults (housework for girls, outdoor - if any - work for boys).³⁸ Research has also shown sex-stereotyping in children's books:

These transparent messages, complete with brightly coloured illustrations, clearly lay out children's separate roles. Thus the sex roles are divided very effectively in these and similar primers. They discriminate between the sexes and present a basic grounding in those attitudes and that behaviour from which women are now struggling to escape.³⁹

The attitudes and behaviour observed by children in their books are then translated into actual and active sex-differentiated behaviour by children long before adulthood.⁴⁰

Part of the conditioning is *what* is learned: the content of the message. This includes the attributes associated with women - the positive ('affectionate, appreciative, attractive, charming, gentle') and the negative ('affected, complaining, fickle, frivolous, fussy, nagging, prudish, rattle-brained, weak and whining'): and the

attributes associated with men - the positive ('adventurous, ambitious, confident, courageous, enterprising, independent, logical, rational, realistic, stable') and the negative ('boastful, coarse, daring, disorderly, loud').⁴¹ These were identified by university students who were asked 'to indicate which adjectives from a list of 300 were typically associated with either men or women'.⁴² They represent the standard gender stereotypes with which children are conditioned by the positive or negative response of adults.⁴³

Part of the conditioning is not just the attributes, but the values attached to them. Not only are the more positive attributes attached to males 'investigations often find that greater value is ascribed to male attributes'.⁴⁴ By the age of 14, girls have internalised '*lower self-esteem than boys of the same age and than girls of any other age*'. In the research that identified this phenomenon, the 'growing awareness' and assumption of the female role in society' was suggested as a reason that 'might lead to decreased faith in one's abilities and a consequent drop in self-esteem'. Lack of self-esteem emerged as a central theme in the discussions with the Older Women's Group about their teen years. **Kath** (43) characterised her teens as 'total lack of confidence'. **Helen** (44) said she had 'very little sense of her self at all.'

Chris (49) I was as shallow as a puddle in summer.

Carla (50) I had no concept of self at all. My whole desire was to please mainly men, but everyone if possible.

Part of the conditioning is profoundly connected with **chronology**. What is learned about gender-appropriate behaviour is that it must also be age-appropriate: that is, that there are age stereotypes attached to the gender stereotypes, particularly with regard to the imperatives and timing of marriage and motherhood. Members of the Older Women's Group and women of their generation in the interview sample, had picked up the expectation that they should marry and have children *by a certain age, at the correct age, at the right time*.

Helen (44) When I was young, there was great pressure to marry and in my case and in the case of my contemporaries it was just unquestioned. We had to get married. And there was every pressure not to have a career, except to take a job that would further your marrying, take you out to meet people, over a shop counter or whatever, anything else was a waste of time. And it was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because by the age of 24 without a career, the only thing to do was marry. There weren't any other alternatives really, conditioned as I was, brought up as I was. I got to the point where I thought there was nothing more going to happen, so I thought I might as well get married. This is the end of the line. In my late 20s. In other words, I was going to be past it unless I married. The idea of having a career or being independent, even of having any interests except marrying simply didn't occur. I was brought up to believe that your value was the sort of husband you got, how much of a woman you were was judged by your husband. Not having a husband at all said something too. It was always drilled into me quite explicitly that if you got to 25 and hadn't married, people started to wonder what was wrong. Felt sorry for you. I remember quite distinctly a girl of 28 - people saying, 'It's a pity that she never married'. And I was 27 then.

Julie (45) described the way in which she learned that women's lives are mapped, or scripted, in advance in terms of marriage and motherhood.

Julie (45) Everyone's ambition was to be engaged by 18-19 and married by 20-21 and first child by 22. They would have seen it as failure not to do so. Great pity for someone who might not make it. Enormous pressure. More than that - a way of life.

There was no other conceivable alternative - anything else would have seemed deviant or mad or handicapped or something. Any woman's life which did not fit into this would be seen as blighted. Blighted even by 14-15 if you could see it was not going to happen to her - and there were girls who were 'ugly' and were obviously not going to.

Julie referred to the 'ambitions' of the girls at her single sex girls' school where they were 'all educated for marriage and motherhood'.

Julie We felt if a woman was not married and a mother by 25, her (45) chances of a normal life were finished.

Sandy, of a similar age (42) had learned the same script:

Sandy It was a universally held belief at school and among my friends (42) that if you didn't get married there was something wrong with you.

And even she, who was lesbian and who'd never wanted to marry and have children, 'went through a short phase of believing that what I really needed was to find a man and get married' before she was 30.

Generation is gendered. And gender is rigidly age-graded and age-stereotyped. These women were profoundly influenced in their education for the female chronology by age and gender appropriate attitudes and behaviour expectations from early in their lives.

V. IDENTITY, DEPRESSION AND THE FEMALE CHRONOLOGY

Very closely connected with compliance with the female chronology for all members of the Older Women's Group was depression. Kath (43) referred to 'chronic depression' in her thirties before leaving her marriage at 39. Carla (50) said she experienced 'a severe depression' on divorce because of the realisation of how she'd been cheated by compliance with the female chronology: 'I felt bitterness and anger. I cried for five years until I got it out of my system.' Chris (49) experienced 'five years real depression' when she realised that marriage 'meant the end of my life.'

Many of the women in the life history sample had also suffered from depression. Barbara (28) had had a breakdown at puberty, in her view because of the pressure to comply with femininity.

Barbara My body now started changing rapidly, from being slim to being (28) quite podgy. I was aware of this and of it being to do with becoming a woman. All sorts of sexual things started in the class to do with boys and girls. And I became very aware that there was a female identity expected of me. By 12½ years I was fully developed. I had a nervous breakdown, I was just shaking uncontrollably - for 5 days. I think now that it was an accumulated reaction to the stress of the last year - about 'becoming a woman' And from then on I lost most of my confidence - about doing anything.

When at puberty, there appeared to be no escape from the 'female chronology', Barbara's response was 'reactive depression'. Miriam (38) had suffered from depression and anorexia in her teens, for what she regarded as similar reasons: forced femininity and failure to be successfully feminine. Debbie (40) had suffered a serious depression, with weight loss which she described as 'anorexia' after her marriage. Hazel (48) had experienced massive post-natal depressions on the birth

of each of her three children. Jill (44) described herself as having been 'chronically clinically depressed' until she became a Lesbian in her late thirties. Her mother had suffered from depression through her marriage and Jill thought that 'marriage had made my mother ill'. Another eight women had been in therapy of some kind at some point in their lives for 'depression'. Over one-third of the sample said they had suffered from depression significantly in their lives.

The number of women in this sample who suffered from depression was consistent with statistics which show that from two to six times as many women than men suffer from depression at any age.⁴⁶ Figures indicate that women are categorized more often than men as depressed, psycho-neurotic, psycnotic or as suffering from non-specific emotional disorders.⁴⁷ There is a particular prevalence of depression amongst women with children (mothers of young children and mothers in mid-life whose children have left home).⁴⁸ The incidence of depression connected with mothering is high. A study published at the time this research began, suggested that depression was directly connected with the life cycle of women. In her research on women's experience of depression Scarfe discovered quite incidentally that:

'... the replies I was getting varied - in relatively systematic ways - with various stages of the life cycle.'⁴⁹

In order to explain the depression, Scarfe tried to identify the circumstances in which women typically found themselves at different life stages and the expectations that were placed upon them. She observed that the teen years were characterised by: '... separation

from one's parents, and with changing body-image - the frightening journey of transformation from child to sexual woman.'⁵⁰ In the years of the twenties, major preoccupations were: '... the search for intimacy and commitment: the career costs that might be incurred, should one put the 'loving' tasks ahead of the work ones ...'⁵¹ The issues of the thirties were defined as: '... the mistakes that had already been made and the payment that had been exacted: an 'I've been cheated sense that the fantasies and dreams of childhood had not been and might never BE satisfied...'⁵² Mid-life preoccupations were seen as even more concerned with loss:

'... of certain identity-conferring roles or ways of being - roles which, in many an instance, had been perceived as a person's (sic) sole source of inter-personal power or meaning. It might be that the fading of a woman's attractiveness was being experienced as an overwhelming assault. For she'd depended upon being sexually appealing in order to get herself needed attention: attention that wasn't merely needed for a sense of pleasure, but was needed for emotional survival. Or it might be ... the departure of a child, perhaps the youngest child - and the subsequent loss of the nurturant mothering role which she'd conceived of as her identity, her reason for being.'⁵³

Scarfe noticed how much women's expectations, experiences and identity were defined by the need for male approval ('transformation from child to sexual woman' and 'fading attractiveness'), by marriage ('the search for intimacy and commitment') at the expense of a career, and by motherhood ('the nurturant mothering role conceived of as her identity and reason for being'). It was a scenario that brought the curtain down on the lives of women at about the age of fifty, denying women a third of their lives by attaching no value to women beyond the age of 'male approval', marriage, and motherhood.

Scarfe's study illustrated how compliance with the female chronology - the normal course of life expectations for most women - contributed to depression in women and how "the depression itself speaks a good deal about the stage of living in which one has become stranded."⁵⁴ For women, compliance with the female chronology often required a compromise of their own identity and integrity - of their 'self'.

'Each of us does, in effect, strike a series of 'deals' or compromises between the wants and longings of the inner self, and an outer environment that offers certain possibilities and sets certain limitations.'⁵⁵

The model of male development has been described as one of 'continuity' and 'ego identity' acquired through 'integration' of abilities, aptitudes and apparatuses' characterised by 'accrued confidence' and 'inner sameness'.⁵⁶ Women's lives, by contrast, are often characterised by 'a series of discontinuities which subject women to a series of identity crises.'⁵⁷ This, suggests Bernard, is because women's lives are regarded as deviant within a concept of the life course as male, within a society structured on the 'male chronology'. She observed that the stages of the female chronology are often defined negatively:

'... there has been a substratum of disparagement for each of the succeeding stages. With the menarche, a woman became periodically unclean. With sexual initiation she lost her chief asset, her virginity. With childbearing, she lost her sex appeal. With menopause, she lost her reason for being. Every stage entailed a downward step.'⁵⁸

Cultural disparagement towards the life stages of women would almost certainly contribute to a negative construction of women's identity,

as would the conditioning required to enlist women's compliance with the female chronology.

In order to play their part in the female script, women's identity has to be determined appropriately in relation to men. In order to be able to marry and to mother (in marriage) a woman has to be sufficiently attractive to men to be sought after and selected as a mate. She needs to be sufficiently feminine to succeed in this endeavour. Male approval will be a priority in determining her attitudes, behaviour, self-image and self-esteem. Women's identity will thus be defined in relation to men, marriage and motherhood (in that order). In its most extreme form: she withholds her 'self' (her identity) while she waits for him.⁵⁹

She holds her identity in abeyance as she prepares to attract the man by whose name she will be known, by whose status she will be defined, the man who will rescue her from emptiness and loneliness by filling 'the inner space'.⁶⁰

Moulding their identity to men had been typical of the experience of members of the Older Women's Group, for this was the identity they had been conditioned to believe would enhance their opportunities.

Helen: My mother used to say quite explicitly that the only thing you
(44) have to worry about is your looks, because that's the most important thing. And I always remember my father who was very attached to my mother who was supposed to be very beautiful - and he'd say that when she was young she'd only have to come

into a room for all the men to turn, she didn't have to do anything. I thought that was the ideal. Everything depended on your outer shell, nothing to do with who you are or what you do.

Carla: It is really an issue of different roles. I would consciously
(50) think to myself - the kids are coming home from school, and I would consciously be my mother bit, do it, and when my husband came home, I would do the wife bit. I very consciously played different roles. I was never me.

Helen: I was certainly brought up to believe that the world was made
(44) up of couples and men. And women just weren't people. Not once they were past the young virgin stage. That's part of the baggage I carry. Because I still feel the norm is being a couple, even though intellectually I reject that. That's where pleasing comes in, that's how you get to be part of a couple. Its ok to be a man, it's all right to be a man. A man is a person. There isn't the same pressure on men to be part of a couple. It's very hard for me to divorce the emotional from the intellectual. I have to keep telling myself it is irrational to feel that couples and men are normal, and that women aren't. It's only since the feminist movement that I've thought of women as a force, as part of the population. To me, real people were men or couples.

The sex role conditioning of females is in subservience: in serving, caring, pleasing. These are not positive or powerful attributes, but they are what is required for the job of attracting men (a husband) On that level, they make sense.

... no matter what a girl's goals may have been - marriage, job, career or whatever - her path has been determined by her success in pleasing men'.⁶¹

The Older Women's Group discussed their conditioning to be "nice and sweet" and "pleasing to men". Chris (49) had 2 daughters whom she said she 'brought up exactly the same way as my mother brought me up':

Chris To be sweet and nice and pleasing. Don't upset your father,
(49) don't talk to your father before he's had dinner because he'll be hungry, don't talk to him after because he'll want a doze. Don't talk to him Sundays because he wants to read the paper.-

I mean there wasn't a time they could talk to him. What I was saying was just leave him alone while he's quiet. Let sleeping dogs lie, I can remember saying that.

Carla described the power of the conditioning:

Carla: Women want to please. Even when you're aware of it. When I'm (50) saying something, I'll think, Jesus, you're trying to please again. I don't think men are brought up to please people. I think it is a quality that is not instilled in men. I passionately believe that it is instilled in women and that's our trap. We want to please, particularly men, certainly our children, and people around us. We want to be liked.

Carol Gilligan found, in the women she interviewed, that 'identity is defined in a context of relationships and judged by a standard of responsibility and care'.⁶² This is as it would be with women whose identity was defined in relation to men. With men in the 'role' of protector and provider, and women in the position of being protected and provided for, then it would be the case, as Gilligan describes it, that masculinity is defined through separation (and autonomy) and femininity through attachment (and dependency). These are the attributes (the identity) required for 'the job' of attracting and keeping a man/husband.

At birth, males and females are equally 'dependent', and necessarily so.

In the case of boys, however, dependency must be outgrown; that is one of their first developmental tasks. But the 'psychological work' in the first stages of female development is not to overcome dependency but to retain, even exaggerate, it.⁶³

The natural thing would be for girls to move towards greater and greater autonomy, but 'dependency must be bred into them, not only not discouraged but actively encouraged'.⁶⁴ Chris (49): 'I hadn't enough sense of self to create a life round myself on my own.'

Ironically, however, as Bernard then points out, the qualities that make a woman most successful in the job of attracting and pleasing men (the prettiness, passivity and dependency) are qualities which are most unsuitable to the demands of the 'role' - the work - of mothering which requires initiative and strength and independence. As Jackson describes it:

... becoming feminine means preserving certain child-like qualities, while becoming masculine means growing away from them. Characteristics that would seem ridiculous in men are thought sexually attractive in women.⁶⁵

Feminine attractiveness is 'so closely identified with child-like qualities, that vulnerability and dependence, coyness and cuteness all enhance a woman's sex appeal'.⁶⁶

For women, therefore, there is a discrepancy between successful sex role conditioning (femininity) and successful age role conditioning (adulthood).

... the qualities deemed necessary for adulthood - the capacity for autonomous thinking, clear decision-making and responsible action - are those associated with masculinity and considered undesirable as attributes of the feminine self.⁶⁷

Sontag suggests that the social conditioning of men as masculine and women as feminine plays a part in the double standard of ageing and the data in this study bears this out. Thus, masculinity is associated with 'competence, and self-control', qualities which increase with age. Femininity, on the other hand, is associated with 'incompetence, helplessness, passivity, non-competitiveness, being nice,' qualities which are not improved by age. She notes that girls are, from early childhood, 'trained to care in a pathologically exaggerated way about their appearance and are profoundly mutilated (to the extent of being unfitted for first-class adulthood) by the extent of the stress put on presenting themselves as physically attractive objects.'⁶²

There is a similar incompatibility between successful femininity and growing older, for what greater contradiction could there be than a 'child-like' middle-aged woman, or 'immaturity' and 'helplessness' at an age when women are experienced, capable, mature and adult:

One reason why ideals of female beauty emphasise youth so strongly is that only young women can exploit these childish attributes to the full. It is usually considered rather grotesque for a 40-year-old to 'play cute'. The appeal of childlike qualities is most evident in men's tendency to be attracted to women much younger than themselves.'⁶³

As the qualities of femininity are associated with youth, as they are not even the qualities associated with or valued in adulthood, they are unlikely to survive the process of ageing into mid-life and beyond. And as femininity fails to survive the test of time, so do women themselves, having been forced to adopt its attitudes and behaviour and expectations in

order (ironically) to survive in the first half of their lives. What has survival value in youth - i.e. femininity - becomes a liability for women as they grow older.

This contradiction is a recipe for psychological confusion about 'identity' of a sort that was common to the women interviewed: of being adults, but feeling like a 'little girl', of not feeling like a 'grown-up'. Sheila, at 38, said: 'I don't feel any different or more grown-up than I did when I was 16 really'. But, she was a grown-up, not a child, and the mother of two teenage children. Indeed, she was so much a grown-up that she was dealing at the time of our interview with the death of her younger son of leukemia *as an adult, like an adult*. (He had been ill for 2 years and actually died several months later). It was clearly inaccurate and inappropriate that she felt no more grown-up than she had at 16'.

Valerie (37) described how she had internalised the female chronology, but not having had children until her early thirties, she had not lived according to its timetable.

Valerie (37) I was conscious of becoming 35 - it was like another one of those markers. 30 was mainly to do with children, 35 was more, well, by now I ought to have achieved something: I'm no longer young, what have I got to show for 35 years! And feeling in some ways very unsettled, that I should have had my children when I was 10 years younger. But I was gadding about and being irresponsible.

Nor had she lived according to the male chronology either:

Valerie But another thing, is feeling that I should have a career by
 (37) now, I should be able to say, 'I, Valerie, am a ...'
 Headmistress, famous novelist, therapist.

She had largely followed the female pattern (although her timing was 'off'): combining children with part-time work. Although she had done this 'work' excellently and under the difficult circumstances of being a single parent, she was aware that it did not give her adult status or make her feel like a grown-up.

Valerie I should know who I am. I shouldn't have this little girl
 (37) inside me, who feels needy and wants to have a good time, wants to be selfish, wants to be not just devotedly a mother.

She equated being a grown-up with 'being male' and living a 'male chronology':

Valerie The message is, why don't you settle down now, make up your
 (37) mind on something. That I should have grown up.

She defined 'grown-up' as:

Valerie Somebody who knows where they are going. You look at them
 (37) from the outside and they are all of a piece, they don't have any untidy bits. They've got a world view, they know what they think, they are not going to change their mind, they are not suddenly going to go off and do something outrageous, they are predictable, you can rely on them.

This, ironically, is a description of the gender stereotyped male.

Members of the Older Women's Group expressed a similar ambivalence and confusion about being 'a grown up'. Alison (60) said 'there are times now at nearly 60 when I don't feel grown up - that I'm a little girl lost. When I have these feelings, I realise that I have not truly found myself.' Chris (49) said she had taken responsibility for raising two sons. When she became a mother she'd grown up in society's eyes, but not her own: 'I've never grown up.' Kath (43) saw growing up as complying with the roles of the female chronology and had resisted.

Helen (44) felt that not feeling like a grown up was in fact an aspect of the infantilising of women. Like Valerie, Alison thought that being a grown up meant taking on the roles of the male chronology. This was not permitted to women, but women's exclusion also had an element of freedom - from the rigid demands of the labour market as experienced by men. In Valerie's view, this was 'another small kernel of truth inside a larger lie.' Carla (50) saw being a grown up as having a strong sense of self, a sense of others quite separate from you.' In that case, being grown up would be, as Sontag suggested, in contradiction to the requirements of successful femininity. Loss of self, or a sense of self, was a high price to pay for compliance with the female chronology, as members of the Older Women's Group had come to discover.

VI. THE INFLUENCE OF FEMINISM

Most of those accounts came from women who were in their forties at the time of their interview: same generation, same scripts, similar attitudes and experience. Twenty years later, after a decade of feminism, one might have expected significant changes to the script: different attitudes, beliefs and expectations, different opportunities, different identity. But this was not the case.

Emily (18) described how age and gender appropriate attitudes and behaviour expectation had influenced her life.

Emily (18) You're always too young for this and too old for that. Too old to lie on the floor and put your feet in the air, especially if you don't have knickers on, too young for adult things I wanted to do - like smoking and drinking and sex. You get too old to do silly things like climbing trees because it's not ladylike. My mother's great ambition in life is to turn me into a lady, wearing skirts and good shoes and behaving properly. Not sitting cross-legged on the floor in jeans. I mean, I don't want to be a lady! For my mother, being a lady is wearing dresses and being how ladies always seem to be, dresses, tights, shoes, carrying handbags. My mother always thinks I'll grow out of this stage - of wearing jeans and big baggy jumpers, that some day I'll grow up. And maybe I will, but not in the way she wants. Not wearing her outward signs of being grown up. I actually hope I'll stay like I am.

Emily wondered if the imperative 'act your age' when said to girls as opposed to boys (and it appears to be said more often to girls) really meant 'to act ladylike, conform to the stereotype'.

Emily (18) I think for girls you are expected, almost overnight, at a certain age, stop being what you were, and overnight become a lady or how society thinks females should act. Society expects

females to get married, at a certain age or between ages. I've always been told by my parents not to get married before the age of 21 because I'd be too young and I wouldn't know what I was doing ... but ... when you're 21 suddenly you do. And you'd better get married straightaway. As if suddenly overnight between the age of 20 and 21, you suddenly know what you're going to do and you're suddenly old enough and you know what's right and what's wrong. Which is absurd. Because suddenly overnight you don't know anything and that's the truth of the matter. You can't just change suddenly, it's a gradual process. If you're going to change at all. According to my parents and their values, after you're 21 you'll be ready to get married. They think you should get married somewhere between the age of 21 and 26. Because it's a good age for girls to marry. Older if you're a male, that's what my parents think. A man should marry a bit older. A female should marry someone a couple of years older. Why? Because they're likely to have a better job, better able to provide for me, keep me in the style to which I've become accustomed. (*Sarcastic tone*)

The scenario of expectations includes timetabled motherhood too:

Emily My parent's plans for me includes having children too, of course. You know get married, three or four years later have a family. My mother wants to be a grandparent I think, but then she wouldn't like it because she would think she's old. Just because grandparents are old, whatever age they are. They become old overnight, just like I'm supposed to grow up overnight between the ages of 20 and 21. That's the way my mother sees it, that she would be old when she was a grandparent. It's absurd. She could be a grandparent now, I suppose, or could have been when I was 14 - and she would have been old then!

In spite of social and historical changes, the same information and messages about the female chronology were still being transmitted intergenerationally, *familially* and culturally to **Emily** as they had been to **Julie**, **Helen** and **Sandy**.

There was, however, a significant difference, for **Emily** was resisting the pressures on her to conform with the female chronology.

She had 'discovered' feminism and been particularly influenced by Dale Spender Man Made Language. She came to our interview with a poem 'The Road Not Taken' by Robert Frost which she had discovered while doing her 'A' levels and which held deep significance for her at that moment. She saw her life as a big, wide, great, empty space stretching in front of her, waiting for her to fill it, to choose:

Emily For me, the choices are going to university, going to work,
 (18) doing voluntary work, they're very definite roads, like going to university, getting a good job, getting married, that's one road definitely, but not for me.

She felt that this was what was expected of her: 'and I don't want to do what everyone expects me to do, I want to do what I want to do'.

Society's expectations were clear to her:

Emily I think society in general expects you when you leave school to
 (18) go on to further education, get a job, settle down, have children, go back to work again, live happily ever after, that's it, never having done anything at all.

But she wasn't so clear about what she 'wanted to do'.

Emily To be honest, I don't really know what my road is, but at the
 (18) moment I know it's not going to be marriage or going to university or finding a good job.

She saw it as 'rebellious' against what was expected of her by her parents: 'They say it's your life you can do what you want, but they think they know what's best and they tell you what to do'. Also, she was not inspired by her parents as models:

Emily I mean, you look at them and ask yourself if you want to end up
 (18) like them, is that what it all means ... so why should you do what they say?'

Other women interviewed also said they'd 'been put off marriage by seeing their parents' marriage.'

Emily was desperate when I interviewed her. She was doing voluntary work for a period of six months, and she didn't know what she was going to do when she left:

Emily (18) People might think it's bad because I don't have any definite plans, or anywhere to go, but it's good for me. I haven't got to do something at a certain time. I don't think I could live at the moment knowing that in four years I'd be leaving university. It's just that I am so conscious of the social structures, and how the whole world wants me to conform in some way. Something in me is really resisting, I feel that if I give in that that is the end of my life.

The expectations filled her with nothing but fear and foreboding. She saw the female chronology as a trap, compliance with gender and age appropriate behaviour as loss. It was not only the pressures of the gender stereotypes, but their timing which she resisted. Emily saw her life as mapped out, scripted, with a part for her to play not of her own making or choosing. She was refusing to participate and she was looking for alternatives. Feminism had given her a new perspective on her life and its possibilities.

Some 25 years earlier, Julie (45) had also 'resisted' the pressures to conform to the female chronology, pressures which came both from home and school. She'd wanted to go to university, but her father 'forbade it'.

Julie (45) He said I was to come home and work in the house then, helping mum like a proper farmer's daughter, and help him on the farm, And eventually settle down and marry a young farmer and behave

yourself. And that was like having a jail sentence before I had even started my life. I was appalled.

She resisted the jail sentence, and enrolled in the local tech. for a secretarial course; 'a period of massive growth, when I really took control of my life'. Asked where marriage fitted in for her then, she said:

Julie Those expectations were there. But it didn't occur to me that
(45) I would not be able to marry later. I knew that that was at the end, definitely, but I wanted as much as possible first. I was going to get married later and have five children - at about 26-28 years.

In fact Julie was married (to a farmer) and had twins by the time she was 20. In spite of her awareness and resistance, she followed the female chronology as it had been mapped out for her, fulfilling her father's 'dreams' (society's role) for her, even against her will. Not just the what (marriage and motherhood), but the when (before the age of 25); and all of this in a relationship with a man whom she knew - and acknowledged - at the time was unsatisfactory.

On the one hand, this was a demonstration of the power and influence of the script she had internalised. But it was also indicative of the absence of alternatives and support (from outside as well as inside the family) to follow another 'chronology'. This was before the Women's Movement. Later influenced by feminism, she had been able to free herself from the constraints of the conditioning and the chronology. She left her husband and her secretarial job and returned to higher education, going on to higher status, higher paid

employment. Julie said she 'dated her life' from the day she left her husband, that 'feminism had chnged her life.' She saw her earlier compliance with the script as loss and waste.

This was also true of members of the Older Women's Group.

Helen (44) I regard that time as my dark ages, literally. Just wasted time. The whole of my 20s and 30s too. My ambitions were so shallow. All I wanted was to make a successful marriage - someone who could keep me and was desirable. I wanted nothing for myself at all.

Alison (60) felt she had been 'hemmed in for life' by compliance with the female chronology - 'a prisoner' was how she described the early years of marriage and motherhood. Helen (44) looked back on complying with the female chronology in her twenties as 'being utterly miserable', having very little sense of myself at all, a big pit, a great emptiness'. Kath (43) felt she had 'wasted the best years of my life'. Carla (50) said, 'I gave up my life for other people.'

They had all had a sense of their power in their teens. Alison (60): 'an awareness of myself, a flourishing of talent' before marriage and motherhood. Carla (50) had 'felt the world was my oyster, I felt powerful, I had this feeling of potential and power, but no understanding of how to make it happen for me, of how to develop it.' Chris (49) talked about 'a feeling of power' too in her teens, potential' because 'everything was in fact geared towards a good marriage, and I knew I didn't have the intelligence or strength in myself to say this is not what I want. I didn't really know what I wanted that was different.'

The discontent had been there in their 20s for the generation of women in their 40s at the time of the interviews. But, unlike Emily, they could see no alternatives.

Helen I didn't know what was happening or why. So by the end (44) of my 20s, I was completely trapped.

Later in their thirties and forties, they had been 'liberated' by feminism, many of them initially by reading Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch. They had also discovered female friendships ('how lovely women were'), learned about the lives of other women, no longer felt so isolated, stopped blaming themselves and started supporting each other. They talked about their 'passion for feminism', of 'completely identifying with it'. Asked what they would have changed, they said: 'to have discovered feminism earlier.' 'To have been more perceptive of everything,' said Chris (49), and then started crying: 'I can't go on. I get too emotional when I think of the waste of my life.' What feminism had provided these women with was AWARENESS: raised consciousness, a new sense of self, a new identity, and following on from that, a new, and in their view, valued life.

VII. CONCLUSION

This chapter - Part Two of the dissertation - has used the data collected in Participant Observation discussion with the North London Older Women's Group and the life history sample to describe the various aspects of the oppression women have internalised with regard to age and gender. It has dealt with double standards in attitudes to age, and indicated how these are communicated through age and sex stereotyped representations of women and through childhood socialisation into femininity. It has drawn on women's experiences to illustrate the connections between age and gender throughout the life span, to conceptualise the female chronology, to distinguish it from the male chronology, and to define the internalised oppression of women as a script learned through stereotyped representations and socialisation. It has suggested that the script of the female chronology appears to be transmitted inter-generationally, irrespective of social and historical change. It has illustrated the pressures on women to comply with the script, and attempts by women to resist compliance. It has described the influence of femininity on the construction of women's identity in relation to the female chronology, and the effects this has on women's feelings of self esteem as indicated by women's experience of depression. It has suggested that under the influence of feminism, women have found resources to resist compliance, to redefine their identity and to seek alternatives. Having described, here in Part Two, the content and some of the processes of women's internalised oppression with respect to age and gender, Part Three will examine the characteristics of the

oppression itself, throughout the life cycle: now it is constructed, maintained and valued, and women's compliance with it. Part Four will then look at the ways which women have found to 'liberate' themselves from aspects of both the internalised oppression and the oppression, and how feminism has influenced this.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 3

1. Jacobs, R. (1980), p. 6.
2. Sontag, S. (1972) p. 73.
3. Adams, C. and Laurikiertz, R. (1976), p. 125.
4. Sontag, pp. 74-75.
5. Hendricks, J. and Hendricks, C. (1977), p. 304.
6. Woman, February, 1983.
7. Itzin (1986a), p. 14. In 1983, there were 10.1 million people of retirement age in Britain - or 17.9% of the population (GHS 1985). The numbers of people over the age of 65 will be increasing over the next two decades and the elderly population itself will be ageing. By 1991, the numbers of people over the age of 75 will have increased by 18.4%, and those over 85 by 56.6% (OPCS 1983). Estimates put the increases of, over - 75s at 25% by the year 2000 and those aged 85 - plus at 60%.'
8. Itzin, C. (1987a), p. 47. This local study based on a representative one in two sample of 1000 people over 65 from 12 selected GP practices in East London discovered: 'Over three-quarters of the people interviewed reported long-standing or chronic illness. Over half reported restrictions on their lives because of chronic illness. Over a third of the sample had been ill in the past three months. One in ten of the sample were permanently housebound. One in five used mobility aids. Over a quarter reported sufficient disability that it made it difficult to get around their homes. Nearly half had difficulty walking or were unsteady on their feet. One in five of the sample were unable to bath, get out of doors, collect pension or prescriptions or use public transport on their own. 3% were unable to eat, get to the lavatory, wash, dress or get in and out of bed on their own. 6% of the sample had fallen in the last year and 4% had had fractures since their 65th birthday. At least one in ten of the people interviewed were suffering from depression. At least 3% of people interviewed were suffering from dementia.'
9. IBID. 'Over a quarter of the elderly screening sample were in receipt of Supplementary Benefit. Nearly a quarter of those interviewed were referred to the DHSS for further advice on benefit entitlement. One-third of the people interviewed said they could not afford to keep the room they lived in warm enough.'
10. IBID, p.3. '495 referrals were made as a result of the screening, the equivalent of just over a quarter of the sample to health services and just under a quarter to social services. One in ten people interviewed were referred to their GP for medical reasons as a result of pulse, blood pressure and urine tests. Over a third of the sample were assessed to require follow-up visits by health visitors or community

health nurses. 7% of the sample suffered from multiple disease, disability and disadvantage requiring 3 monthly surveillance.'

11. Itzin, C (1986c), pp.114-127; Norman, A. (1987), p. 3; Hepworth, M. (1988), p. 4
12. Masters, W.H. & Johnson, U.E. (1970), p. 67.
13. Bernard, J. (1975), p. 107.
14. Oakley, A. (1987), p. 13.
15. Neugarten, B.L. (1968), pp. 95-96.
16. Bernard, J. op. cit., p. 100.
17. Lopata, H. (1971), p. 43.
18. Bernard, J. op. cit.
- 18a. HMSO (1988), p. 49.
19. GHS (1984) Table 6.6.
20. Cunnison, S. (1987), p. 135.
21. They were then in the process of participating in a Channel 4 TV production about media representatives of older women.
22. TUC (1984), p. 9.
23. WMAG (1983).
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PART THREE
THE OPPRESSION

CHAPTER FOUR

AGE AND SEXUAL DIVISIONS; MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD AND 'WORK'

I. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF AGE AND MARRIAGE

The power and influence of the script Julie (45) had internalised was so great that she ended up complying with it - against her will, her better judgement and her active attempt to resist it. What is the source of its power? How does this scenario come to exert such a force in women's lives? One influence on women's attitudes and behaviour are representations of women - as sexually objectified, sex-stereotyped and subordinate. Another influence is the socialisation of females into femininity, childhood 'sex-role' conditioning and the education of women for the female chronology. Underlying all this is the sexual division of labour itself: women's unpaid work as wives and mothers and women's low paid work in the labour market. Part two illustrated the central part played by chronology in the social construction of gender identity. Chronology is also a key factor in the sexual division of labour and the social construction of opportunity.

Most people marry:

... marriage is a major institution in our society: 93 per cent of people are married at some time in their lives.¹

Marriage statistics obviously include men as well as women, but there are, as we have seen, particular pressures and strong expectations for women to marry. In one study of fifth form (i.e. 16 year old) girls, 96.3% said they 'approved' of marriage and 36.1% thought their

'real fulfilment is in a home with children'.² The experience as well as the expectation of marriage is different for women than men. According to Bernard:

... she loses more and gains less from the institution.
..... well-authenticated data shows that there are actually two marriages in every marital union - his and hers.³

The apparently gender-neutral concept of marriage obscures the very different, and subordinate, position of women within marriage:

... when a woman becomes a wife she usually expects - or is expected - to change her name, her residence and sometimes her job.⁴

For women, marriage is not only an 'opportunity', but a source of 'identity'. Women have been described earlier as 'holding their identity in abeyance' until they find their husband and they are also described as moulding their identity to suit their husbands:

Women also change more psychologically as a result of marriage. A review of longitudinal studies reported that wives were likely to modify their personalities and their values in line with their husband's expectations.⁵

There was evidence of this from the Older Women's Group:

Chris: I was only married for five years I should say. But that was
(49) the feeling I had. After I got married, I suddenly realised
I
wasn't me in my own right. I was just somebody else's
appendage.

Kath: I'm 43, I was married for a number of years. Unusually, we
(43) actually lived together for a few years which was a bit
beyond the pale then. I didn't actually marry him until I
was about 31, by which time I had given up all hope of a
happy life of any sort at all, which is why I agreed to marry
him actually. I thought, well, my life's over.

Chris: I think there were pressures. I got married when I was 35.
(49) I wasn't terribly conscious in my mind of pressures. It was,
however, going to be a choice between work and marriage.
When I got married, that meant giving up work. Particularly
for me as I was in the Foreign Service and couldn't carry on.
I liked my job, so I didn't want to get married. And when I
did get married, I thought of it as me giving up everything.

For Chris the choice of marriage or work was actually determined by
the marriage bars which operated then in the Civil Service, which
prevented married women from continuing in employment.

There is for women, a timetable attached to the expectation to
marry in relation to which both Chris and Kath married 'late.' In
the previous chapter, Julie (45) described the 'ambition' of girls
in her school 'to be engaged by 18-19, married by 20-21, and first
child by 22': how she had tried to resist, but had in fact ended up
following this script and its timetable almost precisely. Leonard
discovered a similar pattern in her study in the seventies of
courtship and weddings in South Wales:

... women started a relationship with their eventual husband
at eighteen, became engaged at nineteen and married at
twenty-one.⁶

The men, in Leonard's study, followed a similar but slightly 'later'
timetable:

... starting a relationship with their eventual wife at just under twenty, becoming engaged at twenty-one and marrying at twenty-two.⁹

Men, however, are usually freer to deviate from the timetable without approbation or penalty, and male identity, though it may have an investment in marriage, is not generally so profoundly defined by and dependent upon it.

In this study, only three-quarters of the 46 women had married, but the study included an extended sample of 16 lesbian women, of whom 7 (nearly half) had themselves been married earlier in their lives. Of the 31 women who had married, 16 - nearly half - had followed the prescribed timetable of marriage before the age of 21; 21 had married by the age of 22 and 27 were married by the age of 25.

The 'Classic' Pattern of Marriage

Debbie's story illustrates the classic content and timing of the marriage script followed by many women in their forties at the time of the interview. Debbie (40) was the woman who'd been loved best at the age of 6 for being a 'good little girl' and helping mummy with the housework: the one whose mother had been horrified when she put on a pair of shorts to play sports. 'For myself', she said, 'I had no independent image, my identity was totally what anybody else wanted me to be'. Both parents 'expected' her to marry. She was a working class 'girl' who'd gone to grammar school, done well academically and had ambitions to go to university, but:

Debbie My father thought it was bloody ridiculous when I went to
(40) university. But I wasn't really aware of this 'til about 18
when I wanted to do A-Levels and my father was against it
because he wanted me to stay working in the bank - as secure.

Social class operated with gender to set limits on expectations and opportunities. And it was not only parental pressure, but pressure from school and peers which pushed her initially out to work (in the bank) at 16, rather than 'staying on' to study.

Debbie My goals then were whatever the school said - O-levels, then
(40) I left with my friends to do a typing course at the tech -
and hated it. But I decided to be a secretary because
everybody else was doing that.

When she got her first job in an office at 17, she 'hated it': 'the clothes, being ordered about, being a nothing'.

Debbie So I went back to do A-levels. I felt I could do much better
(40) for myself, and so it was necessary to get the A-levels, but
I did not have a concrete idea of what that would lead to or
anything.

At the same time, there were 'positive expectations' to marry which operated alongside the 'negative expectations' with regard to education and employment.

Debbie I never expected not to get married myself. I got married
(40) because there was no good reason not to, not that there was a
good reason to marry. Marriage was like going to work - you
didn't have to in one sense, but you just did. I knew I
would have to be married by the time I was in my mid-
twenties, or else I would be a worry to my parents.

In fact, like the majority of women, Debbie followed the female chronology at this stage of her life. She met her husband at 17, got engaged at 20 and married at 23 - a virgin, again according to parental expectations: 'My parents' attitudes were that you didn't do it before marriage, you saved yourself for your husband'. Falling in love was, as scripted, part of the scenario, but there was an element of 'pretending' for the sake of playing the part and making a reasonable performance of it:

Debbie I think we fell in love with each other, I was for a bit. We
(40) were always together, like good friends, we should never have got married.

This sense of 'resignation', this 'falling into' marriage less through choice than the force of inevitability, or out of inertia was characteristic of other women interviewed. Debbie had a white wedding, in a Catholic church, (he was Catholic), and what she called a 'rather middle-aged honeymoon in Guernsey'.

Where Debbie tried to 'resist the whole domestic bit' was to say she 'didn't want children and wanted to go to university'. So she taught for 2 years and at 25 was accepted to do a degree.

Debbie My father again said 'What you need my girl is a house and
(40) kids, never mind all this bloody education'.

Nevertheless, she got a first-class honours degree and 'felt really proud, I felt I'd overcome my humble beginnings, beat the buggers'. Although she had acquired a new sense of herself (self-image, identity) as 'articulate' and 'good at something', it did not, at this stage, alter the script.

Her husband had got a job in Australia; she went with him and got pregnant: as a wife, she was expected to change her name (she did), her residence (she did) and her job (she did for a while). And like many of the women interviewed, she got pregnant because she was expected to and couldn't think of any reason not to.

Debbie (40) I was in Australia with nothing else to do, and there was no reason not to have them, though no reason to either. After 17 months, I had, another again, no particular reason, people just had two kids'.

At this point that Debbie suffered from a severe depression which was instrumental in her growing recognition that she was unhappy in her situation. She felt then that she was failing in her marriage, but she came to believe that marriage had failed her, through no fault of her own. Depression had operated as a signpost earlier as well, when shortly after the marriage she experienced dramatic weight loss and apathy. She saw the episodes of anorexia and depression as her 'internal resistance' to compliance with the female chronology.

The passivity of women in following the script of 'marriage and motherhood' (usually a package) illustrates the effectiveness of the process of female socialisation. The fact that women often do not see themselves as making choices will in part be a consequence of the real absence of or limited choices other than marriage and motherhood, in part a result of the conditioning which makes women *feel* powerless to choose. Debbie had made attempts to resist compliance with the female chronology in several ways at different stages. Eventually influenced by feminism, she went on to become a successful academic and author, and she left her marriage as a lesbian. She freed herself from some of the stereotyped expectations and limited opportunities which had been a barrier earlier in her life.

Socio Historical Change, Social Class Differences, Same Scripts

It was interesting to discover from this data that similar patterns operated in the lives of the women interviewed regardless of their age and generation, or social class or the specific historical context of their childhood conditioning, or the social and historical changes which had occurred and which did quite materially change their circumstances and opportunities (for example the end of marriage bars in the Civil Service and teaching profession). Although opportunities changed, attitudes, beliefs and identity remained remarkably constant.

Debbie's experience had been repeated 20 years later by Mary (18), also a working-class 'girl'. She was engaged at 16. When I interviewed her, she was going 'to be 18 in a few months, getting married in July'. Asked why, she said:

Mary We're living together at the moment and it's just like being (18) married really except we haven't got a certificate saying we're married. But of course, when you're married, you then have children and that's a bit different.

She was 'looking forward to getting married' in the big Catholic church down the road, although neither one of them were churchgoers.

Mary I'm getting my wedding dress today, got my shoes, got our (18) wedding rings, we've paid a deposit for our hall ...

She wanted 'a really nice wedding' and she said she was 'taking her time, not rushing things which Bob would do if he had his way - get married next week or something silly like that'. They'd saved up to have everything just as they wanted. She planned to have

children - '2, maybe more if I feel like it':

Mary When I'm about 20-21, about that age, I shouldn't think before, (18) because I'd be just married and just turned 18, and by the time we get settled and get a few bits, like a three piece - then we can start saving for the children, looking after the child with some money behind us.

Mary had gone on to have two children by the age of 22. Like middle class **Emily** in the previous chapter, she saw her identity and opportunity defined by marriage and motherhood. In spite of social class differences, they had both internalised similar attitudes, beliefs, expectations and identity. But social class determined a difference in response based on market potential (**Mary's** delight, **Emily's** ideal). At this stage in her life **Mary** saw compliance with the female chronology as an avenue of escape from her 'under class' position in society (she'd grown up in one room with an unmarried mother on welfare benefits) and from low paid, low grade employment (she had worked as a shop assistant since leaving school). **Emily** on the other hand saw the female chronology simply as a trap. For **Mary**, unlike **Debbie** or **Emily**, education was not an alternative. Feminism had in fact influenced both **Mary** and **Emily**, making them realise they could take charge of their own lives and try to get what they wanted for themselves. This sense of personal empowerment was in marked contrast to the passivity with which **Debbie** had entered her marriage twenty years earlier, **Alison** 40 years earlier and **Eve** 50 years earlier.

Twenty years before **Debbie**, during the second world war. **Alison** (60), another working-class woman, had followed the same script 'One

was', she said 'expected to get married by 20 or 21' and she did. He was 'a nice Jewish boy': she knew she was expected to marry just such a man.

Alison And as all my mates had got married, and he was there, and (60) acceptable, and wanted me, despite the fact I was fat. So I got married. I married him because he was Jewish, and unlike most men, solid, gentle, and he would be faithful.

Shortly after she married she realised she was 'hemmed in for life'. After having her first baby she felt her life 'had a little more meaning' - but it was 'still a prison'.

Middle class Eve (72) had followed the same patterns of the female chronology yet a generation earlier, abandoning her ambitions to be an artist (with which she had already had some success) to marry and have four children.

Eve Well, of course, eventually we were all supposed to get married (72) I always wanted to become an artist and I pursued that very hard under great difficulties. My twin didn't mind, so she went to a convent to learn all those feminine things, you know, to become a good housewife. But, I stayed on and did my matric.

When her father 'didn't want to pay for her artistic education', Eve arranged for herself an 'apprenticeship' with a local sculptor, and then got a scholarship to a prestigious art academy. At the same time, she 'always wanted to get married, because it was a very important thing to me, to have a family, but I wanted to be an artist as well'. She married:

Eve I was hoping my husband would allow for this that I wanted to (72) do. But, of course, he didn't. I was going to be a housewife and have his children.

She had her fourth child at the age of 44 and didn't return to her artistic pursuits until her husband died when she was 62.

The script of the female chronology seemed to remain the same for these women generation after generation, transmitted and internalised in a similar form. There were some social class differences in compliance determined by labour market situation. But the most significant difference was in the influence of feminism. Mary (18) and Emily (18) responded to the female chronology with an awareness of its implications and a sense of choice in relation to it, whereas *at the time* Debbie (40) Alison (60) and Eve (72) had complied with the female chronology each with a sense of resigning themselves to their fate. And they had all continued to comply until their lives were sufficiently influenced by feminism to enable them to seek alternatives. For Debbie this was in her thirties, for Eve and Alison it was their fifties and sixties. In other words it wasn't until the decade of feminism in the 70s that they got a lever with which to lift the lid on their own oppression within the female chronology.

Nevertheless Alison and Eve both stayed in their marriage until they were widowed. Alison tried to develop an alternative economically independent existence and active life in the Women's Movement alongside her marriage, but it was, in her own words an 'uneasy co-

existence' and she wondered on occasion if she ought to have left her husband. Eve (72) only took up her life as an independent and autonomous individual in pursuit of her own goals when her husband died. She relied on the roulette of chance (her husband's death) for the opportunity of 'freedom'. She did not make the choice for herself and would presumably have gone to her own grave with her 'personal' dreams unfulfilled. Once widowed she became profoundly influenced by feminism and blossomed in her own creativity.

The extent to which the same scripts were transmitted to women in successive generations was striking. But so was the extent to which women were prepared to sacrifice their own self-realisation to marriage and motherhood not only in the absence of any other apparent alternatives, but even when alternatives were available: apparently in the grip of the attitudes, beliefs and values they had internalised as women.

This was certainly true of Janet (50) who had 'married for life' - til death do us part - but for better or worse had not got that far. At 50, she was recently divorced. She described herself as 'old and fat'. She had been left by her husband for another - much younger and slimmer - woman. She had been shocked to discover after marriage that there were differences (i.e. inequalities) between men and women, particularly between 'women's work and men's work':

Janet I found out about men's work and women's work, and that was
(50) the shock of my life. And he one day said - I was, you know, up to here doing things and asked him to help - and he said, oh, that's women's work. And I said, what do you mean. You

know, my father washed clothes, vacuumed, ran the sewing machine, cooked, but my husband, never!

However, it was only on being divorced at 50 that she realised how 'unequal' marriage had made her, and what she had lost (as well as gained) by having bought wholesale the stereotype of marriage and motherhood: the cost of compliance with the female chronology.

She had married at 21 ('a textbook case') and had her first child in the same year, at 21. She hadn't 'planned' to have children straightaway. As with so many other women, 'it just happened. I didn't really do anything not to'. She then had four children, one after another, with a year out to get the TV: 'I had a baby in '54, '55 - a TV in '56 - '57 and '58'. She was sterilized at age 28. They never used any contraceptives. Asked why, she said: 'Things just happened, and you accepted them'. This was an extreme, but probably not all that unusual, example of the fatalism and powerlessness women have described experiencing in relation to marriage and motherhood. Janet's child-bearing period occurred in the pre-pill era, but there were contraceptives to be used if she had chosen to use them to have any control over the number and timing of her children. Instead she abandoned herself to some internalised notion of her destiny.

Janet (50) was another woman with considerable talent and potential in her own right. She was a competition athlete at university where she'd trained as a PE teacher. When she married and

had children, she decided she was 'going to have a career after the children', but the internalised passivity continued to prevail: she did 'nothing to keep the children from coming' and she did nothing to plan or organise 'the career':

Janet (50) Well, as far as a master plan, you didn't have time, between wiping their bums and their noses, to sit down and set your goals. You live your life. The ultimate goal, of course, I did have a degree, and I was going to teach. But the particulars, I never really sat down and said, I'll give myself so many years.

On the contrary, she actively assisted her husband's pursuit of *his* career. He had a master plan, and she had time to assist him in achieving what she could not conceive of, nor achieve for herself.

Janet (50) Then my husband decided he had to go back to college. And the children were still young, and I still had to raise them. So he went back, and I did part-time work outside the home to keep some things on the table ... you can do without ... we were from a generation where you just nitched your belt up a bit tighter and you make do. So I did part-time work, and that was fine, because we were a team - you see, I'm from that sporting background - and as long as your team is with you, you'll do anything. You may take a whole load, but you don't feel like you're taking a whole load. We were a team. It took him five years with the Ph.D, very hard. And the last two years I taught full-time.

The 'team' concept carried Janet through some difficult times, but obscured *who* was always 'batting' (him) and *who* was always in the 'back field' (her): that *his* marriage and *her* marriage were not the same. She didn't discover this until she was divorced and left (by her 'team'), after 31 years of marriage and motherhood, very obviously disadvantaged in terms of opportunities in life for

herself: 'You see', she said, 'divorce is drastic. I was married for life'. At the age of 50 outside the 'career' of marriage, she faced both sexual and economic disqualification. Of all the women interviewed, she appeared to *be* as well as *feel* most disadvantaged by her long term and rigid compliance with the female chronology. Feminism had made her aware of alternative life styles and she was determined to rebuild her life as an independent woman, but she more than others felt the odds were against her.

The sheer power of this script and the pressures to conform with it are further illustrated in the cases of two of the lesbians interviewed. Although they were fully aware of the fact that they were lesbian at the time, they nevertheless tried to comply with the script of the female chronology 'to time'. Barbara (28) was the woman who'd had a 'nervous breakdown' in puberty, (in her view because of the pressures to conform to the stereotypes of femininity), but had continued to be academically successful and was accepted at university. She married at 19 while at university, but before she married she'd 'met and fallen in love with his sister'.

Barbara I thought if I didn't talk about it and got married, somehow (28) I'd become normal. And that's how I lived for the next 4-5 years - married to Robert, but in love with his sister.

She'd married in part 'for stability' and in part to prove to herself that she wasn't lesbian: 'I thought if I didn't say anything and played another part', it would vanish. In Barbara's case, the marriage script was certainly viewed as a 'part' or a 'role' to play.

After 5 years she left and 'came out' as a lesbian. In retrospect she believed she 'had conformed to all the categories as a survival mechanism', and they had failed her. As with the other women, however, she had been empowered to take charge of her life through the influence of feminism. This involved not only adopting a lesbian life style and politics, but also pursuing a career in a non-traditional area of work for women, as a religious leader.

Conclusion - Paradox and Power

Quantitative data and qualitative data alike demonstrate the pressure that is put on women to marry, and then how most women do in fact marry. So do most men, of course, but marriage has a different meaning and function in the lives of women, in relation both to opportunity and identity. Marriage is scripted and timetabled and apparently internalised by women as a major source of fulfilment in life and material to their definition of self and identity. And indeed there are many satisfactions in falling in love, in loving, in making a commitment, in establishing a long-term even life-long committed relationship between two people, in sharing lives, in creating a home and a family. These were certainly some of the things that motivated women into marriage.

But there is a paradox. For marriage can also be simultaneously - and bewilderingly - a source of frustration and loss of identity as women "hold their identity in abeyance" and mould their identity around their husbands. There are thus fundamental contradictions for women in the role of wife; in terms of identity (both gained and lost), in terms of opportunity, in the gained relationship and its status, but in lost - or at least altered - relations to the labour market and downward mobility. Some of the women in this sample were downwardly mobile through marriage to the extent that marriage was an obstacle to them pursuing their own occupational upward mobility, the potential of which could be measured by their educational status at

marriage. Furthermore, although the majority of married women were working in 1980 (60%, compared with a minority in previous generations), the majority of them worked part time, and this had risen from 33% in 1980 to 40% in 1985.²⁸ In 1989, three quarters of part time workers were women.²⁹ Part time work is low paid and low grade, and this means that although women continue to work in employment after marriage, they experience occupational downward mobility in doing so. They also experience downward mobility on divorce especially if they have been economically inactive in marriage.

Of the 21 women in this sample who had divorced, 10 (nearly half) could be said to have been downwardly mobile as a result of having married and then either having become housewives and wholly dependent on their husbands economically, or having worked part time and been partially economically dependent on their husband. In other words, if marriage can be seen as an avenue of upward mobility for women through their husband's occupation, then divorce can often be seen to be a cause of downward mobility for women, at least for a period of time. The women who were most downwardly mobile as a result of divorce were the women who were most economically inactive and most economically dependent on their husbands, the ones like Janet who had made a 'career' out of the unpaid work of marriage and motherhood.

Women in the sample entered marriage as if they had no alternative, but they did have alternatives. Those who were already aware of their lesbianism had this as an alternative. Some, like Eve

(72) had talents and ambitions as artists. Others had educational qualifications. Everyone had their current labour market participation or potential. But they had nevertheless internalised the notion that they 'ought' to marry, that in marriage lay their 'real' life opportunities.

Many women described their feelings of passivity and powerlessness in relation to getting married and then a similar process of sacrifice within marriage: putting husbands and children first and their own self-realisation second. Although marriage did offer opportunities, rewards and satisfactions, it was also clearly oppressive to women. Furthermore it can be and often is short-lived. One third of all marriages end in divorce: two-thirds of the women in this sample were divorced.¹⁰ In the context of a lifetime, many women move into and out of marriage. It is not the life time career it is represented to be. Women who try to make a career of marriage often fail - ending up unfulfilled, frustrated (Alison 60), ambitions unrealized (Eve 72), divorced (Janet 50), suffering from depression (Debbie 40).¹¹ The divorce statistics doubled during and after the decade of feminism, and it is likely that some of this increase will have come about as a consequence of feminist critiques of marriage, and the opportunity this gave women to feel discontent with marriage. This was true of women in this sample. The larger proportion of divorced women in this sample will have reflected the divorce trends in the seventies.

What emerged from this data most dramatically was the power of the institution of marriage, its script and its timetable to be internalised and acted out. The power was demonstrated in particular by the ability of the script to be transmitted and internalised intergenerationally over historical time, apparently independent of real changes in the position of women with regard to the labour market, changes in sexual attitudes and behaviour and developments in reproductive technology. The evidence here is not only of the social construction and maintenance of marriage as an institution, but of the construction of identity for women in relation to marriage. Both the institution and the internalised identity appear to transcend other important factors such as social class, sexuality and socio-historical change. There is also evidence in this data of the similar and parallel social construction of the content and chronology of motherhood.

II. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF AGE AND MOTHERHOOD

Of the women who had been married, all but the two women who were aware of being lesbians before they married, were also mothers. 5 of the lesbians who had been married were also mothers. Motherhood usually occurs initially within marriage: as well as the 90% who marry there are 80% who will have at least one child.¹² Motherhood is traditionally *expected* to occur within marriage. Women, therefore, in the pattern which emerged from this data, expect to marry and also to become mothers within a very short space of time. Motherhood has been described as the 'point in the life cycle where gender inequalities became more deep-rooted, or perhaps only more transparent.'¹³ The proportion of women who are mothers but not married has increased and is now high compared to previous historical periods (14.3% in 1981 nationally, and nearly 20% in London), but this is largely due to divorce: when they became mothers, most of them women were married.¹⁴ There are, of course, women who become pregnant outside of marriage ('before they are married'): some of these women have abortions (147,619 in 1986 in 1987), some become 'unmarried mothers' (180,000 in 1984) and some get married.¹⁵

Joan (72) said she 'had to get married', an expression that has traditionally meant getting married precisely *because* the woman is pregnant rather than for any other reason and therefore indicative of both the symbolic relationship between marriage and motherhood and that historically women have been stigmatised by giving birth out of wedlock, with children of such circumstances legally categorised as bastards. It is only recently that women in numbers have chosen to

become pregnant outside of a marriage, based on a positive decision to have their own children independent of 'the father' or 'a' father. These have included women who are faced with the biological clock and the possibility of coming to the end of their childbearing years without 'finding' a marriage partner, and lesbian women who have chosen to live emotionally as well as economically independent of men, but also to mother, on their own or with women partners.

As women (and not men) can reproduce and as the continuation of the species relies on reproduction, it has been assumed that all women are naturally - and will be - mothers, and that women mother naturally. These assumptions are made regardless of whether individual women actually do - or will ever - become mothers. Although there are those who regard marriage as women's -- -- psychologically if not biologically determined destiny, it is possible to see from this data how marriage is in fact socially scripted and constructed. This data also shows how the basic assumptions, patterns and timetable of motherhood is as much socially constructed as it is biologically determined by the menarche and the menopause. In fact, it is the timetable of the female chronology rather than the biological clock which appears to be the most decisive influence on having children for most women.

When this research began, feminist sociology had begun to describe the 'all-pervasive socialisation for motherhood':¹⁶

Although motherhood is not in itself a marital status, it

is part of the state of marriage for practically everyone since about every married person has at least one child ... reproduction comes to be viewed exclusively as a female function ... as *the* female function. Women come to be seen almost exclusively in their reproductive function. Their world is shaped with this perspective in mind ... A great deal of the shaping of the female character is related to the role of mother.¹⁷

This life history data confirmed many aspects of the social construction of mothering and also illustrated its chronology.

Timetabled for Motherhood

Alison (60) had conformed to the female chronology and, married as she knew she was expected to do by the age of 21 and almost immediately, 'programmed' as she was:

Alison (60) I began to want a child - just as the next thing to do, so we did. I wanted more than one. I didn't plan it. And had another after 3 years. She wasn't planned either, but I wanted her.

Alison worked full time before marriage and motherhood, but 'didn't work after having children' because she believed it was 'better to be at home with your children in the formative years': a belief supported, again, not only by her sexist conditioning and maternal deprivation theories, but the left-wing political party in which she was active:

Alison (60) Also, I always prided myself on being well-organised - so that supper would be on the table when my man came home, the children in bed etc.

Although she said she 'didn't work', she also added: 'except for typing and childcare at home'. Not only was her 'role' as housewife and mother invisible as work, but and, in her view, the typing didn't really count as 'work' either.

Alison When the youngest started school I went back to paid work
(60) outside the home, clerical work. I did apply to teach but was refused because of having children to look after. Part-time 'til they were about 11, then full-time.

This historically has been typical of the pattern of women's work: low-paid, low-status employment between leaving education and marriage (or motherhood), part-time work while children are under-five and prior to primary school or age 11 and before secondary school. What was true of Alison's experience in the immediate post-war period, was still true for women in the *seventies and eighties*.²⁸

Earlier, when talking about her ambitions, Alison (60) had said, like most women: 'I never thought in terms of a career'. Then, when married with children, and following the female chronology, Alison said: 'I was determined not to be 'just a mother'. 'Women's work' inside the home (housework and childrearing) is, contradictorily, regarded as both 'desirable' and unsatisfying:

Alison Although I felt I was doing the right thing as a mother, I was
(60) also very frustrated at home.

Marriage and motherhood are held out for most women as a major goal in life whether or not they also work, and which, if unachieved,

constitutes failure. But, housework and childrearing are not paid, and are perceived by many women as having 'no status'. Alison addresses the perceived contradiction between self-realisation and being a "good mother".:

Alison I was determined that no-one out there should see me as only a
 (60) mum. But I felt a mum too. I didn't resist that. I love children. I think to myself, was I a bad mum? But, I don't think I neglected them. I saw it as continuing a life of my own.

Alison's concept of 'bad mothering' was not constructed from working full-time with young children which can be a source of stress and guilt for many of the proportionally few women who do. The national survey of women's employment in 1980 found that 'many of the women who worked full time whilst responsible for dependent children ... said they found it difficult to cope with the competing demands of home and work.'¹⁹ Alison's guilt derived simply from maintaining and developing friendships and doing voluntary political work during the early childrearing years. Although Alison 'never thought' in terms of a career, had very early abandoned her ambitions to be an actress because she thought she was 'too fat' and had left school armed only with office skills, she went on to develop a very successful 'career' in political work and then, influenced by feminism, to become active in the Women's Movement, and a noted feminist spokeswoman for older women.

Making a Career of Motherhood

In Miriam's (38) case, marriage became a vehicle to motherhood. Like Alison, (60) a generation earlier, she chose her husband not because she 'fell in love' or because of sexual compatibility, but because: 'he was kind, generous, not a gallivanter, not too attractive, so I wouldn't have too much trouble or competition'. Flouting traditional expectation, she asked him to marry her because she 'wanted the experience of marriage'. But her profound ambivalence towards marriage was evident in the ceremony:

Miriam It was strange, but I was determined to be married in
 (38) trousers, and I was, in a dark grey suit and white shirt, in a registry office. I think I couldn't believe that I was doing it and I didn't take it seriously, one part of me didn't. I even giggled in the ceremony and it had to be stopped and myself admonished. I found the ritual ridiculous and meaningless. Yet at the same time, I changed my name immediately to Mrs. Wilson and delighted in that and in thinking of myself as now married.

On one level, **Miriam** had contempt for the institution and its rituals, on another she was compelled to pursue it single-mindedly and to wholly and wholeheartedly abandon her identity to it.

Miriam described the marriage as doomed from the beginning, and becoming pregnant almost by accident because 'we almost never slept together'. But the 'experience of motherhood' became everything that the 'experience of marriage' wasn't.

Miriam Having Alan was the most important and most pleasurable
 (38) experience of my life - the actual giving birth - and it inspired me. I felt wholly positive about having a child.

Before becoming pregnant, she described herself, like so many of the women interviewed, as having no 'job ambition' and doing part-time work (translation and temping) although she had a university degree which had objectively increased her labour market potential. This pattern of under-achievement, absence of direction or ambition, or unrealised ambition, and low status work was typical of many of the women interviewed.

For **Miriam**, motherhood became a *real* full-time career:

Miriam (38) Then when I had Alan, I just wanted to be with him. A bit like my mum. You see, I was convinced I needed to be with Alan for the first two years of his life, that the seeds are laid then, the foundation laid for the development of the self. I had absolute confidence in what I was doing. So, I found marriage meaningless and frustrating, but motherhood exciting and fulfilling.

Her husband 'left' when the baby was one. In spite of the fact that the marriage was 'doomed', the separation was an emotional upheaval, but it left **Miriam** in a domestic arrangement that suited her.

Miriam (38) For 6 years now I have lived alone with Alan. He is my main relationship. I stopped thinking of myself as married, stopped using his name, stopped thinking of him as my husband.

She channelled her previously undirected intellectual ambitions and creative abilities into and through her son in a way she found satisfying:

Miriam In drawing out artistic and musical abilities in my son, I (38) rediscovered my own. And we sketch and paint and play music together.

Influenced by feminism, she left the political party in which she, like Alison had done a combination of voluntary unpaid and paid work. She had joined a women's support group and enrolled for an Open University Degree. Sheila (38) was also a 'casualty' of the female chronology, and had decided to make a 'career' out of raising her children. It was a conscious decision to value what she was doing, although she felt it had 'no status'. Influenced by feminism, she had also used the education system to increase her social and economic power.

Motherhood as Supreme Accomplishment

Although she had resisted many aspects of age/gender oppression in adolescence (through anorexia for example) and rebelled against marriage, **Miriam** (38) ironically felt she had found her ultimate fulfillment in mothering in just the way women are led to believe they will, or should. For motherhood, like marriage is often 'represented' to women as the other ultimate source of opportunity and identity. This is what Hazel (48) had internalised. She had married at 25 ('a bit late')! to the 'first man I met who seemed to find me attractive'. Although she was 'behind schedule', they did not hurry to have children: 'then we decided about my late 20s that if we were going to have a family we had better start, as I was going to be an old mum'.

Having children meant giving up a good, reasonably well-paid and satisfying job as a teacher, and a curtailment of freedom, but children were 'expected', and the 'time' had to be before 30, or it would be 'too late'. The fact, as Hazel noted, that women are now choosing successfully to 'start families' in their mid-30s rather than early or late 20s, is further evidence that motherhood, like marriage, is also a social construction. Hazel had been led to believe that having children would be the supreme accomplishment in a woman's life:

Hazel (48) Anyway, I was primed to believe that this first birth was going to be the most wonderful experience of my life. But it was an absolute disaster. From which I don't think I ever recovered.

Giving birth was a 'terrible shock' and so was motherhood, in spite of what Hazel had been conditioned to believe:

Hazel (48) Then motherhood came as a terrible shock, that has often left me wondering if I should ever have had children. Because I really did not enjoy it. Partly because it was the first time in my life I'd ever been tied to the home, and I had left a job I really did enjoy.

Nevertheless, she got pregnant again 'by accident' when the baby was a few months old. She had an illegal abortion, followed by psychiatric treatment to 'help her be a better mother'. Then they 'decided to have another baby':

Hazel (48) Partly because I hoped this time it would be alright, and be another opportunity to have this wonderful experience. Almost as if there had been something so far in my life not attained. Knowing what I do now I cannot imagine how I could have believed in this ultimate experience thing. But also we both wanted more than one child.

Hazel (48) was still, at that point, in spite of bitter experience to the contrary, in pursuit of the 'ultimate' experience of childbirth she had been conditioned to believe was the experience that would epitomise her existence as a woman. She wanted a daughter, and to her disappointment, had a son. So she tried a third time for a daughter and self-fulfilment as a woman, and for the third time had a boy. 'All my pregnancies' she said 'were pretty traumatic'. The conditioned beliefs, the stereotypes and the reality she experienced were in different realms. In retrospect, she could say that 'it now seems incredible that I should have had such naive ideas'. 'Suddenly', she said, 'I realised that life didn't have to be all these stereotypes'. But she was no different than many women in being conditioned to believe that self-realisation would be achieved through motherhood. Hazel (48) eventually became profoundly influenced by feminism and had, as her children were becoming independent, left her marriage to 'come out' and live as a lesbian. At the time of the interview, she was also considering a major career change.

Motherhood without Marriage

Jackie (19) was similar in her conditioning with regard to motherhood. But influenced by feminism, she differed in having

rejected marriage. She was black, working class, and at 19 pregnant with her first child at the time she was interviewed. She was not married, however, and had no intention or desire to marry.

Jackie I thought about it when I first met my boyfriend at 15. He
(19) wanted to, and so I wanted to. But I've changed my mind now - if I get married I'll be tied down - nowhere to go, nothing to do, no freedom. Expecting a baby now doesn't alter that. I didn't want to get married as a child, didn't think about it.

'But you never know what the future will foretell', she said. While she'd never wanted to marry, she'd always wanted to have children.

Jackie And I wanted them young so that they could grow up with me.
(19) I'll stay living at home with my mum when I have it, she wants me to, it will give her something to do. My brother's girlfriend, also not married, has her baby in two weeks time.

She and her parents felt she was at 19 'too young' to marry, but not 'too young' to have children. Marriage, meant loss of freedom, so marriage was rejected or avoided, and motherhood was organised 'independently'. This was the case with all three of the black women of Afro-Caribbean origin. So there may have been cultural factors as well as feminism influencing their decision. But in every case, marriage was regarded as a 'trap' and also detrimental to their relationships with their partners/fathers of their children. While Jackie thought she might marry her boyfriend 'sometime', she said when asked how she saw herself in 10 years time, 'I'll probably still be living with my mum'. And when she needed things 'like money, I won't go to my boyfriend, the first person I'll turn to is my mum'. Jackie was avoiding the 'trap' of marriage as a strategy to

stay free and independent, to the extent of organising motherhood independently. She felt empowered by this: her way of maintaining an autonomous identity. But the only other opportunity, or identity, she could envisage for herself was early (teenage) motherhood, where she might 'feel free', but would in fact be 'tied down'. Thus, while she was getting out from under one aspect of her oppression as a woman (marriage), she had not entirely escaped the other (motherhood). And although she (unlike women of earlier generations) had access to effective contraception, she was casual in its use and had 'wilfully' failed to protect herself from pregnancy (she'd had an abortion prior to this pregnancy).

Whether marriage and motherhood is rejected or resisted or entered into with resignation or enthusiasm, or marriage-avoided and motherhood-adopted, the expectations seemed to exist for these women that in marriage and/or motherhood lay a central, if not the sole, opportunity and the source of their identity as women. They had, in spite of objective circumstances and other opportunities, internalised one or the other or both of these roles as 'destiny', both quite coercively timetabled and also short-lived. As with marriage, the women interviewed appeared to have similar attitudes and behaviour with regard to motherhood whatever their age and their generation. Thus **Alison** (60) and **Hazel** (48) entered motherhood in a period prior to the availability of the contraceptive pill and before abortion was legalised. **Miriam** (38), ten years later had access both to the higher education that increased her labour market potential, and to improved contraceptive controls, but she nevertheless had

internalised the ideology and repeated the patterns of marriage and motherhood.

Martin and Roberts came to the conclusion from their national survey of women's employment that 'even though the benefit of working is recognised either in general terms or as the best way to be independent':

... work is held to be less central to women's lives than to men's ... While only a minority of women think women cannot combine a career and children, it is clear that these are rarely considered equally important, since a majority of women feel a home and children is a woman's prime aim and main job and endorse the view that family responsibilities may conflict with having a demanding paid job.²⁰

Their quantitative data provided evidence of the primary socialising of women as wives and mothers and the power of that conditioning to override even the acknowledged objective benefits to women of paid employment.

Mary at 18 and Jackie at 19, forty years later than Alison, thirty years later than Hazel and 20 years later than Miriam, with labour market potential and the possibility of completely controlling their own reproductive timetable, still conformed to the female chronology with regard to marriage and/or motherhood.

At the same time, Jackie had been sufficiently influenced by feminism to reject marriage in favour of what she regarded as autonomy. Other women had also been conditioned to the female

chronology, complied with it for a period in their lives, but then influenced by feminism, had quite radically altered their lives. And there was demographic evidence to indicate that in the decade of feminist influence, the timing of marriage and motherhood had altered significantly. The average age at marriage for women had risen from 22.6 in 1971 to 24.1 in 1986, and age at birth of first child from 23.9 in 1971 to 26.2 in 1986.²¹ This will have been due to women's increased participation in the labour market and to the influence of the ideology of women's liberation. And the contraceptive pill had provided an opportunity for women to separate motherhood from marriage, to control the chronology of childbirth and childrearing. The timing of marriage and motherhood had therefore changed, coming later in the female chronology.

Thus feminism has contributed to giving women more flexibility within the female chronology and within their own life course. Influenced by feminism, women have been able to recognise the social construction that conditioned them to marriage and motherhood by age 21 or 25 or 30, that even the biological clock gives them until 45 or more to bear children. They have been freer to manoeuvre within the male chronology - eschewed marriage and motherhood in their twenties and pursued careers, establishing themselves in the labour market and embarking on motherhood 'late' (even later and later). As evidence of this change, the fertility rate in the 20-24 and 25-29 age groups had fallen from the beginning of the eighties, and it had increased in the 30-34 age group.²² The proportion of marriages for women under 20 had more than halved between 1971 and 1986.²³ And women's

labour market participation had correspondingly increased in this period.²⁴ This has contributed to an increase in opportunity for women. But there is also a sense in which it has just postponed for women the problems they have always faced in combining paid employment with unpaid childrearing.

Marriage or Motherhood as the Site of Women's Oppression?

One of the questions raised by the data (as well as by feminist sociology) is whether the 'problem' for women is marriage or motherhood. Was Janet (50) disadvantaged on divorce at 50 because of having been married or having been a mother, or both? Was Jackie (19) really 'liberated' by her decision not to marry but to be a 'young' mother? Some women regarded it as both, and as we have seen, they usually go together: motherhood with marriage. But in its own right, marriage has been regarded as exploitative of women and women's position in marriage described as subordinate. Furthermore, marriage has been perceived by women in this study as a source of loss of identity, loss of opportunity for self-realisation and disadvantage in the labour market (even when women have continued in employment after marriage). Jackie (19) and the other two Afro-Caribbean women interviewed had not married and believed that the 'problem' was marriage, that it was marriage rather than motherhood which was most oppressive to them.

At the same time, many women identified motherhood as the source of their difficulties: removing them from the labour market either

permanently or for a period of time, returning them to part-time work, or requiring a double shift of full time mothering with full time employment, putting them in a position of being simultaneously dependent and depended upon, their work as mothers isolated, unpaid and unvalued, their identity valued negatively in motherhood, the experience for some a disappointment in relation to their conditioned expectations. In this context, some feminist theorists have come 'to hypothesise the universality of childbearing and childcare as the primary social activity of women, 'and to trace universal subordination to that cause'.²⁵ Chodorow, for example:

... believes that the fact that women, and women only, are responsible for childcare in the sexual division of labour has led to an entire social organisation of gender inequality.²⁶

In this perspective, motherhood rather than marriage is regarded as the site of women's subordination. According to Dworkin:

Women are interchangeable as sex objects, women are slightly less disposable as mothers. The only dignity and value women get is as mothers: it is a compromised dignity and a low value, but it is all that is offered to women as women.²⁷

Dworkin also points out that:

In fact, having children may mean both increased violence and increased dependence; it may significantly worsen the economic circumstances of a woman or a family; it may hurt a woman's health or jeopardise her in a host of other ways.²⁸

The experience of the Older Women's Group confirmed some aspects of the loss associated with motherhood:

Ros: It takes chunks out of your life, if you've got children,
(44) doesn't it? And that is ageing ... you have to dedicate so much of your life. As a woman you can be a woman to the point that you have children. Then you're a mother before you are a woman, during the period that you have children, and then you become a woman again, a woman who has aged. I've had to wait 17 years to become a woman again. It's like a 17 year chunk out of my life.

Alison: What with the pressures of finance and children, most younger
(60) women, especially working class women, don't have the time to look nice and young and pretty. They are in the period - of hibernation - possibly the worst period of their lives. A period of exhaustion. And it's only once you start to come out of that stage, that you can begin taking an interest ... if you have other things in your life to boost you. Then you can take an interest in your own appearance and what other people think of you. Some never come out of that, others do.

At the same time, there is the paradox acknowledged by Dworkin that:

... having children is the one social contribution credited to women - it is the bedrock of women's social worth.²⁹

Although motherhood can be and often is deeply rewarding and satisfying, it - like femininity and marriage - can also be short-lived. Motherhood is a socially constructed set of attitudes, beliefs and behaviour which can reward women in the short term (although not, as we have seen, without penalty) while simultaneously disadvantaging them in the long term. Dworkin sees marriage as the institution that guarantees the control of women's reproductive 'powers'.

... for women, life is in the uterus; and the well-being of women - economic, social, sexual - depends on what the value of the uterus is, how it will be used and by whom, whether or not it will be protected and why. Whatever her race or class - however much she is privileged or hated for

one or both - a woman is reducible to her uterus. This is the essence of her political condition as a woman.³⁰

According to Dworkin, 'having children is the only edge women have on survival at the hands of men ... without reproduction, women as a class have nothing.'³¹ If this is the case, women would have nothing and be nothing when they are no longer able to reproduce, or if they were not regarded as fit to reproduce. Within this system, women past menopause, older women, old women would - in its logic and terms of reference - have no value. Dworkin refers to laws 'intended to keep select women having babies and to destroy women who are too old to reproduce' (or 'too poor or too black').³²

Old women do not have babies: they have outlived their husbands, there is no reason to value them.³³

Motherhood and Downward Social Mobility

'There are', says Peace, 'harsh constraints to those who fall outside the norm' of marriage and childrearing.³⁴ But there are also harsh constraints for those who conform. There is, for example, the consistent pattern of downward social mobility on motherhood, evidence of which has been provided by the data in this study. 22 of the 26 mothers had been educationally and occupationally upwardly mobile before motherhood and became downwardly mobile on and during motherhood, as their labour market potential was affected negatively by motherhood. Table 9 shows the pattern of employment for each woman in the sample in relation to marriage and motherhood. In this table, the women are categorised occupationally according to their

own occupations before marriage, and then according to their employment status (part-time, full time or economically inactive) after marriage and motherhood. In earlier generations there were social class differences with regard to employment after marriage: middle class women more likelier to continue to work full time after marriage, to stop work after having children and then to return eventually to part-time and full time work. The working class women in the earlier generations in this sample were likelier to have stopped full time work on marriage, the rest on motherhood. But younger women were likelier to have continued paid employment after marriage and the results of the DOE/OPCS national survey of women's employment showed that by 1980 marital status had no effect at all on whether women worked, only whether they worked full time or part time. Married women were likelier to work part time.³⁵ And regardless of social class, the employment of all women was either interrupted or reduced from full to part time when they had children.

The national survey of women's employment in 1980 also found that 'most women leave the labour market for several years following childbirth': 'that the presence of dependent children has a major effect on the economic activity of many women that 'the presence of children, and the age of the youngest child were by far the most important determinants of whether or not women work'.³⁶ Furthermore, women with children under 16 were 'more likely to be working part time than full time'. Thus 84% of women without children were working in 1980 (78% full time and 6% part time) compared to 27% of women with children under five (7% full time and 20% part time). And

while there was an increase in the proportion of women with primary school aged children (5-10) working to 64%, the majority of these (48%) were working part time. And while 76% of mothers of secondary school children (11-15) were working, still the majority (45%) were working part time.³⁷

Both Cunnison and Wimbush have also identified the change of status and downward mobility of women when they became mothers:

Most women leave full time employment, returning usually to part-time work when the children go to school.³⁸

Cunnison identifies three working lives of women - first from school til marriage, second in settling down with a partner and the birth of children ('childcare and housework'), and third when children leave home.³⁹

The occupational downward mobility of women as mothers is described by Wimbush:

The early years of motherhood are a stage in women's lives characterised by major transitions in their employment profiles. The majority of women withdraw from the labour force just before their first baby is born and when they return it is often on a part-time basis.⁴⁰

Women were also often downwardly mobile within the labour market on returning to work after having children. Thus Martin and Roberts found that 51% had changed occupational level on returning to work and of these 37% had moved down in occupational status. Half of the majority who returned to part time work returned to a lower occupational level.⁴¹ The longer women stayed out of the labour market after having children, the likelier they would be to return to part-time work.⁴² At each later stage, opportunities in employment usually become more limited in choice, in challenge and remuneration.

This pattern of downward mobility was clearly evident in this sample. Most of the women (22 of 26) were occupationally downwardly mobile on motherhood. In their mothers' generation there was a similar but more pronounced pattern of downward mobility on motherhood, as well as decisive downward mobility on marriage. (See Table 6).

What is perhaps so constantly confusing in trying to identify the source of women's oppression is to look only at the content (ie women as wives, women as mothers) in isolation and in the short term: separate from chronology, the life course, the life cycle. Women move in and out of motherhood. It is, as marriage often is, a short-term occupation. Furthermore, both marriage and motherhood are related to women's economic subordination in society. Ultimately the question of whether it is marriage or motherhood which is the 'problem' for women cannot be answered without reference to women's relation to the labour market, without looking at the inter-relationship of marriage, motherhood, and 'work' both in time and over time, within a life course perspective.

III. WOMEN'S RELATION TO 'WORK'

Women constitute 40% of the labour force. 20% of households have a female breadwinner. 52% of mothers with dependent children are economically active. 74% of married women work.⁴³ But the work that women do in paid employment is low status, sex-stereotyped work, where women:

... typically carry out dull, repetitive, badly paid jobs which offer them few prospects for advancement. These jobs are concentrated in a relatively small number of industries, so that they are often identifiable as 'women's work' and are considered less productive and important than other types of work. Women's work is found in service industries, in certain manufacturing industries such as food, drink, clothing, textiles and footwear, and in shops and hairdressing. Women are also employed for cooking, cleaning and serving food. Many women work part-time, and the hours which they work often bear a close relation to the age and number of their dependent children. Lowest-paid of all women workers are those who work at home, again because of their dependent children; these include childminders and homeworkers for industry.⁴⁴

Not only is the work available to women low status, it is also low-paid. At their highest, women's earnings have only been 75% of men's.⁴⁵ In some occupations, it is as low as 50.1% of men's (selling) and is generally relatively lowest in the manual trades (product packaging 63.8%, catering, cleaning, hairdressing 69%). In managerial and professional occupations, women's earnings are also relatively lower than men's (61.8% and 63% respectively).⁴⁶ In 1987 women's weekly earnings were only 66% of men's.⁴⁷

Part-time work is particularly low-paid and low status. The majority of part-time workers are women.⁴⁸ 9 out of 10 part-timers

are female and 44% of the female workforce work part-time.⁴⁹ Often 'identical work is paid at a worse hourly rate if done part-time rather than full-time'.⁵⁰ Part-time workers (less than 16 hours) are not entitled to redundancy payments, claims against unfair dismissal and most maternity benefits.

Part-time work is located in the unskilled or semi-skilled occupations which are most available to women. Women's 'role' as wife and mother and the absence of sufficient or satisfactory childcare facilities means that many women are only free to work part-time while rearing children: 20% of married women with children under five work part-time while only 7% work full-time.⁵¹ Of married women with children over 5, 44% work part-time while only 20% work full-time.⁵² In addition, about a quarter of a million women are 'home workers', even more exploited and less-protected than other part-time workers. The most recent research confirms this pattern of women's work and this position of women in the workforce.⁵³

Interestingly, while there has been an increase in the proportion of women who work during the decade of feminism, there have been no significant changes in the structure of the workforce, and women still do not have access to the high status, well-paid position of power and influence either in the public or the private sector.⁵⁴ The Department of Employment/OPCS survey in 1980 found women concentrated predominantly in a few occupations mostly in the service sector, and that this had 'remained relatively stable over the last fifteen years'. Three quarters of all clerical workers were

women and 70% of women were working part-time in manual service jobs.⁵³ The data in the study is consistent with the statistics on women's position in the labour market, and the market situation of women generally.

Education for the Female Chronology

There was evidence in this study that whatever education or employment they eventually managed to achieve, the women interviewed were initially systematically 'directed' towards 'careers' of marriage and/or motherhood and away from paid employment, or the pursuit of 'careers', or positions of power and influence 'in the public sphere': away from the pursuit of their ambition, from self-realisation and the achievement of their own goals. They were under-educated and/or they under-achieved in the education system - no matter how 'clever' and academically able they were. They were often directed *into* low-status, low-paid (clerical, secretarial) work or into 'women's work' (the 'caring' professions, particularly teaching). The would-be doctors and lawyers and artists became teachers: an important job, but one of the 'caring' professions regarded as suitable for women, the 'women's work' with its lower pay and its lower status.

Of the girls 'who did eventually go on to further or higher education (and were therefore apparently succeeding and achieving), few of them did what they 'really wanted to do', but something regarded as more suitable by their parents or (by that time) even themselves.

Julie (45) who had wanted to go to university, but whose 'father forbade it' went to the local technical college and obtained secretarial qualifications. Miriam (38) had wanted to go to art school ('I was very good at art'). Her mother: 'persuaded me that I must go to university and get a degree, then I could decide afterwards if I really wanted to do art. She said I had a flair for languages, which is nonsense'. Jean (35) My mother used to say to me when I was about 9, you'll be a pharmacist when you grow up, you have to be educated for the job'. Her mother died when she was 11, but Jean thought this ambition (a high and un-stereotyped female expectation) was 'something important she gave me'. Her father and her stepmother, however, took the more traditional line:

Jean (35) My stepmother used to say, 'When I left school at 16 I became a hairdresser and I was never a worry to my parents'. And I remember my father saying - it's no use you going to university because you'll just get married'. So I thought I wouldn't get much help from either, and I guess that is why I left home at 16.

For the majority, it was their parents *as well* as the education system who positively discouraged ('forbade', refused to allow) their pursuit of further and higher education or professional training and careers or the pursuit of artistic ambitions. Parental injunctions such as 'what you need my girl is a house and kids, never mind all this bloody education' or 'women are only good for breeding, to sleep with, and at the age of 40, shoot the lot', (Ruth's father), are simply the most explicit expressions of the prevailing attitudes and expectations. While these women appear to have chosen marriage and motherhood in preference to a career, in almost every case, the women

were presented with an either/or choice: either education and employment (career) or marriage and/or motherhood. They felt that the expectations with regard to the female chronology were in opposition to the expectations of the education system, that there was a fundamental contradiction in compliance with both. They felt they were valued more for being sexually attractive and successfully feminine than for being 'brainy' and academically successful.

Women's future value as wives and mothers is mirrored in the classroom.

Girls are actually faced with the task of deciding whether to opt for reduced achievement, and gain popularity (with, of course, the accompanying reduction in educational attainment, in employment prospects and in financial independence) or whether to opt for maximised achievement and disapproval (and the threat within the prevailing ideology of a lonely and unattractive existence). This is a conflict which is not experienced by male students for whom there is no incompatibility between achievement and popularity. It will not have escaped the attention of either girls or boys that men who do well in the world's terms have little difficulty in finding a partner, whereas women who do well in the same terms are frequently portrayed as partnerless.⁴⁶

Academic achievement is often regarded not as a positive choice for girls and valued, but the only option for girls who fail as a successfully feminine female:

Miriam Having failed with boys, I now turned to a lot of reading, a lot of interest in art and music and philosophy and politics. (38) Because of this I attracted to myself some very clever girls, they sought me out although I was still a silent mouse.

At the same time, **Miriam** confessed to really 'only wanting to attract

boys' for her identity and value as a female depended on it. Although she was 'clever', her intelligence, ability and achievements did not hold such high value.

Karen (15) thought there was a 'miscalculation' between her life as a young woman and the education system. What is often obscured is 'that young women are making transitions through the sexual and marriage markets as well as through labour markets, and that they have to balance social and financial pressures in the hope of getting a good job and a boyfriend or husband'.⁵⁷ The other reality obscured by the conditioning is that women are likely to combine marriage, motherhood and paid work *over time*. Most of the women in this sample had moved in and out of marriage, in and out of motherhood and in and out of full time and part time paid employment at different stages in their lives.

The feeling that women had to choose between work and family, that the 'choices' were conditioned and that there was considerable loss - in time, with age - whatever the choice was reflected in the Older Women's Group: There was overwhelming evidence of abandoned ambitions, lowered expectations, 'limited' education, educational under-achievement, education for 'women's work', education for marriage and motherhood, peer and parental pressures away from work careers and into the careers of marriage and motherhood. Lauren (61) was an example of educational under-achievement:

Lauren I worked hard during term, but could not pass exams. So could
(61) not stay at school after I was 15. My first couple of jobs were in dull offices in uninspiring districts. Eventually I

got a better job at John Lewis's where I made progress through their enlightened attitude to helping younger.

She later returned to 'adult education', became a highly cultured woman and worked in publishing. Eve (72) was an example of 'abandoned ambition', abandoning her artistic career from marriage at 23 to widowhood at 62.

The power of the female chronology is more powerful than the dreams of women. Young women would appear to survive early childhood socialisation with some personal ambitions intact. It is as if they are kept in ignorance of the full implications of femininity and being a successful female. The limitations they face are obscured, and come later as a painful surprise. Parents are then influential in crushing the hopes, the dreams and even the plans that may have survived. And the institutionalised sexism of the educational system makes its contribution. Brenda was one of its victims:

Brenda (23) My ambition was to be a doctor, but by the 6th Form it had gone by the board, because I'd gone and done the arts subjects - even though I knew I was doing the wrong things. My maths were bad then, but that is just because they taught the boys' half of the room. I decided now I'd end up doing English or something at university.

There is a passage from 'under-achievement' in higher education to under-representation in the higher grades in institutional employment, in high status positions of power and influence.⁵⁸ Is this a choice? Is a 'choice' determined by parent and peer pressure, still a choice? Is a 'choice' made after a process of systematic conditioning still a 'choice'?

The Economic Necessity of Marriage

From this information it is possible to conclude that women are conditioned and educated away from full, active and equal participation in the labour market, and also that the labour market does not present an attractive proposition in economic terms to women as a group, in spite of their sizeable participation in it and in spite of the 'success' of a small proportion of individual women in overcoming the obstacles of low status, low-paid work. By contrast, marriage may look a very attractive alternative in economic as well as social terms. Because the emphasis is always on the emotional dimension of marriage, the economic reasons for and benefits of marriage as a 'career' for women are often obscured. Hamilton in 1909 argued that marriage was the only *economically viable trade for women*.⁵⁹

At the turn of the century, when women's participation in the labour market was limited, marriage often was the only economically viable career. Seventy years later, marriage is usually regarded a matter of the heart. This however, has been questioned by feminist sociologists. Leonard has noted the emphasis on the 'social importance of marriage', but concluded that 'marriage is also an *economic necessity for most women*'.⁶⁰ Finch has argued that marriage makes good economic sense for women as well as noting that social life is organised to make compliance easy.⁶¹ Delphy has gone a stage further in suggesting that it is *because* of 'discrimination against women' in the labour market and 'their exclusion' from economic power, that marriage is an economic necessity for women:

While ordinarily it is seen as the 'family situation' which influences the capacity of women to work 'outside', I have tried to show that it is the situation created for women in the labour market which constitutes an objective incentive to marry, and hence that the labour market plays a role in the exploitation of their domestic work.⁶²

Or put conversely:

Arguably, discrimination in the labour market exists only to turn and return women to marriage, precisely in so far as marriage constitutes their objectively most profitable, or least bad 'career' (ideologically: their 'destiny', their 'whole existence').⁶³

As evidence of this, Delphy demonstrates the priority marriage exerts over paid work in the ascription of social class for women: that women are allocated a social class category according to the employment of their husbands (or fathers) even when they are themselves in paid employment. Their existence and *identity* is thus defined as wives (and daughters), rather than as workers.⁶⁴

'The super-exploitation of *all* women in wage work', says Delphy, 'is determined by the domestic situation of *most* women' (i.e. in marriage) and 'constitutes an economic pressure towards marriage'.⁶⁵ If we consider the life stories discussed so far from this sample, discount any elements of conditioning and 'desire', and look only at the economic element, it is possible to say in every case that there were indeed economic advantages in marriage, in achieving higher social and economic status and escape from low paid, low status work.

This was particularly evident in Debbie's (40) case. Although she eventually went on to higher education and academic work after marriage, before marriage she had been pushed both by parents and school into office work. Or in the case of Lauren (61) working in 'dull office jobs'. Or Jean (35) who left home at 16 to do factory work. Or Eve (72) whose father refused to pay for her artistic education.

The economic advantages of marriage were also evident in the situations of women who were left by their husbands in their late 40s and 50s, when they found themselves economically disqualified in the field of employment and sexually disqualified from the opportunity of remarriage (and thereby regaining the economic base - and security - of marriage again). Indeed, the position of women in divorce at any age or stage, according to Delphy, is evidence of the economic incentives for women in the institution of marriage:

... Not only is marriage the necessary condition for divorce, but also that divorce is not inconsistent with marriage. For while a divorce signifies the end of a marriage ... it by no means implies the end of *marriage* as an institution.⁶⁶

Dworkin, like Delphy, sees discrimination in the labour market as making marriage a more attractive economic proposition:

They are worth more in the house than outside it ... In marriage, sex labour is rewarded: the woman is generally 'given' more than she herself could earn at a job.⁶⁷

Dworkin does not see women as a group being 'sexually and economically independent' through work outside the home' because 'women are paid too little'.

The Appropriation of Women's Work

Delphy identifies another paradox in the relationship of marriage to paid employment. There are economic advantages to marriage for women, relative to the labour market, but there are also disadvantages to marriage in economic terms:

My proposition is that marriage is the institution by which unpaid work is extorted from a particular category of the population, women-wives. This work is unpaid for, it does not give rise to a wage but simply to upkeep ... The fact that domestic work is unpaid is not inherent to the particular type of work done, since when the same tasks are done *outside the family* they are paid for. The work acquires value - is remunerated - as long as the woman furnishes it to people to whom she *is not related or married*. The valuelessness of domestic work performed by married women derives institutionally from the marriage contract, which is in fact a work contract.⁶²

It is this appropriation of women's labour in marriage, caused by discrimination in the labour market which is, suggests Delphy, the economic basis for women's oppression. There is thus a dual economic basis to sexual inequality: sex discrimination in employment and the appropriation of women's work in marriage.

Delphy argues further that the extent to which some of women's 'labour power' is also diverted into paid work (as well as into household work) proves beyond any doubt that the 'marriage work' is

indeed appropriated, for it (unlike their other paid work) is 'given for nothing', i.e. it has some value in the labour market and no value in marriage (except to the husband).⁶⁹ Furthermore, it is not because women are 'naturally' mothers that their childrearing work is 'liable to be exploited', but 'rather that because their work is appropriated, women must raise children for nothing'.⁷⁰

Thus, motherhood, far from being a natural fact giving birth to exploitation, is a social construction created by exploitation.⁷¹

If this is a correct analysis, then it would certainly provide an economic explanation for the fact that marriage and motherhood go together for most women without any real thought or choice or decision.

Thus, also in Delphy's view, marriage is simultaneously the source of women's economic betterment and the site of women's oppression because of its appropriation of her labour. This paradox has been identified also by others. Bird and West suggest that 'husbands not children' are the problem for women in paid employment, that marriage not childrearing has the greatest influence on the "continuity and direction of women's employment"⁷² and Finch argues that it is marriage itself and not just child-bearing that is an important feature of 'women's subordination'.⁷³ This she concluded from the study of women's contribution to their husband's work (a very clear case of appropriation of labour, if the element of 'love' is removed).

The appropriation of women's labour in marriage could account for why women find being 'just a housewife and mother' so frustrating, boring and unsatisfying. For Delphy defines what a wife and mother does not as a *role* but as *work*, and *unpaid work* as well. She distinguishes between the *tasks* which can be and indeed are often performed on the labour market as paid work, often by the very women who perform them at home unpaid. She argues that it is not the work itself which is demoralising, but the conditions under which it is carried out: its isolation, its valuelessness, the fact that it is done for 'men', for 'free' (the relations within which it is carried out).

In one study, 75% of housewives found their work to be monotonous as compared with 41% of factory workers.⁷⁴ The actual work being compared in this study was similar in terms of the tasks being carried out. It could therefore only be the *conditions* of work of housewives which made their work worse: the lack of pay, the lack of value, the isolation, the appropriation, the exploitation. When the 'role' of 'housewife' is no longer abstracted from the economic system, it becomes 'housework': unpaid work, not a vocation; labour, not a labour of love; exploitation rather than a 'role' or a 'responsibility' or an 'identity'.

This will also be true with regard to the work of mothering as carried out within marriage, and may account for why single parent women, who are doing the work of childrearing on their own, often in poverty, actually experience their work of childrearing as more satisfying and less oppressive than when they were married.⁷⁵ The

high incidence of depression amongst women with children may also be explained by the conditions in which the work is carried out. It may explain why marriage and motherhood literally drive women 'mad': ie depressed.

Regardless therefore of the qualities of any individual relationship, the fact that the marriage contract requires women to work without pay for men and children is a situation of structured inequality and subordination and therefore a source of frustration and dissatisfaction, depression and even fury. At the beginning of the century, Hamilton had identified this paradox of women's oppression within marriage:

I hold, and hold very strongly, that the narrowing down of women's hopes and ambitions to the sole pursuit and sphere of marriage is one of the principal causes of the various disabilities, economic and otherwise, under which she labours today.⁷⁶

The very fact that it is work is often obscured for women by the fact that it is 'for men' (a labour of love) and performed in the marriage relationship. Not only is it unpaid work, but the hours are long. A study of 40 urban housewives showed that of those women with children, none carried out less than 50 hours of housework per week and most were averaging 70-90 hours per week,⁷⁷ Women who do paid work outside the home still do most of the housework: Martin and Roberts found that 54% of wives working full time ... did all or most of the housework, whilst 77% of wives working part time said this'.⁷⁸ 99% of men never cleaned the lavatory.⁷⁹ Men seldom scrubbed the kitchen floor, ironed, spring-cleaned or scoured the cooker. And

surveys in Britain, France and the USA all agreed that in the vast majority of homes it was still women who took overall responsibility for running the household, even when each partner had a full time job.⁸⁰ So, 'housework is still women's work, despite the willingness of some husbands to help out with peripheral things.⁸⁴ It has been estimated by the business world that if the tasks that women carry out as housewives and mothers were 'valued' on the labour market, they would be earning in the region of £20,000 per annum. Martin and Roberts concluded that:

... the vast proportion of domestic and caring work which has to be done in our society is done by women, is unpaid, and affects women's ability or willingness to compete as workers on equal terms with men.⁸²

The Economic and Social Construction of Love

Perhaps most revealing of all is the new perspective that an economic analysis of marriage provides on what is regarded as the separate and (again) 'natural' sphere of emotion or feeling. If marriage is an economic necessity for women, then it is either extremely convenient that women 'naturally' fall in love so that they can marry: or 'falling in love', unlikely as it may seem, is, like motherhood, at least in part, also a social construction. Firestone argues that 'in reality, a woman is never free to choose love without ulterior motives': i.e. economic motives:

It takes one's major energy for the best portion of one's creative years to 'make a good catch', and a good part of the rest of one's life to 'hold' that catch. ('To be in love can be a full-time job for a woman, like that of a profession for a

man).³³

Delphy notes the effects of structural inequality and power on 'love relationships', which operate independent of the individuals in any relationship. Leonard also discovered this in her sample of young women in South Wales whose freedom to enjoy any given relationship in the present was constrained by the need to see each new relationship 'in terms of its possible future':

... when one ought to do things (the right age to marry) and when one can afford to do things.³⁴

Basically, young women can not 'afford' *not* to fall in love (because of the economic necessity to marry). There is therefore, whatever else there may also be, an economic motive to this emotional experience. There is also an economic base to the age of marriage: for neither can a young woman 'afford' to be 'too late' about this 'business' of 'falling in love' and marrying. Her livelihood and status are at stake.

Age of Marriage and the Economy

The 'age at marriage' has varied historically, largely in relation to economic factors. Bernard, has noted that 'the marriage rate has been closely related to economic factors'.³⁵ Thus, in the 17th century, sons did not marry until they could establish themselves economically independent of their parents:

This pattern of marriage was associated with a high average age at marriage for women (mid to late twenties), a small age difference between husband and wife (less than five years), and a sizeable proportion of the male and female population never marrying at all.⁸⁶

Leonard points out that the wage labour system in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, meant 'earlier marriage' and that after the First World War, there was 'a decrease in the age of marriage of all classes'. At the same time 'while the economic system affected the marriage pattern, the marriage pattern also influenced the economic system': thus, young women 'entered the labour market for a time before they had responsibility for childbearing and rearing and the domestic servicing of a husband'.⁸⁷ Bernard identified this pattern:

In the past practically all of the labour force participation of women came before marriage and motherhood. Now most of it comes after marriage and even after motherhood.⁸⁸

Thus, the *timing* of paid work has also changed in relation to marriage and motherhood.

These changes had become dramatically apparent in the 1980 national survey of women's employment. More women were working between marriage and the birth of their first child (88% in the 1970s compared with 62% in the 1940s).⁸⁹ More women were returning to work within six months after their first birth: between 1975 and 1979 half had returned within 3.7 years after their first birth compared with 9.2 years in 1950-54.⁹⁰ And there had been a steep rise in the labour

market participation of women in their thirties and forties since the 1960s.²¹

There are also pressures to marry in order to acquire the status of an 'adult' which is attached to marriage as with the case of **Mary** (18). For both men and women, marriage is an opportunity to leave home and to establish an independent life. For young women, 'grown up status' can be very much related to having a relationship with a male, or being married, or having children. In Leonard's study:

The group of women and girls with whom they work is significantly differentiated in terms of age, and many already have boyfriends, fiances or husbands. Status within this group depends on age and 'success' (committed relationships) with boys/men. Lacking, therefore, both the status and the support that the school peer group gives, the sixteen year old girl seeks a permanent relationship with a member of the opposite sex.²²

Many of the women in this study also mentioned peer pressure and **Mary** (18) made it quite clear that she was marrying to escape from home, to be treated with the respect accorded to adults.

Leonard identified other age factors related to marriage. For example, in order to 'marry at the right time', lengths of courtship have systematically varied:

Thus I found that girls who at the age of fourteen started to go out regularly with the boy they eventually married, married on average six years later; those who started at the age of seventeen married three years later; and those who commenced the relationship at eighteen married two years later.²³

The average age at marriage in Leonard's Welsh study was 21. The

average age of marriage in this study was 21.9. Statistics show a shift between 1971 and 1986 in the average age of marriage for women from 22 to 24 and for men from 24 to 26. (There was also a substantial shift in that period in the average age at birth of first child from women from 23 to age 26).³⁵ These changes were a response to women's increased participation in the labour market which meant, in Delphy's terms, that women were less dependent on the economic benefits of marriage. The later average age at birth of first child was in response to the availability of the contraceptive pill. Women's increasing responsibility for mortgages and family expenditure has also been shown to have influenced the timing of children. A study in 1989 found women 'locked into mortgages' and 'feeling they could not give up work to have children'.³⁶ The influence of feminism, encouraging women's economic and emotional independence, will also have affected changes in the age of marriage and birth of first child.

Enforced Economic Dependency

Marriage is thus a system which enhances the status of women and which may offer a 'better deal' than the labour market as a 'career', but in which women's work is unpaid and unvalued and in which women are therefore exploited. Thus, paradoxically, however low women's economic value may be in the market place, it is in a sense even lower in marriage and motherhood because of the conditions under which the work is done: not only low pay or no pay, but dependency and isolation. There is a lack of autonomous identity and limited opportunity for personal fulfillment outside the roles of wife and

mother. It should come as no surprise to find women feeling constrained in marriage, given the economic dependency and the exploitation and appropriation of their labour within it. Women would not have to be aware of this or to understand why they felt trapped: the concrete, material, structural conditions of the relations of marriage as an institution (regardless of any two individuals in any single marriage) are in reality a constraint on women and would therefore give rise to the feelings women expressed of frustration and lack of fulfilment.

The enforced economic dependency of women in marriage - and what it means - was illustrated by Evelyn (68) who had worked in a factory from leaving school at 14, and then as a single mother through her 20s until after 30 she had married: 'settled ... settled for that ... mainly always because of Leigh ... To see the pleasure of Leigh with John put a full stop to anything I might have done relative to branching out'. When she married, she stopped work: it was 'the done thing at the time'. Giving her daughter a father 'compensated' for the loss of independence in work, but in her mind there was no doubt it was a loss: it was 'a *bad* thing' because it made her 'absolutely dependent'; 'I had an allowance, an inadequate allowance, as you can guess, and was absolutely dependent'. She later returned to work and influenced by feminism through her daughter, she had come to see how her life had been limited. She felt it was too late for her to make major changes in her own life and instead supported her daughter to live independently and to pursue her ambitions as an actress. The

support was both emotional and practical. She took over a major responsibility for raising her grandson when her daughter divorced.

Other women in this sample also spoke eloquently about both the economic and emotional dependency of marriage:

Jean Conventional marriage functions best for women when they have
 (35) to be totally dependent on the man. And as soon as I had another interest I couldn't care about him. So the less you have to depend on them the less you need them. Mainly emotionally. So when I thought I was questioning my marriage I would make myself dependent on him, close myself off, channel myself emotionally towards him.

Influenced by feminism, Jean eventually 'channelled herself away' from heterosexuality altogether, and into a return to education.

Frances (39) said she 'started to become a person through working for things I wanted myself'. Work freed her from dependency:

Frances I was rebelling against my husband from very early on,
 (39) because he didn't like it at all that I was working: he wanted me dependent on him, financially and emotionally. I was becoming more and more independent through working. Then I decided to go to college, and that was another big step forward. When I trained to be a teacher I was going to be able to get quite a good salary. And I was getting more and more independent and financially more viable.

Eventually, she (like Jean) left her husband and children in an effort to break free. Bernard describes 'non-employed housewives at all income levels', feeling degraded by the unilateral control of their monetary resources. She found that:

... desire for escape from such humiliating conditions was found, in fact, to be a major motive or reward among blue-collar and

service workers for entering the labour force ... The benefits of paid employment outweigh the benefits of homemaking.⁹⁷

Ironically, discrimination in the labour market is less oppressive than the conditions of work in marriage. Any paid work would therefore serve to get women out from under the economic and emotional oppression of marriage and offer a positive identity as well as economic independence. It should come as no surprise then to find married women seeking higher value and higher status in paid employment, even in the low valued areas of 'women's work'. This was certainly the case for the majority of women in this sample whose strategies are discussed in Chapter Seven. One of the most important influences of feminism in this period was its analysis of women's oppression in marriage and motherhood, its encouragement of women's labour participation as an avenue of women's liberation and the enactment of sex discrimination legislation to make direct and indirect discrimination in employment unlawful and to legislate for equal pay.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER FOUR.

1. Archer, J. & Lloyd, B. (1982), p. 152. Other studies put the figure at 90 per cent. Leonard, D. (1980), p. 6.
2. Byrne, E. (1978), p. 71.
3. Bernard, J. (1971), pp. 146-148.
4. Archer, J. & Lloyd, B., op. cit., p. 153.
5. Ibid.
6. Leonard, D., op. cit., p. 72.
7. Ibid.
8. Martin, J. and Roberts, C. (1984), p. 13.
9. OPCS (1989)
10. Ibid, (1989).
11. Thompson, P. Itzin, C. and Abendstern, M. (1990). A study of old age based on a random national sample showed that those couples who had followed the traditional sexual division of labour in their marriages were most unsatisfied with their marriages and their lives in old age.
12. Leonard, D. op. cit., p. 6.
13. Allatt, P. & Keil, T. (1987), p. 8, and OPCS 1981. Figures from OPF (One Parent Families), 1988.
14. One Parent Families (1989).
15. Ibid.
16. Bernard, J. (1975), p. 72.
17. Bernard, J. (1981), pp. 164-165.
18. Martin, J. and Roberts C., op. cit. pp. 13-15.
19. Ibid, p. 78.
20. Ibid, p. 191.
21. HMSO, (1988) p. 5.
22. Ibid, p. 8.
23. Ibid, p. 5.

24. Martin and Roberts, op. cit., p. 13.
25. Tilly, Louise (1975), p. 163.
26. Quoted in Rich, A. (1981), p. 7.
27. Dworkin, A. (1983), p. 143.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Dworkin, A. (1983), p. 150.
31. Ibid, p. 146.
32. Ibid, p. 151.
33. Ibid, p. 153.
34. Peace, S. (1981), p. 30.
35. Martin, J. & Roberts, C (1984) p. 123.
36. Ibid, p. 123.
37. IBID, p. 13 and Itzin, C. (1989). This was the finding of the University of Essex/ESRC Families & Social Mobility project presented in its report on 'Gender and Social Mobility.'
38. Cunnison, S. op. cit.
39. IBID.
40. Wimbush, E. (1987) pp. 151-152.
41. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 152.
42. IBID, p. 128.
43. Family Finances (1984), Fact Sheet 4, Family Policy Studies Centre.
44. Archer, J. & Lloyd, B., op. cit., p. 178.
45. HMSO, op. cit. p. 45.
46. Equal Opportunities Commission (1987-88).
47. HMSO, op. cit. p. 47.
48. Sedley, A. (1983), p. 3.
49. Labour Force Survey (1981); Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 17..

50. Sanders, D. (1982), p. 83.
51. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 14.
52. General Household Survey (1984).
53. Beechey, V. & Perkins, T. (1987); Allen, S. & Wolkowitz, C. (1987).
54. EOC 1988/89.
55. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 32.
56. Spender, D. (1980), p. 151.
57. Allatt and Keil (1987), p. 5.
58. Spender, D. and Sarah, L. (1982) pp. 40-42; Stanworth, M. (1983).
59. Hamilton, C. (1907), p. 17.
60. Leonard, D. (1980), p. 5.
61. Finch, J. (1983).
62. Delphy, C. (1984), p. 20.
63. Ibid, p. 116.
64. Ibid, p. 28. See Chapter 2 on the Social Classification of Women.
65. Delphy, C. (1980), p. 94.
66. Delphy, C. (1984), p. 94.
67. Dworkin, A., op. cit. p. 64.
68. Delphy, op. cit. pp. 94-95.
69. Ibid, p. 95.
70. Delphy, C. (1980), p. 95.
71. Ibid.
72. Bird, E. and West, J. (1987), p. 9.
73. Finch, J. op. cit.
74. Oakley, A., op. cit. p. 87.
75. Itzin, C. (1980).

76. Hamilton, C., op. cit. p. 22.
77. Oakley, A. (1974), p. 93.
78. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 114.
79. IBID, p. 28.
80. HMSO, op. cit. p. 5.
81. Sharpe, S., (1981), p. 223.
82. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 115.
83. Firestone, S. (1979), p. 128.
84. Leonard, D., op. cit., p. 72.
85. Bernard, J. (1981), p. 155.
86. Leonard, D., op. cit., p. 7.
87. Ibid, p. 8.
88. Bernard, J. (1975), p. 102.
89. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 124.
90. IBID, p. 128.
91. IBID, p. 136.
92. Leonard, op. cit.
93. IBID, p. 74.
94. A Gallup Poll carried out for New Woman magazine in July 1989 showed that in Wales women expected to marry and start a family earlier (by age 20) than in other parts of the country (by age 24/25), p. 9.
95. HMSO (1988) p. 8.
96. Mintel (1989).
97. Bernard, J. op. cit., p. 167.

CHAPTER FIVE

AGE AND SEXUALITY: INSTITUTIONALISED HETEROSEXUALITY

I. MALE APPROVAL AND THE SOCIAL CONTROL OF YOUNGER WOMEN

Insofar as marriage is an economic necessity for most women, (as well as being regarded as socially desirable) the very livelihood of women therefore depends on attracting and keeping a man: getting married and staying married. Given the economic imperative, the ideological pressure to marry and the power of the institution of marriage, there is pressure on women to devote an enormous amount of time, attention and money to look attractive to men. For women's most valued social identity is that acquired through relations with men, with a view to marriage. Preoccupation with appearance in these circumstances for women will be understandable and arguably even desirable. It is necessary in these circumstances to 'be' what men want them to be. It is intelligent therefore on a survival level for women to identify themselves in terms of male criteria of sexual objectification. It is also necessary in these circumstances for women to compete with each other for men, and therefore to be divided from and sometimes even divided against each other.

In this competition - where the prize is marriage and motherhood - the criteria for success is either to *be* young and beautiful or to *stay* young and beautiful, or at least to *look* young and beautiful, at every life-stage, as much and for as long as possible. There are, of course, rigid stereotypes which define beauty in a way that most women can never achieve. Appearance usually matters as much or more, than any actual physical attribute of beauty or any other quality of interest or value. In youth, women need to 'look old enough' (to be

sexually viable and sexually available) and that usually means 'trying to look older' in teen years: but not 'too old' (to be sexually viable and sexually available) and that usually means, as women grow older, 'trying to look younger'. As a member of the Older Women's Group put it:

Ros: I remember from the age of fourteen at least to twenty-two (48) I always tried to look older, was always so pleased to be taken for older. Then, although I try to pretend it doesn't worry me now, I've become conscious that perhaps I would like to be taken for younger. So I will have spent the best part of my life not being at all happy with the age that I was. I feel like I've been robbed of my life.

The reason women put such a priority on their appearance is because they have little choice: their very lives - i.e. their livelihoods - can depend on it. Women desperately try to embody a male-defined feminine ideal because survival depends on it.' In a cruelly ironic way, this can become women's only major source of 'power' in society.

Ellie The most important thing that most women have got to offer a (40) man is their looks.

Betty I don't operate on the level of being sexually attractive (28) normally. I'm more concerned with being direct and communicating than operating through being coy or flirting. I'll only resort to those things when it is the last source of power that I have. I think for a lot of women that is all they have and feel that they have - and that's why they are so devastated when they feel they are getting older.

Sexual 'Qualification' & 'Competition' for Men

Accumulating and increasing the 'power' to attract men and to keep a man (ephemeral, arbitrary and transient as this power may be) becomes a major 'investment' for women because of the economic and social opportunities it can buy in the marriage market. What women invest in their appearance represents profit for capitalism. Selling the materials to assist women to look young and beautiful is a multi-million pound a year industry: billions of dollars in the USA.² At the time this research was carried out, £41 million was spent on men's toiletries such as deodorants, colognes, after-shave. In the same period, a total of £424.5 million was spent by women on preparations to make them more youthful and more attractive. £121.5 million on perfumes, £58 million on make-up, £71 million on skin-care, £95 million on hair preparations, £42 million on shampoos, £37 million on other toiletries.³

The data from the life history interviews provides a litany of the teenage attempts to 'look older' and the mid-life attempt to 'look younger' and in every case to look sexually viable.

Ros (48) From age 10 to 11, I dressed to look sexually attractive. I wore jeans and my father's old shirts, but tied them up to look sexy.

At 48, Ros still wore make-up: 'I put on my eyes' because 'it makes me look more beautiful, more sexually attractive'. For most of her life Hilary (64) had felt compelled to spend a lot of money on clothes and a lot of time on her appearance 'for men to be

attracted'. Influenced by a decade of feminism, however, Hilary had let go of the compulsion:

Hilary (64) I have always been very conscious of clothes, had too many clothes - probably still do, but I no longer have this compulsion to buy lots of clothes and to have clothes better than everyone else - and everything matching - it's still important to me, but not a compulsion. Before I seemed to want people to notice me because of what I was wearing - but now this does not matter that much to me - now I want people to be glad because *I* am there. Before I used to take a long time - hours - before going out to get ready. My hair had to be exactly right, my make-up, my clothes - pressed and neat.

Jane (23) started wearing make-up at 15: 'Mascara, blusher. To be much more attractive - I had to try to find a male. I was 15, I didn't want to be on the shelf!' The greatest pressures on her at that time were 'having a boyfriend, getting one, preferably good-looking'. So she dressed to look and 'feel sexy':

Jane (23) Apart from my tigerskin dress and snakeskin 6" platforms to go out, Chelsea Girl clothes - mid-calf skirts, little cardigans, big platforms - I was always falling off them, but they were fashionable and they made me a bit taller.

Influenced by feminism, she had taken to wearing loose fitting clothes and flat shoes.

Karen (15) had been 'sexually active' since the age of 13 when she started to use 'eye-liner and lip gloss' ('because that's what they did on *Charlie's Angels*'). She liked the idea of 'changing the way you look'. Her major concern was being attractive to men, or at her age, boys:

Karen (15) I used to have qualms because, about having a big bum and stubby thighs - I used to be very small, you see. And now I'm not so small. And little tits and I used to think, god, what am I, nobody will - you know, as soon as I take my clothes off this guy will scream right out of the room. I mean, when I was 13 and had a boyfriend it didn't matter, because I wasn't conscious of, you know, what you should be, what shape you should be, I thought I'm OK, I didn't think about it, I just did what I naturally did. And then when I got older - it's this sort of self-conscious thing again - living up to your expectations - I started realising that maybe I wasn't attractive to men. And that of course affected my life totally for a period of about a year. And whereas before I was quite happy, suddenly it dawned on me that, god, this is terrible. And for about a year I was totally inhibited about going to bed with people and things like that. And now I'm totally uninhibited again.

Her self-image - her identity - was determined by what men thought of her. That **Karen** was in fact blonde and blue-eyed and beautiful in the traditionally 'stereotyped' way made her fears all the more poignant - and significant. Even the women most likely to succeed in the competition for men felt insecure and inadequate.

Mary (18) was also acutely anxious about how she looked to men:

Mary (18) Usually I can tell what suits me and what doesn't, and I can ask Stan and he'll tell me the truth - because I don't like to look stupid walking down the road as if I've got something on that doesn't belong to me - I keep asking, do I look all right? Do my shoes look all right? And that.

It is as if the very existence of these young women depends on how men see them, and of course in a sense it does. For them, at their age, feminism had made them aware of their behaviour, but unable to change it. They had too great an investment, they felt, in complying with the female chronology in this way at this stage in their life.

Looking Older and Sexier

Looking older and 'more sophisticated' is an essential part of looking attractive to men in the teen years. Betty (28) started wearing make-up at 12-13 years: 'we would put on make-up because we thought we looked older'. Now she wears make-up (foundation, eye-liner, mascara, eye-shadow, lipstick) when she gets dressed up:

Betty It's part of a ritual of getting dressed to go out - it's (28) like stockings - I hate wearing stockings, it feels like I'm wearing someone else's legs - but it's part of the ritual. And sometimes it's fun, because you can be different: I feel very glamorous. I feel older. I think I look older.

Looking older men getting taken more seriously: and more 'power':

Betty The situations where I wear make-up are when I want to be (28) more assertive - like going to business meetings, going to a conference with Alex, presenting myself as being older - and more powerful. More mature.

She too felt she couldn't afford to abandon the behaviour, but she was very selective about occasions when she needed (for economic reasons) to comply. Generally she wore casual clothes and flat shoes.

Sheila's (38) aim was to look older and sexier:

Sheila I liked to wear what was fashionable, and my mother didn't (38) always approve. My mother made me a straight skirt and I would put tacking stitches down the inside when I got to my friends to make it tight and fashionable, and then take them out again before going home. And high heeled pointed shoes -

winkle pickers - and now I have bunions from that, and a beehive hairstyle.

She did it because 'everyone else did it' and because it was the image presented in magazines:

Sheila I used to feel it would make me beautiful and interesting. I
(38) think I wanted to be sexy, but I was never sure I was, but I thought the clothes etc. enhanced that. I used to try to look older - I didn't want to be thought a child, because children were treated as nothing.

She described herself as having been 'fat' (10 stone): 'I thought I was gross and ugly'. The clothes which were in fashion then 'didn't help': 'those big full skirts with the big belt that you pulled in, and my waist is not small, I'd have to pull it in 'til my eyes bulged'? She was, she said 'just not equipped to deal with the world I was in. Not only did I not have the right body, I was clever and that was considered inappropriate by most of my friends'.

A number of women described trying to look older and 'sexier' by wearing high heels, winkle pickers and stilettos. **Maureen** (38) said: 'I was thrilled when people thought me older, because if you were older you assumed you had more freedom of choice'. She described her stilettos as a mark of the years - 'The older you got, the higher you wore them'.

Debbie As a teenager I wore whatever was the fashion - straight
(40) skirts, sloppy jumpers. High heels - extended points - crippers - stilettos with very long pointed toes, and you

used to have to pad the ends out with cotton wool because they would turn up. I wore them from about 13-14. You just wore them if you were a snappy dresser. They followed from being into boys and the whole bit. They made you look attractive. They crippled your feet, but they made you look sexy.

In every case, the women interviewed indicated that they had learned 'how to look right' (ie suitably sex-objectified and sexy) from the women's magazines discussed in Chapter Three. The aim was to successfully sexualise themselves, so they could capitalise on their sexual value and exercise some 'power' in relation to men.

Labels and the Social Control of Young Women

There were, however, subtleties and subtexts to the sexual scripts. Debbie described the knife edge which she had to walk, because although she wanted to look sexy, she didn't really want to have sex, nor did she want to look too sexy: 'like a prostitute'.

Debbie There was a double bind because I wanted to attract boys,
(40) But I didn't want them to get the wrong idea - that I was easy. I needed to be attractive without being tarty - which was giving obvious messages from your dress that you were an easy lay. I didn't wear anything common and not eyeshadow because that was beginning to get common and tarty.

This was another phenomenon which transcended the generations of women interviewed. At 60, Alison was describing the same attitudes as Debbie at 40.

Alison I wanted to be fashionable. I was flamboyant. Make-up, high
(60) heels. But I was not going to be vulgar -- just beautiful. There was a contradiction - in a sense I was thinking of myself as a bit like a prostitute - I had just gone that bit

over - I would wear red, and black. I dressed to shock. But I was terribly fat, and thought I was not good looking. I was 10 stone at 14. So I decided early on that the only thing that would get me by was my personality. I wanted to look more sophisticated and older. The advantage was that it would be easier to get a *man* than a boy, if you looked older and sophisticated.

And **Mary** at 18 was also careful to avoid looking 'too sexy' or 'tarty':

Mary How you put your make-up on is amazing, it makes you
(18) look lovely, different, makes you feel better. If you just slap it on, there's ways of looking nice with make-up and you can look terrible with make-up - you can look like a tart.

Women obviously learned that they had to maintain a delicate balance between looking 'ready for sex' (as **Maureen** described it), but not actually 'having it', or not being seen to have it, or being known to have it. It was the appearance that mattered.

Alison: We've always had as women this terrible balancing act to do
(60) between what's right and what we like and what others like. With make-up, there's a point that one wouldn't make up beyond a certain point because one would look vulgar. Like a tart. You've always had to be careful as to how much you used.

The goal was to get a husband (or boyfriend who might become a potential husband). A tart or a prostitute was another category altogether - not a wife, not desirable, and not the goal. Being in the category of prostitute would exclude a woman from the category of wife: if not in reality, at least in image, in idea, in appearance. As **Dworkin** has pointed out, both categories involve the

exchange of money for sex, but the categories are mutually exclusive in the construction of women's opportunity and identity and the attitudes associated with them are very different - positive for wives, negative for prostitutes.⁴

In this system, *appearance* is everything. In other words, it doesn't matter if a woman is a virgin or a whore (a tart, a prostitute) but *whether she looks like one*, and whether men think she is one. Karen (15) described how she 'freaked out' when word got round that she had a 'horrible body'. She eventually challenged the boy who was supposed to have said it, and he denied it. She believed him. She knew the source of the rumour had come from a boy who fancied her, but hadn't 'got' her. She also took great care not 'to look tarty' even during the phase when she 'couldn't say no'. She knew that it didn't matter what she actually did that was 'dangerous' to her 'status', but how she was seen and how she was 'named':

Dworkin describes this 'male power of naming':

... Men have the power of naming, a great and sublime power. The power of naming enables men to define experience, to articulate boundaries and values, to designate each thing its realm and qualities, to determine what can and cannot be expressed, to control perception itself.⁵

This includes controlling women's perceptions of themselves. Thus, Dworkin describes how the male power of naming becomes internalised by women as the language they use to 'name' themselves:

The world is his because he has named everything in it, including her. She uses this language against herself because it cannot be used any other way.⁶

Part of this naming is the language used to describe women's sexual status. Sheila (38) said she must have looked a 'real scrubber' and Debbie (40) said she didn't want to seem 'an easy lay'. It is, as Cowie & Lees have argued, 'irrelevant to look for actual girls' who are 'easy' or 'scrubbers' or 'slags', because it is the 'presence of the category which is important, not the identification of certain girls'.⁷ In their account of 'the social construction of the individual as a sexed and gendered specific being', they identified the *stereotype of the 'slag' and the 'easy lay'* and concluded that the 'stereotype bears no relation to the girls (virtually any girl) to whom the term is applied.'⁸ It is the category and its terminology which serves to define, identify and *control* the sexuality and sexual behaviour of girls. 'Slags' are the ones who are alleged to do it (have sex without a permanent attachment to a male either as boyfriend, fiancé or husband) and 'drags' the ones who don't. Women have to negotiate their identity, if not their behaviour, somewhere between these two extremes of sexual access. They come to control their own behaviour and define their own identity within the imposed constraints and the enforced parameters.⁹ There are also age categories implicit in these sexual categories. The terms 'slags' and 'drags' are applied to younger women: the terms 'bags' or 'hags' are applied to older women who as Daly has pointed out are also marginalised and held in contempt.¹⁰

The Power of Sex Stereotypes to Hurt Women

Stereotyped images have power over individual women, in influencing how they look and what they wear, but they also function to divide women from each other in competition over who looks most like the stereotype and therefore most likely to succeed in the competition for men. Betty (28), like Karen (15) was by any standards 'classically' and stereotypically beautiful - blonde-haired with a 'beautiful' body. And yet both were envious of other women and invalidated themselves by comparison. *Betty had come to be 'happier' with her body, but she hadn't always been:*

Betty (28) To do with my twin sister being tall and slender, and I wanted to be taller and thinner and less muscular. Now I look at muscular as healthy - I have a strong body. But until now I was never pleased with it - not with the muscles, the height or the weight.

Karen (15) compared herself unfavourably with her best friend:

Karen (15) I was comparing myself to Anna. The thing about me and Anna is that we have grown up socially together. We've always been side by side. We used to swap boyfriends, you know, Nick for her one week, Nick for me the next. And at one point she was totally undeveloped, then suddenly she became developed, suddenly she had tits, arse, nice long legs, thin legs and ankles. And I thought, look what's happened to her, what about me, what's gone wrong with me? And seeing as we were going out with the same guys, I thought she had a plus on me. I became really self-conscious about it.

Their friendship ended shortly after this, each going into separate groups.

Betty (28) was aware of the fact that women dress and wear make-up in competition *with* women for men and to that extent 'dress for women': 'competition amongst ourselves', she called it, or in Hilary's (64) words, dressing 'for women to be envious and for men to be attracted'. Betty was aware of the extent to which the stereotypes invalidated women:

Betty (28) I think we are all taught to think of ourselves as imperfect, and therefore we need to consume to make ourselves more attractive. We are kind of undermined.

But she also realised the 'power' she had in attracting men by 'fitting' the stereotyped image:

Betty (28) I've come to realise how much power I have because of my looks. You are noticed. Men want to be seen with attractive women, and around them, you get a lot more mileage out of being attractive. If you need help doing something it is much easier - people want to please you, men want to.

Feminism had made them aware of the competition with other women that had been forced upon them. They had come to hate it and had made deliberate attempts to eliminate feelings of competition by making friendships and supportive relationships with other women.

The stereotypes have the power to induce women to use cosmetic surgery in order, as Jill (44) did, 'to become more attractive'. She was in her 30s at the time:

Jill (44) Isn't it awful? Feminists would jump on me. But it was always a thing in my life. In my teens - that not being

phoned by boys - I felt I was unattractive - and I think I was - I was depressed most of the time. Anyway, my teeth protruded - with a normal bite I could get my thumb under my top teeth. And my chin receded.

She said she 'felt terrible about her profile' in her teens and 20s: 'I'd always put my hand over my face and never smile openly'. She felt disadvantaged by comparison to the value placed on straight white teeth in advertisements. At age 38 she began the 'long and painful process just to straighten a few teeth' which involved 'having a perfectly good tooth pulled' and wearing a mouth full of braces ('but even with my braces on I smiled more'). She then had a major operation to 'extend her lower jaw':

Jill (44) They took two slivers of bone from my hip and then cut along the side of my neck, both sides, just below the ear. Then he lifted up the muscle that lies along the side of your jaw. Then they took the 1/2-1 inch of bone that they had first removed from my hip and grafted it onto my lower jaw, back by my ears. This one is rough, not so good a job, this one is really good and smooth. So this pushed my lower jaw out. Afterwards I had to have my jaw wired together for a month.

Jill did all this because: 'I thought if I'd had a more attractive mouth I'd be more attractive to men'. And it was a success.

Jill (44) Realising then that I also had nice legs, attractive body, and feeling good wearing mini-skirts. But it was all going for male approval - and getting it. Watching men look at my body and thinking, I've made it.

In retrospect she said 'it makes me feel sick in my stomach now'. She had since become an active feminist and a lesbian and actually

saw the whole business not as women achieving power over men (although she *felt* more powerful in attracting men after having had the cosmetic surgery), but as women giving up the real power they have to men.

Jill (44) It's a terrible thing to give up so much power. I didn't really want male approval, damn it. But I went for it. And I feel disgusted with myself, that I could never say I had an attractive body until men said I'd got an attractive body. When a woman friend said, you have nice legs - it was not as important as if a boy had said it or a man. It makes me feel ashamed and guilty and disgusted now to have given men the power to name my attractiveness, that I should have had to define myself by men's view of me.

Jill believed that she had resorted to a form of 'torture' to make herself attractive to men. Debbie (40), who had also become a lesbian had come to think the same of wearing high heels:

Debbie (40) But I now consciously would not wear anything with a heel. Because clothes for women are designed to control and mutilate - I realised what it means to wear high heels - and the similarities with Chinese footbinding. Although I'm sometimes aware of being a bit of a short arse, it feels humiliating to have to wear high heels to make myself acceptable.

What emerged from the data was how the 'normal' process of becoming successfully sexualised was both physically and emotionally damaging to women.

Fat, Anorexia and Age/Gender Stereotypes

Weight gain was a problem for many of the women interviewed who spoke about the 'affliction' to their identity and their opportunities of 'being fat'. Alison (60) decided she couldn't be an actress because she was 'fat' - 'terribly fat', she said of her 10 stones at 14 - and she 'thought herself not good-looking': 'People used to sing 'Roll out the Barrel' at me'. Helen (61) had always been fat as a child and used to long to be slim and blonde. Janet (50) had gained 100 pounds when she got married and at 50 described herself as 'old and fat'. Jane (23) described herself as 'fat' and said: 'I have a compulsive eating habit. I eat compulsively and then diet'. Sheila (38) had an 'ideal of physical perfection' as 'tall and rangy with your legs at a certain angle - like Lauren Bacall'. She described herself as 'fat' - as always having been fat. Dieting had been a constant theme in her life:

Sheila (38) Constantly in theory, in practice not a lot. But I think about it all the time, it's an awful undertow in my life - which I would willingly shake off if I could. I would like to eat normally but I can't help stuffing myself. I've thought of having hypnosis to stop it. It is important to me to look more beautiful and healthy.

These women were responding to what Orbach describes as 'fat as a symbolic rejection of the limitations of women's role':

Just as many women first become fat in an attempt to avoid being made into sexual objects at the beginning of their adult lives, so many women remain fat as a way of neutralizing their sexual identity in the eyes of others who are important to them as their

life progresses. In this way, they can hope to be taken seriously in their working lives outside the home.''

Women's constant concern with being overweight is very much justified within a system of male power and male approval that defines beauty as thin.

In contrast to, and probably in response to the 'affliction' of being (or feeling) over weight was a pattern of starvation: exaggerating the ideal image to the edge of ill-health and possible death. Thus another kind of damage inflicted on women as a result of the pressures to conform to the stereotypes of femininity and successful age and sexual objectification was weight loss - sometimes in its extreme form of anorexia. Although there was no direct question asked about it, six of the women interviewed volunteered that they had had anorexia at some point in their lives.

Miriam was one of them. At age 12, she 'hated' herself:

Miriam I used to look in the mirror at my breasts developing. I just (38) didn't know what to do. I just felt myself to be ugly and hated myself.

She described herself as '*desperate* to be pretty and attractive', wanting to be 'popular' but not knowing how:

Miriam All the other girls had learnt how, but I hadn't. I badgered
(38) mum for high heels, but she bought me a pair of big blocked
heeled old ladies shoes - instead of the 'sexy' stilettoes.

By the time she was 14 she'd decided she had 'failed with boys' and had got a best friend who 'wasn't very pretty in the required way' either. So they decided to diet together. They got all the books and made a 'pact': 'We both, became extreme in dieting'. Why? 'Because I felt unattractive and I wanted to attract boys. That was the only reason'. After a year, she and her friend weighed about 6½ stone.

The 'image' **Miriam** 'aspired to was elegance'. At 16 she weighed 5½ stone and her parents were worried. **Miriam** dieted nearly to death to achieve the stereotyped image of female beauty:

Miriam The more weight I lost, the better I felt. I looked at
(38) myself, and thought I was now attractive - by 8 stone - and more
and more attractive as I became thinner and thinner. And I
gained more and more confidence about my appearance.

She thought she was influenced by 'images, ideas girls and women have of themselves, and forcing themselves into them'. She thought she dieted to such an extreme because 'I was so lacking in self-esteem'. That **Miriam's** compulsion to starve herself eased off when she finally 'succeeded' in being sexually attractive to a male and in having sex seemed to support the link between anorexia and the sexualising of women. 'Someone had 'had' me at last - and I was pleased at that, I thought no-one ever would and was desperate for the experience, she said.

Not only had the anorexia nearly brought her to her death at the age of 16, it had caused her permanent physical damage:

Miriam It ruined my digestion and, I think, my kidneys. Also, I
(38) ruined my teeth, they've all had to be either pulled out or crowned since. And my hair went very thin, but has since grown thick again. My periods stopped for 4 years and ever since have been scant and irregular.

Even now, she said she'd 'never really got over the anorexia, either physically or mentally'.

Miriam Physically, I weigh around 7 stone, and if I go any higher I
(38) get into an enormous panic and start starving. I cannot bear to look at myself any fatter.

Although she had become an active feminist, she still thought 'she was too fat', and was still very preoccupied with her appearance:

Miriam I take a lot of trouble, about 40 minutes in the morning
(38) dressing and doing my hair and looking in the mirror before I face the world. If I look in the mirror and don't like the look of myself, that depresses me and I fuss until I am satisfied. The first thing I do every morning as soon as I get up is look in a mirror. And the last thing I do always on leaving the house is look in a mirror and the same thing on coming home. I have mirrors in every room in my house, and I use them constantly.

Miriam's experience demonstrates the power of the stereotype of femininity and age/sexual objectification and the extent to which this can be internalised and acted upon. She put her anorexia down to wanting to conform to the stereotype and failing. If women's

only real value is sexualised, then success in life depends on being a successful sex object, or being sexually 'qualified' and competitive. This matters more than being educationally or artistically or occupationally successful. Miriam was in fact artistically gifted and an academic high flier, but this did not matter. It could not compete with the sexual value as she perceived it.

Five other women also said they had suffered from anorexia at points in their lives when they felt unable to conform to the 'script'. The fact that 'anorexia' appeared spontaneously so often in this sample was interesting and suggests that it may be even more common, in a self-diagnosed form than as a medical diagnosis. What was particularly interesting was that two women had become anorexic soon after marriage. Julie (45) went down from 9 stone to 7 stone in the two years after marrying, and Debbie (40) went down to 6 stone. Debbie wanted to remain sexually attractive to men, but the weight loss was also a response to the massive disappointment of marriage:

Debbie (40) I didn't want to eat because I wanted to become slim and beautiful. I put on a stone after my honeymoon, and started dieting and became obsessed with it. But it was also geared to being attractive to others than John - because I wasn't getting anything from him, except a very boring, tedious, monotonous middle-aged married couple relationship.

For Julie the weight loss was entirely in response to having been defeated by the female chronology - having ended up married with

children (twins) at 22 when she had deliberately planned not to succumb to the scripted timetable of marriage and motherhood and had other ambitions.

Marriage, Motherhood and Premature Ageing

The weight loss after marriage was interesting because the reverse phenomenon is perhaps more common: of women 'letting themselves go', looking older and less attractive. In Leonard's sample of newly wed women, it was noted that women's appearance changed (and was even expected to change) after marriage:

Yes, they go from being 'mod' and 'with it' to being dowdy and plain. One friend in particular, her mother said she'd change now that she's married. Another friend with long hair had it cut short because she's married. They look ... *responsible* ... yes, they actually look older. I suppose it's that they don't want to look frivolous anymore. 'Sensible' is the only word ...¹²

Another one of Leonard's respondents had gone from 7 stone 10 lbs to 9 stone and she said: 'My weight worries me - obviously shows married life suits me.'¹³ But does it? Does excessive weight gain any more than excessive weight loss denote happiness? Not according to the Agony Column correspondent in *Woman*:

Although I still love my wife very much our physical relationship has deteriorated badly and I don't know what to do. Since we married three years ago, she has let her appearance go downhill. She has become overweight and wears the dullest of clothes and hairstyles. I know that appearance isn't everything but she's no longer the trim, attractive girl I married and I just can't respond to the physical type she's become. She doesn't seem to realise how she's changed.'¹⁴

Virginia Ironside blamed the 'marriage' for what she thought was 'clinical depression'. The fact that the marriage was described as 'ideal' adds weight to the argument that it is the institution of marriage (rather than the individuals in it) which 'oppresses' women and 'depresses' women and makes them lose all sense or shape of themselves.

There are various reasons why women might let themselves go and 'age' after marriage. There will be a double bind in the matter of appearance: once married a woman is not supposed to be too sexually attractive to men in general (and certainly not sexually available). According to one member of the Older Women's Group:

Allison: Once you were married, you weren't *supposed* to be
(60) looking gay and attractive, you were supposed to be the image of a married woman. Which immediately made you look slightly older. You aren't supposed, after you're married, to be sexy ... except in bed for your husband.

Thus, in strict conformity to expectations about sexuality, a married woman would understandably not wish to appear quite as attractive or available as she did before marriage. 'Letting themselves go' may represent the ambivalence women feel about their sexualised value, its fluctuation in relation to market forces such as marriage. At the same time, women might also feel, that having achieved her economic and social goals in marriage, she didn't need to make an effort. Or she may have forced her natural shape and appearance to fit the stereotype before marriage, after which she might feel 'freer' to revert to her natural size and shape (certainly women generally are rarely as thin as the stereotype requires). Another

consideration is that women who 'let themselves go' may have discovered what a real loss of identity and opportunity marriage actually means: they may be miserable and trapped and over-eating to numb their feelings of disappointment and despair.

There is in fact demographic evidence that marriage 'ages' women:

More than a milestone, marriage acts as a marker for when women are perceived as getting older. In countries such as Spain, Portugal or Latin America where women marry at a relatively young age, they are perceived to be 'old' at an earlier age based more upon anniversary years of marriage than by chronological years of age ... Despite the bride's youth upon entry, marriage ages women.¹⁶

Marriage can be, and motherhood is, hard work, often done in poverty as well as isolation. Adrienne Rich presents the haunting image of an 18 year old working class wife and mother of five children: she married at 13, had had a child every year since, and looked old, worn out and haggard.¹⁵

Motherhood had made her look more like 38 than 18. Betty (28) saw 'ageing as revolving around motherhood'. In this sense, women's purpose and value come to an end with the end of childrearing. Women are seen as 'old' because of having 'grown up' children regardless of the woman's chronological age: a woman may actually be anywhere from about age 36 to age 66 and have a child of 21. There is an assumption that menopause means automatic ageing, although studies of early menopause in women in their 20s and 30s suggests that it is not the end of menstruation itself which is ageing, but the attitudes

associated with it.¹⁷ Whichever of these factors, in whatever combination, the common elements are marriage, motherhood, and the decrease in value that would automatically occur as women's sexuality was used up in marriage, by motherhood, her sexualised value spent.

The Economic Imperative of Heterosexuality

The stereotypes of heterosexuality wield enormous power over women. Women are often criticised, self-critical or mutually critical for the extent to which they succumb to sex-stereotyping and sex-objectification. They are regarded as weak-willed, trivial or pathetic. But if women's livelihoods depend on their success in achieving and maintaining male approval (in marriage and motherhood), then maximising one's sexual value makes sense. If marriage is an economic necessity for women, then marriageability (i.e. appearance) will also be economically determined. Rich identifies this 'economic imperative to heterosexuality and marriage' ... the sanctions imposed against single women and widows - both of whom have been and still are viewed as deviant.¹⁸

Women are therefore arguably *forced* to damage themselves physically (by wearing shoes with high heels and pointed toes), to risk their lives to fit the required image (anorexia), and to suffer the pain and danger of major surgery in order to achieve and maintain the appearance of youth and beauty. The fact that women have internalised the attitudes and beliefs sufficiently that they are prepared to impose this suffering ('torture' according to Debbie) on themselves and each other is further evidence of the power of what

Rich calls the institution of 'compulsory heterosexuality': the institution in which women's value is sexualised.

Indeed, for the women who choose these methods, the advantages are believed to far outweigh any suffering or harm. And within the system of age/gender oppression of the female chronology they are correct. The penalties for not fitting in, or not conforming, mean substantial limitations or loss or loneliness in their lives. And because sexual objectification is based on youth as well as 'beauty', women are particularly vulnerable and potentially limited in opportunity as they get older.

II. MID-LIFE REDUNDANCY AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF OLDER WOMEN

Economic Disqualification

Women who are trying to return to paid employment after 5 or 10 or 15 or 20 years of housework and childrearing are disadvantaged and can expect to return at a lower level and/or at lower pay or in lower status employment than they left prior to childrearing. Their position lends weight to the theory that it is discrimination in the labour market that forces women into and keeps women in marriage. Women who have left the labour market for any length of time to bear and rear children are disadvantaged when they attempt to return to it.

Of the half who decide to enter or to return to the labour force, some (1) resume careers interrupted by the early years of motherhood if, in fact, they ever left their careers. Others (2) find themselves back in jobs that are below their actual potential, but that are the best they can hope for with old training no longer very valuable in the labour market. Some are back in school for retooling, hoping to return to the labour force in middle-level, people-oriented positions. Some are just trying to get back on the track after being temporarily derailed by marriage and early motherhood.¹⁹

The longer they are absent from paid employment, the more disadvantaged they become. In the teaching profession, women are able to accrue 'yearly increments', but at a reduced level.

Most women return. When they do, it is often to a scale lower than the one they left. Moreover, they will have lost several of their yearly increments: women engaged in childrearing only get one-third the yearly increment of women

in full-time teaching. Some return part-time either because it is more convenient or because no full-time job is available. These teachers are all on scale one regardless of their experience, but those who are experienced may be required to carry far more responsibility than a full-time scale one teacher, with no extra payment and no formally acknowledged standing.²⁰

These women experience a double jeopardy: they are more disadvantaged than men of their own age and older and they are more disadvantaged than younger women.²¹

They are further disadvantaged precisely because the work they have done as wives and mothers has not been acknowledged as work. It has not been valued and it does not 'count' in the labour market. It is not exchangeable or regarded as equivalent to any work in paid employment. Although, she describes this work as 'the activity of care in nurturing and sustaining family relationships' rather than defining it as 'work', Gilligan nevertheless identifies the problem 'as ignoring the reality of what has happened in the years' of nurturing and sustaining: 'The problem appears to be one of construction, an issue of judgement rather than truth'.²²

Age & Gender Appropriate Appearance in Mid Life

The mid-life period is also a time when a new set of stereotyped age and sex appropriate attitudes and behaviour impinge to impose constraints on 'identity'. Attitudes with regard to dress are different, but can be just as rigidly age and gender stereotyped in mid-life as they are in youth. American research found that both men ----

and women 'adopted sexually distinctive dress' in response to the 'social world' and also that 'men and women seem to be involved differently in that world'.²³ They also noted that appearance was 'even more riddled with age categories than sex categories': 'people of different ages ... dress differently There is ... a broad distinction between the very young and the old'.²⁴ There was an even more marked distinction for women. According to one of their informants whom they described as 'the wife of a teacher' with no age ascribed:

I have to watch what I wear. I have a square figure and not everything looks well on me. Since I'm prematurely grey, people think I'm a lot older than I am. I don't want to look older, or I'll feel older. If I feel older, I'll act older! I have to watch what I wear.²⁵

Another woman (of 43 and 'the wife of a local theatre manager, a nurse') said she 'dressed a little younger than many of her friends'. These women in mid-life wanted to look younger, but they had to be careful not 'to go too far': for there was a distinction between 'growing old gracefully' and 'mutton dressed as lamb' a category of denigration to be avoided.

The presence on anyone of inappropriate clothes, hair, make-up or jewellery was sufficient for people to know 'mutton dressed as lamb'.²⁶

Fairhurst's study quoted the following descriptions of what 'mutton dressed as lamb' meant:

She usually has those 'pretty, pretty dress' as I call them - those teenage ones that only teenagers can get away with and she'll have a particularly revolting colour. I mean if you're a proper woman you know what sort of clothes suit you and what don't but I think there is nothing worse.²⁷

And:

Looking at her face she's in her 50s say or late 40s and she's got a lot of excessive jewellery on and very, very heavy make-up and pencil type skirts and slits and big - high - you know really big high heels. That to me is mutton dressed as lamb.²⁸

While it is essential for younger women to look sexually attractive and sexually available. The exact opposite is required for older women for whom it is wholly inappropriate to look sexually viable.

Helen: You can't wear the same thing at 40 and look good in it.
(44) It's all a question of sex-appeal, isn't it? There's the sex appeal of the fresh young innocent girl, that a man can dominate and be superior to. When you are no longer young, fresh, innocent and smooth-looking, you've got to make up for it in some other way. By some new kind of sex appeal, like sophistication.

The requirement for mid-life is that women should appear sexless, or asexual and women can be held in contempt for not complying with this reversal of role and identity. Because their primary value is defined as sexual and reproductive, beyond childbearing years women have no value, and their identity is no longer allowed to be constructed as sexual:

An ambivalence of pride and shame (and fear) have marked, under patriarchy, the onset of the menses; sometimes a young woman will experience outright denial and revulsion. A

similar ambivalence of fear and relief often marks the beginning of menopause. For woman - defined - as mother, the event may mean, at last, an end to unwanted pregnancies, but also her death as a woman (thus defined), as a sexual being and as someone with a function.²⁹

Because women's value is sexualised, when her sexual functions are finished (or deemed to be so), she has no sexual value. Trying to prolong sexual value, pretending to be younger than she is, is regarded as ridiculous and despised. Rich describes this mid-life end of a woman's valued life as death. She sees it as a loss, even though she only sees it as a loss in terms of a 'false' identity as constructed within the institution of heterosexuality and she would envisage a lesbian identity or 'continuum' as an alternative construction of identity for women, 'whether we identify ourselves as lesbians or not'.³⁰ Others have seen it as a 'death' which has so little value that it can pass unnoticed and unremarked: they regard it as normal and socially acceptable to regard a woman's life as having a 'short blooming period' and then a 'completely extinguished'.³¹

Sexual Disqualification

So much is it part of the construction of women's identity as 'not sexual' after a certain mid-life stage, that myths and taboos have been formulated and operate to perpetuate the belief that (a) older women don't have sex and/or (b) that they shouldn't, and/or (c) if they do, it is disgusting. Weidiger identified this de-sexualising of women and referred to the novel by Doris Lessing in which the

central character Kate 'lets herself go' when her husband and children no longer 'need' her. Over 40 and fearing that she no longer looks like an attractive woman, she goes out on the street to try to attract the attention of men. But 'no one took any notice'. She describes how her whole being had 'been set to receive notice like an adolescent girl who has spent 3 hours making up.'³² In the shock of her 'sexual invisibility' Kate has to resist the impulse to lift her skirts and expose herself. 'What', asks Weideger, 'could more easily drive a woman to the point of breakdown than to find herself at an arbitrary, biologically defined point in her life, stripped of her identity as a sexual being.'³³

The ultimate in sexual disqualification is exclusion on the grounds that sexual desire, sexual ability and sexual activity don't exist, especially when these beliefs are based on a stereotype and not in reality. That the beliefs - the stereotype - exist is clear:

Our culture continues to foster the belief for a woman in her 50s and 60s sex is neither necessary, nor possible. The prevailing attitude regarding sexuality in the older person is still to deny it, ignore it, or make it the butt of a joke. The stereotype of the 'sexless older years' has done considerable damage to our ageing population and in particular to the older woman. Frequently, this view acts as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.³⁴

Masters and Johnson were also aware of the myth against which they evaluated 'the reality' they discovered in their research on human sexuality:

The misconceptions, fallacies and even taboos directed toward the sexual functioning of women in menopausal and postmenopausal years are legion. We must, in fact, destroy the concept that women in the 50-70 year age group not only have no interest in but also have no facility for active sexual expression. Nothing could be further from the truth than the often-expressed concept that ageing women do not maintain a high level of sexual orientation.³⁵

The 'problem' is not women's ability or desire to remain sexually active from mid-life onwards. The problem is not primarily 'identity' but opportunity. Women's opportunity for 'sexual outlet' with men of the same or a similar age decreases with age partly for reasons of demography (women live longer than men and older women therefore outnumber older men).

For older women, the greatest problem is the unavailability of socially sanctioned capable partners, because of the sex ratio among the aged ...³⁶

The reality is that women's *ability* to be sexually active usually outlasts men's. When the opportunity is there, women take advantage of it. Masters and Johnson found that there is no age limit to sexual responsiveness and Greengross found 'that 7 out of 10 married couples over 60 were sexually active'.³⁷

But women's opportunity for 'sexual outlet' is also determined by negative attitudes and prejudice: 'social disapproval of sexuality in single or widowed older women'.³⁸ Evidence of these negative attitudes was expressed by a member of the Older Women's Group.

Kath: I want to pass as an attractive older woman. I can't come to
(43) terms with this. I've lived all my life on the youth kick, you know, that you're only ok if you're young and attractive, and I've never found any way of surviving without that. So I've joined women's groups and tried to build up confidence in the other parts of me. As insurance for the future. When I'm past it. When I look past it, though, we all know that we never are. That's the tragedy of it.

The Older Woman/Younger Man Taboo

Nowhere is the taboo against sexuality in 'older' women so apparent as in the attitudes which exist about sexual relationships between 'older women' and 'younger men':

The older woman also has few chances of getting remarried, as most elderly men are either married or remarry younger women. This situation is aggravated by the cultural taboo which accepts older men marrying younger women, but frowns on the prospect of the older woman marrying a younger man. Thus, there are a great number of older women who have little choice but to live alone.³⁹

Sontag noted the double standard in the different significance attached to age difference in relationships between men and women. Thus a woman from late teens to mid twenties can expect to attract a man of the same age - or 'ideally slightly older.' If they marry and divorce in their late 40's or early 50's, the man has a good chance of marrying again, probably to a younger woman, while the woman would find it difficult to remarry:

Attracting a second husband younger than herself is improbable; even to find someone her own age she has to be lucky, and she will probably have to settle for a man considerably older than herself, in his 60's or 70's.⁴⁰

Ironically, a woman of 40 often looks better/fitter/younger for her age

than a man of 40, but he is, notwithstanding, still valued higher in the sexual market.

Weideger also identified this double standard in relation to age and sexuality:

The coupling of the older man with a younger woman is absolutely acceptable. However ... an older woman with a younger man ... is seen as a new sort of libertine ... In purely sexual terms ... The young man is likely to find in his older partner a woman who has realised her capacity for sexual responses, while the young woman is likely to find in her older partner, a man who has diminished capacity for sexual response.⁴¹

That 'biological fact is often twisted or obliterated to serve social ends' is evidence of the 'fictional nature' of this sexual value system which constructs older men as desirable and viable and older women as not. 'To many of us', concluded Weideger, 'a woman who seems sexual after menopause is a deviant. She is still expected to fulfil the male image of women, which, after menopause, means her sexuality has disappeared'.

A member of the Older Woman's Group described how she had internalised the taboo of older women and younger men:

Helen: Someone was talking in the office about someone else they
(44) knew - a man in his mid-thirties - and saying 'My God, he's gone out with her and she must be nearly forty! (Laughter) God, she's old enough to be his mother, how could he?' Completely disregarding the fact that I was sitting there in the office, older than forty. They completely disregarded my feelings, it didn't even occur to them that I might be offended. But the idea that a 35 year old man going out with a 40 year old woman was really disgusting ... that really did annoy me.

Although she didn't like the attitudes that were expressed about older women with younger men, Helen had not only internalised the same attitudes herself but allowed them to limit her own opportunities accordingly. She had recently turned down an invitation from a 'younger man':

Helen: Half of me wanted to, but the other half of me said no, no, (44) it's just not suitable. People in the office who know about this will talk and make fun of him. I'd have been the laughing stock.

In fact, it is very common and increasingly desirable for older men to be in relationships with women very much younger than themselves: usually in second and subsequent marriages. Thus, we read about 80 year old Cary Grant's desire to father a child with his wife who was 50 years younger than he.⁴² Or of 'octogenarian George Burns and Brooke Shields age 14 ... 'in our society it is not uncommon for older men to keep company with younger women'.⁴³ And it is increasingly common for middle-aged men to seek younger wives.

In the typical first wedding, the groom is about 2-4 years older than the bride. If the divorce comes when they are both in their 40s, the husband will generally choose a companion 9 to 10 years younger.⁴⁴

Statistics show the limited opportunities for remarriage for older women:

... if a woman is divorced in her 20s, she stands a 75% chance of getting remarried. If she is divorced after the age of 44, in that age range only 56 women get remarried for every 100 men who do.⁴⁵

Figures for the UK also show how few older widows and divorced women 'can hope to remarry in later life'.⁴⁶ Members of the Older Women's Group were aware of this disadvantage:

Elizabeth: In general, women will always hope to get married. After
(44) 40 or 45, they just get discouraged, because they are led to believe that it is very hard to find a husband, because men want them younger.

Helen: In a sexist society, if women are defined as asexual,
(44) as older women are, then it's obscene to see them as sexual. It works very much to the advantage of men. It gives THEM a much longer life as sexual people. Men do have a sexual life far longer than women.

The sexual effects of this disadvantage (this discrimination in relationships on the basis of age) on women's self-esteem is illustrated by a letter from an anonymous 'anguished older woman' to the *Guardian*:

I am a middle-aged married woman who, until recently, felt reasonably attractive and completely confident that our love would carry us through, enjoying and accepting each other's ageing bodies, into old age. When I learned about his affairs with younger women, that naive confidence was shattered. I now realise that I am simply an ageing woman, with a scraggy neck and shrunken breasts, desperately fighting a losing battle against the younger woman (both real and in colour magazines) around me. The only way I can see of escaping from the despair of trying to remain a sex object beyond my time and to be myself again, ageing and unashamed, would be to leave the man I love, give up the sex that I crave and enjoy, and live alone.⁴⁷

A typical agony page answer to an older woman in this kind of situation was provided by Irma Kurtz:

Middle-aged women - and older, too - are often beautiful, clever, philosophical and experienced people, but I would be telling a whopper if I said I honestly thought they had an equal chance in the sex market. As you point out - an available 55-year old man can without undue trouble find a much younger woman, and will

probably want to: to wear on the arm of his ego, or to give him the illusion of immortality, or simply to bear his children. Can you imagine how few available 55 year olds that leaves with whom you might establish a friendship, let alone a lasting love affair?⁴⁸

It is not only opportunities for emotional fulfilment (or love) which are limited, but also, as we have seen, economic opportunities. Divorce (i.e. end of marriage as a career) in middle-age and age/sex discrimination in the labour market usually mean struggle and poverty as well as loneliness. There is the evidence of low status, low-paid jobs and the problems of women 'returning' to the labour market after childrearing. But even within employment it has been noted how 'age can wither the authority of a woman' and 'successful women are forced to maintain a youthful appearance'.⁴⁹

The attitudes to age in relation to marriage partners are deeply ingrained and internalised. In a major study of the sexual, marital and family relationships of English women, no woman in any age category 'felt it was important to the success of their future marriage that their husbands should be younger than they are', but nearly half thought they should be older and nearly a quarter thought they should be the same age'.⁵⁰ Some of Leonard's newly-married respondents indicated their awareness of the age taboos operating earlier as well as later in life:

(How old were you when you first met?)

(Bride) 'I was 26. He was 20'.

(The next question was put)

(Bride) 'Aren't you going to comment [on ages]? Most do [rather bitterly]'.⁵¹

A wife' six years older than her husband was frowned upon or ridiculed. But even 'a wife' 6 months older than her husband was aware of the negative attitudes and victimised by them:

(How old were you when you met?)

(Bride) 'I was 20 and he was 19! [In fact 6 months age gap. She grinned]. I was a bit self-conscious about it at first. Friends teased and said I was 'cradle-snatching'. But he acts a lot older than me anyway, so it's alright, isn't it?'⁵²

'It is', observed Leonard, 'a firmly held norm that boys/men should be 1-3 years, but ideally 2 years, older than the girls/women they go out with and marry'.⁵³

This may be taken as evidence that the taboo against 'older women and younger men' operates at *all* life stages and not just when the 'older woman' is 'older'. Sontag points out that:

'Since women are considered maximally eligible in early youth, after which their sexual value drops steadily, even young women feel themselves in a desperate race against the calendar. They are old as soon as they are no longer young.'⁵⁴

The 'older woman taboo' provides further evidence of the social construction of stereotypes and attitudes because it demonstrates that it is the attitude to the age (difference) not the *actual* age which is the issue. In other words, it is not a matter of what is wrong with older women, but what is wrong with women. It would suggest that perhaps an 'older woman' as a sexual or a marriage partner at *whatever* age threatens

the balance of gender power: that the 'older' woman cannot be guaranteed to be, or to be seen to be, subordinate to the male.

For the majority, the pressures to stay looking young and beautiful in order to get and keep a husband are enormous, and the fear of loss of looks which could so easily equate with loss of husband (i.e. love, sex and livelihood) pushes women either to 'agree with the stereotype' and abandon their sexuality or to pursue artificial methods of prolonging their sexually active and useful lives:

Sagging skin, flabby bosoms, skin discolourations, waistless torsos and thinning body hair can cause great anxieties in those women who feel that these changes impair the image of beauty, youth and sexuality that our culture demands. Many older women reject themselves and, fearful of rejections by a partner, just give up sexual activity. Others need to prove they are still sexually attractive and contribute to the multi-million dollar business of face lifts, fat farms, bleaching creams and hair dyes to deny nature her reality, and to avoid the profound level of disapproval directed toward the older woman.⁵⁵

To avoid the 'disapproval' and disgust, the disqualification, disadvantage and discrimination, women will usually take steps, sometimes even drastic steps, to 'stay young'. To be economically and sexually disqualified from life is a heavy penalty against which pain and discomfort and expense can begin to be measured favourably.

Cosmetic Surgery and the Terror of Not Being Young

Melamed, a psychotherapist, writes about the disproportionate effect on women of the normal changes in physiology and appearance that occur at every stage of the ageing process. She notes that women are anxious

about physical evidence of ageing by their mid-thirties and that most women have serious 'appearance anxiety in their 40's.⁵⁶ Melamed's book is entitled *Mirror Mirror* and sub-titled 'the terror of not being young'.

Weideger describes the addictive pull of the mirror:

'Not long after her thirtieth birthday a woman begins searching the mirror for signs of age. Each one sighted is carefully studied ... A few years pass and looking in the mirror becomes a game of darts. The eyes travel on beams of light directly to the signs of age, land for a split second and flick away. We see ourselves ageing only in those fragmented seconds. The remainder of our time is spent looking at the blurred and generalised images.'⁵⁷

A member of the Older Women's Group described the discrepancy between her inner and outer image:

Alison: My my inner image of myself is still, I (60) would say, not 25, but somewhere around the 35-40 mark. So it comes as a shock when you suddenly see yourself and you're not that age. It still is, and I'm not joking, it really is a shock for me sometimes. Seeing myself in the mirror, or reflected in a shop window. I am physically shocked.

Women are valued for how they look and there is therefore a 'relentless pressure on women to maintain their appearance at a certain high standard.' This is, in part, to remain attractive to men, but Sontag suggests that it is also more fundamentally a means of 'fabricating a certain image by which women state their value.' A woman's appearance 'establishes her status as object' - not what she may really be like, but how she is valued and treated by others. The ideal image for women, what she is valued most highly for is youth and beauty.'

'After a woman's body has reached its sexually acceptable form by late adolescence, most further development is viewed as negative ... their task is to try to maintain that image, unchanged, as long as possible.'⁵⁸

This is where the multi-million pound industries step in to exploit the fear of ageing that women will understandably have acquired and to meet the 'real' (i.e. economically, materially based) need to look younger as they get older. Advertisements aim straight for the solar plexis where the fear will have women holding their breath. The content analysis of *Woman* magazine discussed in Chapter Three showed the emphasis on age as well as beauty. There are frequent advertisements headed 'Do You Look Older?' and then detailing the parts of the body where ageing will begin to 'show' (the hands, the upper arms, the neck, the breasts). Or 'Do Some Parts of Your Body Look Older Than The Rest?' - with photographs of heels ('4 years older'), neck ('7 years older'), knees ('8 years older'), hands ('5 years older') and elbows ('10 years older').

These advertisements provide a backdrop to the hard sell of cosmetic surgery - face lifts, fat removal, breast 'improvements' - whose advertisements are seen more and more frequently in daily and Sunday national press and in women's magazines ²⁹ and whose procedures are becoming increasingly normalised. A private clinic in Nottingham spends £10,000 a month on advertising aimed at the ageing, the older, and therefore according to the message of the other advertisements, the unbeautiful, sexually unattractive and unviable woman. Brochures from these clinics claim that sagging necks and eyes and faces can be stretched back into some semblance of 'youth and beauty', wrinkles can be removed, drooping breasts stitched up and lifted, fat sucked out and bellies, buttocks or thighs firmed up, flattened out, all for the price of a phone call and a few thousand pounds. Women can be saved, or at least

salvaged, from the dire fate that awaits. The penalties of economic and sexual disqualification are real and cruel, and women's fear and dread of that loss so justifiably great that cosmetic surgery can be a real temptation.

Kath: I'm not happy with ageing, not at all happy
(43) with the age I'm at. I'm 43 now. And I think I want to prop myself in a life - like position you as long as possible.

Members of the Older Women's Group and most of the women interviewed were horrified by the idea of cosmetic surgery and when asked said they wouldn't do it - ever, under any circumstances. There were some women, however, who as they were getting older, were still horrified, but were also more keenly aware of their loss or potential loss. They were more ambivalent. They usually responded with a 'no', they would not consider cosmetic surgery, but then qualified their response.

Kath: What happens is all at once when your neck really
(43) begins to sag, and your grannie leaves you a couple of thousand, isn't it too good to be true, and you rush off and have it lifted. I could easily imagine myself being in that position. I hope I never would partly because I've heard it doesn't last, but if it was absolutely foolproof, I'd be off there like lightning. And I wouldn't tell any of you and you couldn't nag me about it. I'd do it to feel better, because looking younger is feeling better. Yes, I'm not saying that I would because I know that I oughtn't to, but I still haven't lost the old urge to keep as young as possible for as long as possible, which is the only way I know how to function.

Hilary No. Yes, I'd consider it, if I had the money, now. Because I
(64) think I look older than I really am - because of the lines in my face. But the idea of the operation and physical pain does not appeal to me.

Ellie I'd do it if my eyes looked so baggy that when I looked at
(40) myself I couldn't stand myself. But sometimes the whole face drops together and it forms another shape, and that's what I wouldn't mind.

Katherine (68) I'd love to have it to pull up the lines around my mouth, because it makes me look so grim and people think you're sad or angry. But it would be too expensive and I've learned to live with it. One friend had it, gave her a pick-up, fine. But I like wrinkles, they show character. On men and women.

Helen: (44) I would have the same impulse to do it and then I would think - what anger, who is making me do these terrible things to myself. Someone has control of me, it's not me who would make those choices freely.

What bothered **Katherine** was her upper arms: 'You've got to cover your arms because you've got this hanging flesh ... drooping skin, it looks terrible'. **Martha** (59) worried most about 'the top of my arms' and 'wouldn't go out in a sleeveless dress'. There was self-disgust in these women's observations. **Alison** (60) talked about 'the collapse at 50'. **Janet** (50) was also most bothered by the 'flaps' on her arms: 'I will hold up my arm and it's like a heavy wing'. She was 'fat' ('6 chins') and thought 'it would be ridiculous to have cosmetic surgery to look better when you weigh 250 pounds'. But she'd known women who'd had it 'mainly to get back in the work field' and 'the others who wanted to look younger, because they had reached fifty and having a lot of trouble with their husbands'.

Janet (50) One woman I know is going to do it when she is 55. The money is in the bank, and the day after her 55th birthday she's going in. Plastic, the whole facelift and some body lift. Breasts, and she is round, so she's having a tummy tuck. A lot of them have tummy tucks - and rear tucks - and necks, chins, eyes - and the hips - it's a bloody mess. But in a couple of months, it's amazing. These people have money, don't realise how painful it is until it is over. And in most cases, reaction after it - they are shocked - the look of it, black and blue, and it hurts. 'If I had known this I would have never done it' - first week, second week - 'I will never recommend this to anyone', fourth week - 'well, it wasn't so bad', fifth week, two months - 'my god, everybody should have it, it will make you feel so much younger'.

Jill (44) had had cosmetic surgery on her teeth and jaw 'to make herself more attractive to men'. Charlotte (66) had had cosmetic surgery in order 'to look younger', more competitive with women, sexually attractive, and economically viable in her hairdressing business.

Charlotte (66) Since I've been in this business I suppose I am more aware of my appearance - in a beauty salon. I felt I had to be an image.

At the age of 55, she didn't like the reflection in her mirror:

Charlotte (66) I had become very wrinkled, my eyes were droopy, and I would look in the mirror and think, no matter what I did I couldn't really look good. And I was really becoming depressed with myself. And I thought, here I am trying to help people with skin care and look good, and stand up here talking to them and look like a prune. So I felt I had to do something about it. It isn't necessarily vanity I feel better about myself.

She'd decided she would have it done before the age of 60.

The operation, in spite of the fact that she had complete confidence in her surgeon (who was famous in the field) 'was more traumatic than I had expected', and she 'looked pretty bad straight afterwards'. She had a 'complete face lift' - with the incision on top of her head:

Charlotte (66) He cut in front of the ear and down and around the ear and the back of the ear. And then at the base of the hairline. So that lifted the neck and the chin. And in the eye area. Then with the incision at the top of the head, that would pull your forehead, so it would lift. He now has a technique where he makes an incision under the chin, but he didn't do that with me. A strip of my hair was shaved across the top of my head. Probably my hair was my biggest problem afterwards, I don't have good hair anyway.

So I recommend anyone thinking of having surgery to leave their hair as long as possible because you can cover up more with it afterwards. Now they are making the incisions back a little further or leaving a little strip of hair here, but I didn't have much hair there so they shaved me from here down. But I wore a wig after and got along beautifully. The first night and day I don't remember too much, because I was recovering from major surgery, and my head was bandaged totally. I think they removed the stitches on the third day. I saw myself just once bandaged up, and I was very badly bruised - some people bruise more. Particularly round my eyes and neck I was bruised - but I have seen people who have had the same operation and were not bruised. But I was not really recognisable for the first few days. I was in hospital longer than most people. I had the dirt abrasion, which is a planing of the skin - above my upper lip - it takes the fine lines away and leaves really smooth beautiful skin. It's done with a machine - something like sandpaper - it moves very rapidly and has to be done very tactfully because if it goes too deep it will scar. There is something they put over the skin after it is done which eventually peels off - but then I looked like I had a red moustache.

There had been some unpleasant after-effects to the operation:

Charlotte (66) First you are very numb - all through the top of your head and in this area - chin and cheek and ear area. The top of my head felt like a canvas block or something. I felt a little tight across my neck and throat, but more tight through the forehead area - and when I was tired it really felt tight. But it wasn't anything I objected to. I wanted it so desperately I was prepared to put up with it all.

She'd started to get a 'jowl' and a 'chicken neck' and 'always felt I had to cover up my neck with bows or scarfs':

Charlotte (66) It is much smoother and tighter now - round the chin. And the crows feet are better. And the eyes are open more, and the forehead smooth. My skin looks generally smooth.

She had the operation at 60 and 'felt 10 years younger' afterwards:

Charlotte (66) I really didn't want to look too different. I felt if I could look 45 that was OK. Because that is a really good age. When I do think about age it is frightening because there are so many things I want to do. I have a young mind and love life.

She was prepared to put up with anything to remain sexually viable and visible as a woman. Now at 66, she was having collagen injections 'to keep her skin supple'. As for the cosmetic surgery: 'It got me what I wanted and I've been very happy with it'.- She wanted to look 10 years younger. She was considering doing it again when she needed it.

Alison, however, pointed out the contradictions and cruel fate that could attend upon trying to remain youthful beyond one's time:

Alison: (60) From experience, I've realised how awful it is if you're really old if you've gone on thinking you could remain young. I'm thinking of my mother. I've never lied about my age, nor did my mother, but though she was older, she knew she looked younger, so she was always loving it when people said 'Oh, but you don't look your age'. But then having looked young all her time, when she was 70 and she suddenly became very much older-looking, though not her age still and she couldn't find her place in society at all because of this. Everything that she'd ever been before was nothing, she couldn't do it any more or be it or seem it or anything - she just collapsed and died within a couple of years. She'd had her hair dyed for god knows how many years, and suddenly it didn't mean anything because there was no way it could match up to the rest of her - her actual age, her actual

feelings, her actual experience. A bit like Dorian Gray, she just aged overnight. Very sudden.

These were the lengths that women were prepared to go for male approval, to attract a man or to keep a husband: the consequences of losing love and livelihood were reckoned even more painful:

Janet I can't tell you the number of 50 year old men that are
(50) getting divorced. And they are throwing women out that they have had for 25 years.

Although women could give good reasons for having cosmetic surgery, **Debbie** (40) thought it was tragic that women were put in this position at all:

Debbie I think it is a tragedy that they have been given no chinks
(40) in that whole ideology that says you are only valuable if you look a certain way, the way that men find attractive. It makes me want to cry. It's like asking me how I feel about human beings being tortured.

Misogyny and Menopause

What motivated women to make use of the drastic measures of cosmetic surgery ('torture' as Debbie described it) in an effort to maintain their sexual qualification is the belief that their lives are effectively finished at 40 or 50. That belief is generated in part by the evidence that their sexual value declines and what Rich describes as her 'death as a woman'. It is also generated by myths and stereotypes which represent women as 'past it'. Paralleling the social construction of women's value as sexualised through sexual objectification, marriage and motherhood in the first half of life is the desexualisation and devaluation of women in mid-life and beyond. In this process of constructing opportunity and identity, the

traditional literature on menopause, with its hidden agenda of bias and negative attitude has played a key part in perpetuating myths, stereotypes and misrepresentations of women. In these sources menopause is typically represented in terms of loss: it 'takes away the powers of conceiving and bearing a child', involves a 'loss of fertility', or 'robs' women of their fertility.⁶⁰

'The menopause actually occurs when your ovaries fail to release any more eggs ... and fail to produce ... it is the loss of oestrogen when the ovaries began to fail that causes most of the problems encountered at this time ... like wasting of skin and tissue ... Oestrogen deficiency allows the wall of the vagina to become thin...'⁶¹

Nelson has discussed the different myths, stereotypes, 'distortions and disjunctions' about women and age which feature in the traditional menopause literature: assumptions which equate loss of femininity with loss of child-bearing abilities, and incorrect information about physiological changes in skin and bone resulting from oestrogen deficiency.⁶² Oakley has referred to the work of Dr Robert Wilson, advocate of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) and author of the best seller *Feminine Forever* as having 'launched the present era of menopause mythology'.⁶³ Thus, in the chapter entitled 'The Loss of Womanhood and the Loss of Good Health', Wilson writes:

To be suddenly desexed is to her a staggering catastrophe ... I have seen untreated women who had shrivelled into caricatures of their former selves ... the woman becomes the equivalent of a eunuch ... no woman can be sure of escaping the horrors of this living decay. Every woman faces the threat of extreme suffering and incapacity.⁶⁴

Another typical example of popular menopause literature which presents a stereotyped and problematised picture of women is the work of

Ivor Felstein described by his publishers as 'one of this country's leading experts on the medical implications of sexual activity in later life'. Felstein described the physical changes in women at menopause as:

Skin bloom loss, increased wrinkling, more obvious hair growth on face and body, thinning and drying of the genital areas on the lady, as well as drooping or sagging of the breasts.¹⁶⁵

He described these changes as 'sexual turn offs' for men that need 'correcting', and offers the following advice on 'thinning, drooping or sagging breasts':

'Discuss with lady partner in a tactful manner. Suggest keep fit exercises or classes. Suggest asking family doctor about hormone tablets. In marked cases, discuss with family doctor about cosmetic surgery.'¹⁶⁶

Much of this literature is both 'woman-blaming' and misogynist. The cruel irony for women is that after having had their identity constructed in terms of sexual stereotypes and sexual objectification, they are then blamed and punished for failing to be successfully compliant or competitive. The woman in the case cited above is held in contempt for the physical changes of age, the medical advice altered, evidence that her value has been sexualised. She is now worthless unless she can be re-shaped into some semblance of her former sexually valued self. The advice to her husband might have concluded with 'exchange her for a newer and younger model', which is what men in middle age often do. This is the ultimate proof of her individual valuelessness: she is completely exchangeable for a woman where sexual value is higher.

In the traditional menopause literature supposed facts are often unsupported or are even contradicted by evidence from the actual experiences of women, or from socio-medical research:

The finding that there was no tendency for women who are menopausal to experience any significant increase in symptoms clearly reduces the importance of this particular biological event ... This, together with the findings that symptoms in fact tend to peak well before this event, lends further support to the view that for most women, biological changes in middle life are of less significance than are the psychosocial ones.⁶⁷

Weideger draws a distinction between the myths and realities of menopause: its biological function (the 'cessation of menstruation, the discreet changes in sex hormones which underlie it, and the termination of fertility')⁶⁸ and its symbolic meaning for women - how women feel about it: 'a blank cloud hovering overhead', 'the end to the best time of my life', 'feared because it is associated with being old.' It is 'not the biological realities that are responsible for the meaning attached to menopause and ageing, but the cultural attitudes towards older women.' 'Our cultural inheritance,' according to Weideger, 'has dictated that a woman is valued *only* as long as she can reproduce.'⁶⁹ The negative attitudes to menopause and age reflect not the physiological process, but the social position of women in society.

As Sontag put it: 'Ageing is much more a social judgement than a biological eventuality.'⁷⁰ Sontag cites examples which 'clearly indicate the fictional nature' of the ageing crisis for women. Hendricks also shows how 'cultural stereotypes continue to enforce a fictional view in the face of which the reality of the situation provides a substantial contrast', particularly with regard to the female menopause: 'the most maligned of all the aspects of human sexuality.'⁷¹ The 'fictional view' of menopause exists as part of the social construction of women's

sexuality, functioning to create and maintain women's value as sexualised (positively in the first half of life, negatively in the second half).

Labels and the Social Control of Older Women

Members of the Older Women's Group were acutely aware that their lives were being extinguished: of their death as women in mid-life. They saw not only negative stereotypes, but also lack of positive 'categories' as a major liability in their lives:

Helen: There is no socially defined and accepted role or label for
(44) the older woman on her own - divorced. In a way you have to make an individual of yourself in each situation you find yourself in. We are probably the first generation to establish this older woman on her own BY CHOICE role. There is a label for every other age and status, but not this one. Not once you're beyond mid-30s and on your own.

Carla: There's only spinster. It was used to me today about a woman-
(50) what a pity, she'd been a spinster all her life. Now batchelor sounds great, but spinster has definitely got negative overtones.

The problem with ascribing a positive role and attitudes to older women seems to lie in a deep-seated ambiguity about women's sexuality. While there is a category for a non-sexual older woman (spinster), there is no category for an older woman who is sexually available but not attached to a male (ie in marriage).

Helen: We don't fit into the category of spinster either, because
(44) while we are spinsters, we are other things as well. There isn't a recognised role that takes account of all that we are - including the fact that we are sexually available.

'Very shortly', said Kath at 43, 'there's going to be no place for me in society, and that's the credibility gap that I have got to try to live across'. And Helen: 'I feel as an older woman that you do have problems which younger women don't have - finding a role that carries with it some status. If you aren't male identified, or identifiable in a relationship with a male, then you have no positive identity.' Without exception, every one of the available labels for women are categories which either define them as sexually unavailable, or available only to one man at a time. Virgin, girlfriend, wife, mother, grandmother, spinster, even the 'other woman', by definition means being sexually available to one man. It would appear that men are only happy when women are defined as sexually unavailable or possessed by a particular male, and therefore controlled by males. Certainly Carla (50) talked very specifically of moving from her father's control to her husband's control.

The available labels and roles give women permission to be a certain very limited kind of sexual person, defined in relation to particular men.

Ironically, however, in spite of the limits imposed by such labels as wife and mother they have the advantage of having some status attached to them. Being label-free or role-less poses problems:

Helen: It makes things more difficult because if there is no name
 (44) put on it, then there are no expectations or rights attached to it. And you don't have a place in society really, except as you make yourself individually remake it every time.

There is no positive label for a woman on her own which denotes autonomous sexuality.

Helen: Even the word 'woman' itself is often frightening to men. If
(44) you say to a man, 'I don't want to be called a lady, I'm a woman', they almost hesitate, as if you are saying a naughty word.

Carla: And it's amazing how you're still called girl, even when you
(50) are fifty. I've been wearing my daughter's badge that says don't call me a girl, I'm a woman.

Helen: Woman is a bit naughty I think, it hints at being sexual and
(44) sexually available.

Helen: All roles are imprisoning to some extent, but without one you
(44) don't exist socially the way society is now. For the liberated woman, there isn't an established role. There isn't one that carries status with it.

To be labelled according to age/gender categories is problematic for women, but in an oppressive society to be without a label is still problematic

One reason there is no positive, socially acceptable, role for women, independent of men, and particularly for older women is that any positive definition of women independent from men would have to acknowledge women's autonomous and active sexuality.

Kath: ... I was wondering if the difficulty of creating a socially
(43) acceptable role for a woman living on her own is because people don't know whether she is or is not sexually available. If you're not available - as a spinster who is devoting herself to a career, then they know where they are. If you're lesbian, people know where they are. If you're totally available, say as a prostitute, again, people know where they are. But if you are just a woman on her own, available according to her own needs and standards, desires, on an individual basis, then people don't know how to react. Because they never know at any

given moment whether the woman is available or not. That is threatening.

The power of sexually autonomous and economically independent women is threatening.

Jill: Women are really strong in their 40s. Their children are
(44) often grown up and leaving. They really have an identity, they can do all the things they wanted to do, and have a real sense of power because of that experience of marriage and childrearing. It's all too threatening to men. If they unleashed women to be that powerful, where would they be? So they have to keep women down.

Women's identity is thus constructed for her in relation to men as a form of social control: of 'keeping her down'. Her opportunities are determined by her age/gender category and her success in filling it. To assert a sexuality and a value which is not sexualized, which is independent of men or male definition at any time, but particularly 'later' in life, at a time when female sexuality is deemed to be valueless, constitutes a fundamental challenge to the construction of the female chronology. And yet, most of the women in this study had, under the influence of feminism, found ways to create alternative categories, strategies to redefine their sexual value as well as to assert their economic value, attempting to forge for themselves a positive identity and to reclaim their power.

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4. Dworkin, A. (1983), p. 65.
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CHAPTER SIX

THE FEMALE CHRONOLOGY: WOMEN'S SEXUALISED VALUE AND MALE POWER

I. WOMEN'S SEXUALISED VALUE

Economic Value

The female chronology operates as an elaborate, but effective, system of social control in which age divisions and sexual divisions are interconnected at every age and stage of a woman's life. It is a system which excludes women from equality and opportunity in the labour market, from economic power, independence and influence over their own lives. It is a system which keeps women subordinate in the labour market *and* subordinate (and economically dependent) in marriage. It is therefore a system which quite unilaterally keeps women economically subordinate and without power.

From one point of view, women are excluded from or exploited in the labour market in the early part of their lives because of the socially constructed expectations that they will marry and mother and they are excluded from or exploited in the labour market later in their lives because they have married and mothered. Women are thus penalised and punished for what they are supposedly 'destined' to do, what they are certainly conditioned to do, and what they actually do do: 90% marry and 80% have children.

From another point of view, it is arguably women's exploitation in the labour market that makes women marry, that 'seduces' (or forces) women into marriage, as offering them a better deal economically than the labour market. The actual exclusion of women from the labour market by

the labour market becomes most visible when women become mothers. Resources for work-place childcare are virtually non-existent. Other forms of childcare are difficult to come by, hard to organise and expensive.¹ The female chronology is a system in which women are effectively *presumed* not to work once they are mothers because there is no systematic provision for childrearing and childcare other than by the biological mother alone in marriage, or alone as a single parent. But women with children need to work, want to work and do work. The penalties (on women and children) for combining childrearing and paid employment are emotionally and economically heavy: the cost of childcare, the stress of making do and double shifts. Having children penalises women both in marriage and in the labour market.

The female chronology is thus a system which constructs women's opportunity and identity in terms of marriage and motherhood, often defining this as a biologically determined 'role' rather than as work, and offering no payment or remuneration for it. Marriage and motherhood therefore simultaneously become sources of opportunity and sites of oppression. In addition what women are 'valued' for has no real (ie. monetary) value. Thus, whether it is marriage and/or motherhood which removes women from the labour market, or the labour market which excludes women into marriage (possibly) and excludes women who are mothers (certainly), what women are 'valued' for has little or no value.

The common factor with respect to the work women do within the home (household work) and the work women do outside the home (paid work) is its lack of value. It is not the work itself (the tasks) which have little or no value, but the fact that *it is done by women*. Thus, in other

cultures, there are (always) sexual divisions of labour: but in cultures where men do what women do in our culture, their work is not lowly, but on the contrary, highly valued.² Women's work is only 'women's work' when women do it. When it is done by men, it ceases to be valued so low. In times of recession or depression, men move into occupations previously filled by women (clerical, catering, sales) and previously devalued as 'women's work'. When men move in, the value of the work rises. It is not the work, or the content of the work that is without value, but who does it: women as women are without value. Given the fact that work in the labour market only has a low value when women rather than men do it, it is necessary to conclude that what women do, whether in marriage, in motherhood, or in the labour market has little or no value because **women themselves - women as women - have little or no value.**

According to Sharpe, 'a vicious circle is set up in which women's work, like the status of women themselves, reinforces their own devaluation.'³

In our money economy, women have relatively little money in their own right. They sell their labour in the bargain basement, at cut prices, and so they are given a cut-price valuation in all spheres of activity. When you sell your labour power you are also selling your time, your life-time, the stuff of life itself, and if it fetches low prices you are yourself valued low.⁴

The vicious circle of women's devaluation includes the appropriation of women's work as wives and mother. This data has shown how women, by way of compensating for their devaluation as wives and mothers seek out labour market participation as a means of increasing their economic value. This offers some relief, but it proves to be only a partial solution. It

does not address the issue or the implications of women's sexual value, and the extent to which women's value is fundamentally and unilaterally sexualised.

SEXUAL VALUE

What little value women have is 'sexual value'. This means that women are valued in relation to their sexual attractiveness, to their sexual potential in relation to achieving and maintaining marriage, and to their sexual usefulness in reproduction. They are valued in relation to their 'sexual qualifications' both in and out marriage and in motherhood. Women's value is thus defined by their sexuality, and by their success in conforming to prescribed forms of sexual objectification. In this sense, women are sexualised and women's lives are sexualised.

Reproduction is determined biologically in the first place by menstruation and in the end by menopause. Reproduction thus has a limited life span, limited even further by the cultural factors which mean that most women do not bear children until a considerable time after the onset of menstruation and most women stop bearing children long before the onset of menopause. Sexual attractiveness - ie male-defined sexually objectified beauty - is defined wholly in relation to youth which has a limited timespan. The fact that women are often left by their husbands in mid-life once they have fulfilled their reproductive and childrearing functions, usually in exchange for younger and more attractive and 'useful' models, is further evidence of their sexualised value as distinct from a value defined in relation to their personality or the value of the work they do as wives and mothers. It is therefore the lives of women themselves which are limited by having their usefulness and value defined sexually and by their capacity to reproduce and rear children. Because women have no real economic value in marriage and motherhood, because

women's only real value is their sexual value, it is in effect women's very value which is sexualised and short-lived.

The data in this study has revealed a system that disqualifies women both economically and sexually, most obviously beyond a certain mid-life stage, but in fact, at all stages through the life span. It has revealed a system in which women's lives are regulated, timetabled and controlled through the definition, or 'construction', of women as subordinate. This subordination is both sexual and economic: accomplished through sex discrimination in the labour market, through the enforced economic dependence of women in marriage, and through the sexualisation of women: in the construction of women's identity in relation to men and for male approval - sexually attractive, sexually available, sexually active, sexually useful, sexually 'owned', sexually dependent, sexually controlled. Because of the economic dependence of women on men in marriage, women's economic subordination is also therefore sexualised. In every respect, women's inequality is sexualised. In the female chronology, the sexualising of women's inequality involves the over-sexualising of younger women and the under-sexualising of older women but always the sexualising of all women at all ages.

Sexualised Economic Value

If women's lives are 'finished at 40', it is not therefore because of the menopause or because of age, but because of value. Their sexual and reproductive usefulness is at an end within a male identified, male defined system of power and value. Women are arguably only disadvantaged in the process of ageing by this system of male power: in

the male definition, the male language, the male approval, the male desire, the male servicing, the male chronology. The key concept of 'retirement' is male: sociological literature and social policies are primarily concerned with male retirement from employment or 'male redundancy'. Both redundancy and retirement have been found to drive men to early deaths.⁵ But women 'retire from reproduction' as well as from paid employment (itself a fact which has often been obscured by the male system of sociology).⁶ And, women are made sexually redundant. These events, unlike their male equivalents, are represented as 'normal' and unproblematic.

With her primary value sexualised and defined by her work in the home as wife and mother, regardless of whether she is in paid employment, a woman finds herself in middle age - *in the prime of her life without sexual value and therefore without value.* This is just as true of working class as of middle class women. Whatever their economic value, and however long term it may be, their sexual value is short term. This valuelessness is not inherent, but created, 'fictional' as Sontag described it. It is not biologically determined, but socially constructed: i.e. determined by the position and treatment of women in society. This is obviously why 'middle age' is so devastating for women:

The 'crisis of middle age' is likely to differ for men and women, since they tend to play different roles over the life cycle. In a sense, ageing is confronted earlier by the woman who plays the stereotyped domestic gender role. She retires from her major career - being a mother - earlier than men retire from the work role. Although this may mean that old age involves fewer wrenching transitions for women, it heightens personal change in middle age. Middle-aged men tended to view themselves as industrious and in control ... and one gains the impression that their concern was with laying the groundwork for a satisfactory retirement life style. In middle-aged women, however, ageing was a present problem, and their views of themselves and their circumstances were much less positive.⁷

Doris Lessing's heroine Kate, who had been a 'full-time mother' till her children were grown up, made the brutal discovery of what it meant to come to the end of her career as a mother.

She was unnecessary ... in middle age, in the full flood of one's capacities and energies ... to become that well-documented and much studied phenomenon, the woman with grown up children and not enough to do.⁹

Kate does have the option, in theory, of beginning a second 'career' after her children leave home. But like many middle class women that had not occurred to her. Like Janet (50) in this sample, she'd made plans for this time in her life: 'study ... travel ... take up this or that type of welfare work ...' But these 'occupations' are just as unpaid and unvalued as child-rearing, ways of passing time until death. Working class women of the same generation as Lessing's heroine also quit work and stayed at home to raise their children, occasionally returning to part-time work before their children were grown up. Working class women have always had less incentive to return to the labour market full time while mothering because of low pay, low status and limited job satisfaction. So, according to Julie (45) 'you didn't farm your kids out unless you had to' (ie economic necessity forced you back to full time work). Thus, working class women as well as middle class women are faced with 'what to do' when the children are 'raised' (at whatever stage they decide this to be achieved.⁹ In theory both working class and middle class women are then free to start a 'new career' in full-time employment.

But Weideger points out, to really have a second 'career' requires recognising that full-time motherhood is a *first* career - and fairly short term too, taking into account the 45 years or more of working

life that is the normal expectation for men. Yet motherhood is not regarded as relevant experience for women who have been full time mothers who want to enter - or re-enter - the labour market in their 40's. A common situation, therefore, is that of the 'middle-aged' women often without qualifications or with outdated qualifications or without 'valued' experience who will find 'something' to do: work that will be compensatory rather than a new source of fulfilment. And 'something' is a world removed from 'substance'.¹⁰

For women in this study, work was a partial solution to increasing their economic value, but this did not *equivalently* increase their sexual value. Ironically, even if a woman has achieved power in a profession or business career, either by choosing a 'career' as an alternative to reproduction and child-rearing, or managing to combine a career with children, she is, as Sontag points out, often 'considered less rather than more desirable.' For 'successful femininity requires passivity not power, incompetence, not achievement, niceness not competitiveness'. She may, have the same sense of real satisfaction and achievement that men can derive from work, but not the status and value, because her primary value, having been sexualised decreases regardless of her economic value.

It is difficult not to have a sense of women's lives within the 'female chronology' as it is currently constructed - and undervalued - as 'wasted' lives. Women themselves communicate this sense of waste and loss. Both Hilary (64) and Charlotte (66), had freed themselves

of the worst affects of age and gender oppression in marriage (and motherhood) through economic independence. But they had gone to quite considerable lengths in their lives to maintain an appearance of youth and beauty. The dependency and oppression of marriage was alleviated for them by the opportunity of a career in paid employment and the autonomy that offered. But these women still remained hooked on the need to maintain their sexual attractiveness and to depend on male approval for a significant part of their identity. They were trapped by the 'terror of not being young' and the need to maintain their 'sexual qualifications'. This suggests that **misogyny (woman-hatred) as well as inequality (sex discrimination) might be a factor in women's subordination, and chronology a factor in its construction.** Dworkin, for one, sees the value of women in the labour market determined by a 'woman-hating social system' in which 'the stigma precedes the woman and predetermines the undervaluing of her work.''' And Daly shows how the manipulation and control of women's sexuality is directly connected to and contributes to constructing women's economic subordination.

II. MISOGYNY AND MALE POWER

Female Mutilation and Sexualised Value

Daly includes cosmetic surgery and hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for menopausal women in her catalogue of the mutilations that are performed on women to make them marriageable, to keep them married or (re)marriageable, and/or to control their sexuality before, during or after marriage: what she calls 'imposed totalitarian heterosexism'.¹² She writes about the 'breast surgery craze' as including the over-zealousness of the medical establishment in performing 'mastectomy' as a treatment for breast cancer with subsequent cosmetic breast reconstruction as well as the 'purely cosmetic' surgery performed on women's breasts 'to make women correctly sexual'.

... their treatments also are totally controlled by heterosexual suppositions, particularly by the idea that all 'normal' women should think/live only in terms of sexual relations with men.'¹³

She sees all of these treatments (and also 'the horrors of the Pill') as 'centring around this controlling heterosexist supposition' and 'controlling women's sexual appetites'.

Daly compares cosmetic surgery - 'the increasingly popular American way of deadly beautification' - with the practice of female genital mutilation - 'the pain and danger of infection inflicted upon millions of African women for "aesthetic" reasons.'¹⁴ The descriptions of the surgery carried out on women's genitals does, in a purely medical account, remarkably resemble the accounts in the life

history data - in Jill's and Charlotte's stories - of the surgery .
carried out on women's faces:

'removal of the prepuce and/or tip of the clitoris, or
'excision of the entire clitoris with the labia minora and
some or most of the external genitalia, or 'excision of the
entire clitoris, labia minora and parts of the labia majora
... The purpose is to close the vaginal orifice. Only a
small opening is left (usually by inserting a slither of
wood) so the urine or later the menstrual blood can be
passed.'¹⁵

In the case of cosmetic surgery of the face, breast, belly or buttocks
and female circumcision, excision or infibulation described here - the
woman undergoes with the tacit approval of her culture, forms of
surgery allegedly to improve her physical appearance according to male
criteria of female beauty. There is pain, danger and risk of death
involved in genital 'surgery':

What is certain is that the infibulated girl is mutilated
and that she can look forward to a life of repeated
encounters with 'the little knife' - the instrument of her
perpetual torture. For women who are infibulated have to be
cut open - either by the husband or by another woman - to
permit intercourse. They have to be cut open further for
delivery of a child. Often they are sewn up again after
delivery, depending upon the decision of the husband. The
cutting (defibulation) and re-sewing goes on throughout a
woman's living death of reproductive 'life'.¹⁶

There is also pain danger and sometimes death involved in
cosmetic surgery. The point of genital surgery is to make women 'more
purely feminine', to 'keep women faithful', to 'make women
marriageable': 'in Guinea ... no man marries a woman who has not been
excised and who is not a virgin'.¹⁷

Only a mutilated woman is considered 100 per cent feminine.
By removal of her specifically *female*-identified organ,
which is not necessary for the male's pleasure or for
reproductive servitude, she 'becomes a woman'.¹⁸

The point of cosmetic surgery is to make women 'more purely feminine' and 'marriageable' (ie. able to achieve and maintain marriage).

Neither female genital mutilation nor cosmetic surgery of the female face and body can serve any biological purpose. It can only enforce women's conformity to and compliance with a social purpose: the regulation of their lives in relation to men, to male approval and to male 'ownership' in marriage. Much as we might want to resist comparisons between 'cosmetic surgery' of the female genitals and cosmetic surgery of the female face or breast, there is a compelling logic to the comparison which reveals what the apparently different practices have in common. Both practices demonstrate the extent to which women's value is defined as sexual and subordinate to the power of men, both sexually and economically (in marriage). Both practices show the processes by which women's opportunity and identity - women's essential value - becomes sexualised.

Daly also makes comparisons between what women in contemporary Western culture are forced to do to obtain male approval and to maintain marriageability and other cultural practices of female 'mutilation'. She refers to Chinese footbinding - 'the reduction of a woman's feet to pubescent three-inch stumps' - as another ritual mutilation performed 'out of fear that otherwise the girl would not be marriageable'.¹⁹

Not to mutilate their daughters was unthinkable to them, for it meant that men would find them unattractive and would refuse to marry them.²⁰

Footbinding - a painful and debilitating procedure carried out on infant females and inducing 'the female helplessness' that sexually 'arouses many men'²¹ has been cited as:

The most striking example of the strange things that women do or have done to them, in almost all cultures, in order to make themselves more attractive to men.²²

According to Daly, the 'males who wielded economic and political power had decided that maimed female feet were essential for male approval and for marriageability'.²³

There are some similarities between foot-binding and the incapacitation of women through the wearing of high heels. Many of the women interviewed referred to permanent damage to their feet as a result of wearing these shoes. Women whose feet were bound couldn't 'run away', they could hardly walk, they had to hobble: women in stiletto heels can't run way, they can hardly walk, they hobble.

Suttee - the burning alive of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands - is for Daly 'the ultimate consummation of marriage', or the meaning of marriage as a measure of the value of women. On the death of her husband, a woman had no value, even if she was, as a child-bride, a widow aged 11 years. If she was unwilling to die, she would be forced by relatives into the 'bed of flames'. Her only value was her sexualised value. Outside of marriage to one male she had no useful value and she was disposable. Daly makes similar comparisons with 'witch burning' as an attempt to control the sexuality of 'older

women' who for various reasons could not be controlled by men in marriage:

... the witchcraze focussed predominantly upon women who had rejected marriage (spinsters) and women who had survived it (widows) ... women whose physical, intellectual, economic, moral, and spiritual independence and activity profoundly threatened the male monopoly in every sphere.²⁴

Dworkin catalogues such practices as 'footbinding, waist binding, breast binding, clitoridectomy, breast enlargement or reduction, hair dying, face painting and high heeled shoes' as:

Strategies employed so that the natural female body will fit the male idea of ideal female beauty.²⁵

They all require 'deforming' or 'mutilation', 'distortion' or 'denial' of women's natural body.²⁶

Male Power and Sexualised Inequality

The characteristics of these forms of woman-torture identified by Daly interestingly appear also to be characteristic of the conformity to the female chronology of the women in this study. These include conforming to an image of male attractiveness and acceptability, changing the shape of the female body for the approval of males (often requiring surgery), making women more sexually attractive and marriageable, ensuring that they can be verified as the property of particular males (as virgins) and not independent and sexually available and active (as the witches were alleged to be): in short, enhancing women's value in relation to men and marriage, controlling women's sexual autonomy and availability.

One characteristic is the 'purity' motive of being marriageable property. Female genital mutilation and facial cosmetic surgery are both regarded as making women more beautiful and marriageable. Women often either do these things to themselves or to each other and either expect it or accept it in other women. This is certainly the case with cosmetic surgery. This creates the *appearance* that men are not involved and that women choose to mutilate themselves and each other, but obscures the economic disadvantage of women which guarantees their compliance for purposes of their survival. Rich remarked on this economic oppression:

Women have married because it was necessary, in order to survive economically, in order to have children who would not suffer economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, in order to do what was expected of women.²⁷

There is also always a 'ritual orderliness' to the procedures that obscures their barbarity and horror. A *NOW* magazine on cosmetic surgery in 1986 featured a photograph of a woman calmly eating an elegant lunch while through the window behind her another woman was being laid out in the operating theatre and prepared for a new breast enlargement implant that was described as 'experimental'. The leaflets and brochures and publicity material sent out by cosmetic surgery clinics is smooth and glossy and (as Daly points out) it 'normalises' the horrors of the medical practices carried out on women. She regards this as all part of the 'legitimation' of women's mutilation 'for men'.

One example of this is described as the 'legitimation of scholarship', and relates specifically to a procedure older women are 'encouraged' to use to stay young and beautiful: hormone replacement therapy. Daly quotes a medical journal which 'linked the use of exogenous oestrogen and endometrical carcinoma.²⁸ The very doctor who 'had directed one of the studies revealing the carcinogenic properties of the drug and had co-authored one of the NEJM articles exposing it',²⁹ also campaigned to keep the drug on the market and marketed it himself. He stood to gain financially from its prescription. Behind the abuse of women is always someone else's economic motive as well as her own 'economic necessity'. In the USA a lot of money is made by the medical establishment from surgery on women.

Another common factor to all of the procedures is that they are painful and dangerous and can and often do lead to death, disability and disfigurement:

The unspoken fact, buried in the interstices of professional jargon, is this: These women, seduced into surgery through implanted fear of unfashionable fat, risk, death.³⁰

The permanent damage to women's appearance caused by mistakes in cosmetic surgery has been documented. The disfigurement and death-rate associated with female genital mutilation, foot-binding, witch-burning and Suttee was - and still is - very high. Furthermore these things have happened to *millions* of women and they still do. In every case, the procedure is concerned with defining women's value as wives

and mothers, with subordinating women to men through marriage and motherhood, with ensuring therefore that women's economic value is sexualised: with sexualising women's value and therefore with sexualising women's subordination.

Rich described this system of sexualised subordination in terms of male power as:

- denying women their own sexuality'
- forcing male sexuality on women
- commanding or exploiting women's labour
- controlling or robbing women of their children
- confining women physically and preventing their movement
- using them as objects in male transactions (*includes* requirement to dress for male sexual titillation).
- cramping their creativeness
- withholding from women large areas of the society's knowledge and cultural achievements.³¹

These characteristics of 'institutionalised heterosexuality' are also, significantly, characteristic of the sexualising of women's value described in this study. MacKinnon asks:

What if inequality is built into the social conceptions of male and female sexuality, of masculinity and femininity, of sexism and heterosexual attractiveness?³⁰

She is concerned with sexual harassment and the arousal of male desire by 'female vulnerability' in the workplace. But the 'eroticisation of women's subordination' which she sees in sexual harassment, and the

sexualising of inequality which she and Dworkin see in pornography is also inherent in the process of female socialisation and sex-role conditioning to which women are subjected, and the sexual division of labour where women's value is sexualised.

The 'eroticised subordination of women' and the sexualising of women's value is timetabled: an essential characteristic of the female chronology. Thus women are either subordinated through eroticisation in the first half of their lives, or they are subordinated through 'erasure of sexuality' in the second 'half' when they are rendered invisible as sexual beings. Rich sees heterosexuality as 'imposed, managed, organised, propagandised and maintained by force':³³ So is its chronology.

III. CHRONOLOGY AND WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

Analysis of women's oppression is usually based on what happens to women - as wives, as mothers, as workers. However, the decision to look at the life course of women at all stages of the female life cycle, has provided a unique picture of the oppression of women as constructed over time. From a life course perspective it has become clear that the oppression of women is defined both by its content and by its chronology. It is never just the content of the oppression which is at issue, but its chronology. Or conversely, the oppression is constructed as much from the chronology as its content.

It is not just a matter of what women can and cannot do, but *when*. Timing is always a part of the mechanism of control: there are pressures and rewards (validation) for being 'on time', and penalties (disapprobation in attitudes, actual loss of opportunities) for being 'too early' or 'too late'. Opportunities are limited by gender: they are also limited by time, in time, and over time. Chronology is thus the key to understanding women's oppression.

In every case, whether it is socialisation, the sexual division of labour or sexuality, age as well as gender is a key component and cornerstone of the construction of women's economic and sexual subordination. Age divisions like sexual divisions are fixed for social purposes rather than biological reasons. In every case, the practices function to control women's compliance with the female chronology and to punish deviation. Sanctions are imposed on a woman

because of her age at every stage of her life as well as because of her gender. Age as well as gender is a mechanism of control. Age as well as gender must be controlled. Women must be controlled at all ages. All of these forms of social control are concrete, material and physical. They are also psychological.

Without the element of age oppression, the gender oppression could not be so effectively controlling and coercive. Without the element of gender oppression, age and ageing would not be a debilitating or an annihilating experience for women. It is the combination of age oppression and gender oppression **over time** which constructs the identity of women as women within a system of male power referred to as sexism or patriarchy, which Rich defines as:

... a familial - social, ideological, political system in which men - by force, exert pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or will not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.³⁴

In addition this sexism is a system which conveniently coincides with the dominant economic system of capitalism³⁵ in which the 'ideological' (the ideas, the attitudes and beliefs) operates jointly with the 'material' economic conditions to determine opportunity and identity.

When age at all life stages is revealed as a factor in the valuation and devaluation of women (as this data shows), then it is possible to see the chronology of women's oppression: the damage done

to women's lives throughout the life span. The oppression of women as women is based on the life long social control of women's opportunity and identity in relation to the female chronology. This study has shown women's oppression to be rooted in the 'eroticisation of women's subordination' and the 'sexualising of women's inequality' which is the consequence of the sexualising of women's economic value in marriage and motherhood and the sexualising of women's sexuality in relation to men and male approval.

So far in this study, the data has illustrated both the oppression (what is done to women) and the internalised oppression (what women do to themselves and each other): how women have complied with their oppression in the female chronology. But two stories emerged from this data: women's resistance to the constraints of the female chronology as well as their compliance with it. For all of the women had resisted quite spontaneously and with some success in many ways at different stages in their lives. Then influenced by a decade of feminism, they had mounted major resistance and had found different strategies for freeing themselves, for getting themselves out from under at least some aspects of the age/gender oppression of the female chronology. The ways that women found to increase their value and power, to feel 'on top of it' rather than 'past it' at all life stages are discussed in Part Four: Liberation.

Chapter Six - Footnotes

1. Cohen, B. and Moss, P. (1988) quoted in Rights for Women, p. 1.
2. Delphy, C. (1984), p. 20.
3. Sharpe, S. (1981) p. 193.
4. Ibid, p. 161.
5. Phillipson, C. (1982) p. 71.
6. IBID.
7. Ward, R. (1979), p. 117.
8. Lessing, D. (1973), pp. 22-23.
9. In the University of Essex ESRC three generational Families and Social Mobility study, working class women of all generations stopped work on motherhood from 5 to 15 years. The women who returned to full time work when their youngest child was five were the teachers.
10. Weideger, P. (1978), p. 226.
11. Dworkin, A. (1983), p. 64.
12. Daly, M. (1979), p. 264.
13. Ibid, p. 262.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid, p. 156.
16. Ibid, p. 156/7.
17. Ibid, p. 163.
18. Ibid, p. 167.
19. Ibid, p. 137.
20. Ibid, p. 139.
21. Ibid, p. 144.
22. Levy, H.S. (1966), p. 7.
23. Daly, M., op. ci., p. 140.
24. Ibid, p. 184.

25. Dworkin, A. (1983).
26. Dworkin, H., op. cit., p. 146.
27. Rich, A. (1981), p. 26.
28. Daly, M. op. cit., p. 249.
29. Ibid, p. 250.
30. Ibid, p. 272.
31. Rich, A. (1981), pp. 10-12.
32. MacKinnon, C. (1979), p. 220.
33. Rich, A. op. cit., p. 20.
34. Rich, A. (1979) p. 57.
35. Itzin, C. (1986), p. 130.

PART 4 - LIBERATION

CHAPTER SEVEN

WOMEN'S STRATEGIES FOR ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AND
AUTONOMOUS IDENTITY

I. RESISTENCE TO AGE AND GENDER SOCIALISATION

Likening the process of age and gender conditioning to learning a script and then performing a role has to be useful. There are many similarities. This is what the majority of the women interviewed did, were aware of doing and described themselves as doing. Part Two and Three of this thesis have been concerned with describing the scripts of the female chronology and demonstrating how and why women comply with them.

But, there is always more to women's lives than acting out a preordained part. Females may be conditioned to passivity, but they are not inherently any more passive than males at birth. And the 'role' of the individual female in the learning or conditioning process itself is not wholly passive either. The 'script role' model is a good one because it implies active learning and adopting a 'character' other than one's real 'self', while still maintaining one's 'self' within and behind the character role. This is certainly the case with age and gender conditioning.

In addition, the roles - the age and gender stereotypes - may be actively resisted and alternatives sought out. The degree of compliance or resistance with which individual women who were interviewed responded to the conditioning varied. Indeed, given the economic and psychological pressures towards compliance, or collusion, the strategies of resistance which women adopted in different ways to the different age and gender pressures at all life

stages were remarkable in their variety and ingenuity and in the courage required *not* to conform and to try to live 'free'. For, set against the losses incurred by living within the stereotypes, were penalties and costs for refusing to participate.

Depression as Resistance

Even when compliance or collusion takes place, women's feelings of frustration, confusion, fury, resignation, humiliation and despair indicate a continuing level of 'internal resistance'. The depression related to the life stages of women and experienced by many of the women in this study, can be seen as a symptom of the oppression: evidence that the experience of women within the traditional female chronology is oppressive, the cause of this category of 'mental illness, just as heart disease can be a physical illness caused by life stress. But the depression can also be interpreted as a form of internal resistance. Thus when the requirements of the female chronology become sufficiently intolerable, some women could be said to resist compliance through depression. As a bid for escape it has been a relatively ineffective strategy because the social response (through the mental health system) has not been to alleviate the causes of the distress experienced within the female chronology, but rather to use drugs to treat the symptoms and obtain or maintain women's compliance. It is nevertheless important to acknowledge the elements of resistance embodied in women's life cycle-related depression. Similar forms of resistance have been identified in anorexia and over-eating.

Being a 'Tomboy'

There were also two very distinct forms of resistance to childhood socialisation and the social construction of femininity discovered in the experience of the women interviewed.

One of these was to 'be a tomboy'. Of the lesbians interviewed, all described themselves as having been 'tomboys'. This was the word they chose (without prompting, in the normal course of the life history interview format), to describe what was apparently their resistance to femininity. Three of the heterosexual women also described themselves as having been 'tomboys', (though more might have done if they had been asked directly rather than the information volunteered). Barbara's experience explains what many women referred to about trying to avoid the labels of femininity. She wanted 'to be a boy':

Barbara I was very determined from about 6 years that I wasn't going (28) to be a little girl - not keep clean and wear dresses that made my movements difficult. I only wanted to wear trousers. Maybe I had a model in my father - because I was wilful and he was bad-tempered, people said I was like him. I called myself John, and my sister Jimmy. My parents were totally tolerant of all this. I'd play adventure games with my father. I was also helpful around the house, not difficult about that, so I was OK for everyone. I was happy and confident and gregarious.

She described herself as having been 'a bit of a legend as a tomboy in the family', and how she had decided she was going to be prime minister.

It is not possible - nor is there any need - to say from this data that all lesbians will have been tomboys, or that being a tomboy

means that women are or will become lesbians in adulthood. This is obviously not the case. But from this data, it is possible to say a) that being a tomboy was a positive alternative to femininity for some females in childhood and, b) that for some of these women, lesbianism provided an alternative to compliance with the female chronology in adulthood. Barbara's parents accepted her 'non-feminine' behaviour. Most of the childhood 'tomboys' were treated with anxiety or antagaonism rather than tolerance: for most of them, non-compliance with femininity in childhood was difficult. They found non-compliance with age and gender stereotypes through lesbianism in adulthood easier, because of their confidence in their 'identity' and especially influenced by the positive images of lesbianism provided by feminism and gay liberation.

Being 'Just a Person'

There were those who identified themselves not as 'female' or 'male', but as 'just people'. They tended to be the ones who were aware of being physically or intellectually 'equal to men'.

Ros (48) I was very physical, and played alongside boys always in games, and liked them. I found the girls silly and boring. But I didn't think of myself as a boy. I felt equal to them. I was aggressive and competitive.

Janet (50) I was on the boys' baseball team. I was the only one they chose to play any sport. I was the first one they chose in any classroom situation, except spelling. No, I was a person. I did not realise about women until I was 20, honestly.

Sheila (38) said she had been 'raised to be a person and I think of myself as a person'. Her father's expectations 'were not of me as a girl, but as a person'. She'd been raised to assume that she was

equal to men, with the same abilities and opportunities. It was only when influenced by feminism that she had come to think of herself as 'a person who is also a woman'.

Lesley (38) had had a similar upbringing, and had found the discovery that she was not 'just a person', both a revelation and a shock. She had totally realigned her self-image as a result of realising that:

Lesley (38) I was not competing equally with men, because my opportunities were not the same as theirs. I could be as capable or even more capable than men, but as a woman I discovered I did not have the same chances as men. Thinking I was a person and equal to men, I felt contempt for women who were women rather than people. I used to think they were stupid, and I was separate from them.

Although it had kept her feeling 'comfortable' during her childhood and adolescence, and allowed her to develop some of her potential, Lesley did not think she had ultimately gained by identifying herself as 'just a person'.

Lesley (38) If I had only realised, I could have taken pride in being a woman, and I would not have suffered so much in my failure to be the same as men.

She had tried to fit in with the male chronology and had succeeded until she had the birth of her second child and separation left her a single parent with two under-fives. Unable to comply with the male chronology and the female chronology at the same time she had resigned from full-time employment in a well-paid 'career job' with prospects of promotion to become a full time mother and a part time

worker (following one of the typical patterns of the female chronology).

Lesley (38) had resisted internalising the full identity of femininity during the process of female socialisation, with the quite reasonable and understandable desire not to have to identify with an 'oppressed' group of second-class human beings who adopted, as Jackson describes it, 'behaviour that would be regarded as ridiculous in a male.' But feminism had provided an image of women that was positive and had enabled her to identify as a woman in a positive way. She could see how 'being a person' had worked as a strategy to survive the painful process of gender stereotyping, but it had separated and isolated her from other women and had seemed to obscure the fact that, although men and women might be equal in ability, they were not equal in opportunity. In other words to be 'just a person', she had to remain unaware of or actively ignore, the evidence of structural inequality and power differentials between women and men in society. Identifying as 'a person' was, at least, a partial solution to the problem of being a woman. When feminism offered some insights and solutions to 'women's problems', Lesley was able to reclaim her identity as a 'woman' and felt empowered by this. Likewise Ros (48) didn't 'realise' until she was 35 that women's position in society was not the same as men's (i.e. unequal):

Ros I'm only coming out of the anger of not knowing it was there.
(48) I would have been a lot happier knowing what war I was in.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF FEMINISM

In each of these cases, it was feminism which provided relief from what had been lifelong constraints. Feminism influenced this research: its literature, methodology, sampling and sample. Feminism influenced the lives of the women interviewed in many ways, changing their relationship to marriage, motherhood and employment and suggesting alternatives to conforming to the traditional female chronology. All of the women interviewed, heterosexual as much as lesbian, had been able to establish more positive identities and had increased their economic and sexual opportunities through the influence on their lives of feminism, and/or through their participation in the Women's Movement.

Feminist Consciousness

Members of the North London Older Women's Group were passionate, almost fervent, in describing how feminism had altered their awareness of the world and their lives. Carla (50) said she had discovered feminism through Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch 'which I completely identified with' and had completely changed her life which 'now was exciting because previously my life was geared round my partner.' Chris (49) had also transformed her life by reading Greer's book:

Chris (49) I went from going round crawling on my hands and knees, in tears all the time. I suddenly started laughing for the first time in about four years - laughing with sheer relief. This was the best thing that happened to me.

Kath (43) described discovering feminism through The Female Eunuch at the age of 42 as a 'complete eye opener'.

The awareness - the consciousness raising itself - was a source of liberation. It provided these women with a 'new way of seeing the same reality, whilst also seeing a new reality', of coming 'to understand the (seemingly endless) contradictions present within life.'² Seeing 'the same reality differently' enabled the women to stop seeing themselves as problems, to start seeing their own personal problems as a consequence of social and political structures. Feminism enabled these women to recognise that what they'd always known was wrong with their lives was not a result of personal failure, or fault, but a problem with a name: oppression, their oppression as women, sexism, patriarchy. This awareness enabled them to stop blaming themselves and to stop being 'victims'.

A major insight was that 'the personal is political': that 'the system is experienced in everyday life and isn't separated from it.' Thus feminism enabled the women to identify the institutional structures of oppression (in education, employment, the family) and how oppression is internalised in 'feelings, beliefs, relationships and behaviours'.³ With these insights, the women's understandings of their lives was transformed so that they saw, and understood, felt and experienced their lives in new and quite different ways. This feminist awareness was the basis for redefining their value as women, forging a new and positive identity and reclaiming power. Closeness to other women and female friendship proved to be an important part of this process.

Female Friendship

A key element of the process of sexualising women in relation to the female chronology has been shown by this study to be **competition between women** for men in marriage. Women described this competition at all ages, from their teens onwards: how it involved making constant comparisons of each other's bodies and beauty, assessing one's own and other women's success in complying with the stereotypes of sexual objectification. The competition divides women from each other, isolates them and pits women against each other at all ages. Competition particularly disadvantages older women in relation to younger women.

No matter how much and how successfully heterosexual women construct alternative 'identities', the ageing of her body has to matter, so long as her sexuality is defined by male standards or stereotypes, and by relationships with men. The 'threat' of the younger woman is real and it reinforces the devaluation of older heterosexual women. In a system where a major source of 'power' for women is their sexual power over men, the absence or loss of that power at any age will be a source of real 'powerlessness'. Women therefore are forced to compete with each other for their survival in a system which defines their value in relation to men. The competition is so essential to survival that women often take its practices quite unawares for granted. At the same time, it is so unpleasant an aspect of women's normal lives that they often 'pretend' it isn't there.

So central is this competition to constructing and maintaining women's oppression as women, that anything which would eliminate the competition would also begin to alleviate some of the aspects of the oppression. This was certainly the case with lesbian women whose sexual orientation and preference brought them together as women, breaking the barriers of competition which are at the heart of what Rich calls 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Rich has proposed as an alternative to institutionalised or compulsory heterosexuality, the lesbian continuum and lesbian existence. She defines this broadly as 'woman-identified experience'⁴ of which sexual experience would not necessarily have to be a part, and which includes closeness between women in the 'giving and receiving of practical and political support'. Rich's 'lesbian continuum' would include heterosexual women:

'... we can see ourselves moving in and out of this continuum whether we identify ourselves as lesbians or not.'⁵

The experience of the women interviewed in this study would support this concept of a 'lesbian continuum' as providing an alternative to the social control of women sexually and economically. Many of the women interviewed (heterosexual as much as lesbian) had been able to establish more positive identities and increased their economic and sexual opportunities through the influence on their lives of feminism, their participation in the Women's Movement, and counteracting the forces of competition with other women.

The concrete form that the contradiction to competition took was female friendship, in providing mutual support to each other on a formal or informal basis. The North London Older Women's Group was a support group: that was its *raison d'être*. It was set up as a resource for women to examine their lives, to learn from each other, to redefine their identity as 'older women'. The group itself had been influential in their 'liberation'.

Helen (44) Since this group my awareness of other women has been lovely and admirable, in a sense that I'd never thought of before. I think of them completely differently now. And I think this has changed my life, my attitude to everything. That women can be so great. It has been like a liberation. I never felt before that it's great being a woman.

Carla (50) felt a 'new great sense of allegiance with other women.'

Kath (43) had 'gone from being totally isolated from other women' in her early 30s: 'I knew women and was friendly with them, but they meant nothing to me, to actually making a decision that I wanted to be close to women, till by my mid-thirties women were a major part of my life. In my 30s, the door opened.' All of these women were heterosexual, but they said they had learned 'to love women.' Alison (60) spoke of 'the Women's Movement and the joy that has brought me.'

Being members of different kinds of women's groups was also influential for many women in the life history sample. Some were members of the 'Older Feminists Network' which met for similar purposes as the North London Women's Group. Some were involved with other women in the study of women: in academic women's studies programmes. One woman met in a women writer's group, another in a

feminist publishing collective. Some had more informal groups of women friends or best friends who were significant in providing support for them as women. Some had found the central theme of feminism - of women uniting with women - an inspiration and source of self empowerment. Female friendship and support broke down the barriers of competition - the divisions between women which are central to maintaining women's oppression - in the same way that lesbianism functioned to provide an alternative to the female chronology.

All of the women felt they had been liberated to some extent by having made close friendships and relationships with other women and by having 'identified' as women with a common experience of exploitation or oppression as women.

Debbie: The Women's Movement, and political lesbianism, in particular, has been a strong influence: 'It has actually given me life'.

Eve (72) said she 'joined the Women's Movement' at the age of 62 when she was widowed and talked about how it had transformed her life. Members of the North London Older Women's Group had similar feelings about feminism. For **Lauren (61)** women had 'meant so much, had so helped and inspired her' that she had a 'vision' of the next stage of her life (i.e. after 'retirement') training and finding work 'through which she could help and guide women'.

For **Lesley (38)** 'feminism had provided an image of women that was positive and had enabled her to identify as a woman in a positive

way'. Katherine (68) had discovered feminism after her divorce at 50 and had 'lots of women friends': 'I love women' she said. She was heterosexual but valued her closeness to women. Miriam (38) had come to value her 'emotionally satisfying relationships with women.' Jean (35) began to 'realise how much she had lost touch with herself' only after coming into contact with feminism. Kath (43) had joined women's groups to build up confidence in herself with an identity independent of men. In spite of the fact that female friendship is not represented to women as being important (Ferguson found only 6% of the content of women's magazines devoted to it), this study has shown that its significance can be profound. It is not so much the nature or content of the support that women give to and get from each other, but the very fact that the contact and connection exists at all, by choice, on a regular basis as a means of re-evaluating themselves and their experience, but also as 'experienced evidence' that women can be close, don't have to be in competition.

Reclaiming Power

For all of the women interviewed, feminism had given them a new vision of the world, a new perspective and a new sense of power. Valerie (38) saw feminism, the Women's Movement, meeting with women as a way of redefining and reclaiming her power.

Valerie I think as women become older, they are more in a position (38) to take their own power. I don't mean power over other people - although that sometimes happens. I mean taking charge and acting powerfully.

For her the age of forty had symbolic significance with respect to this power: --

Valerie Somehow the number 40, in terms of years, is to do with
(38) being a powerful presence, being substantial. Not being written off. I know in my head, but I don't have a 'feeling sense' of what it is to be a strong woman - like, there in the world, substantial, taking up space, people have to negotiate around you, take notice of you. I don't really know how that feels. I get a sense of it from time to time through myself, but I do it, and then I think, 'Oh, oh ...' Still in my head there is that fear that people will run away or won't love me or be frightened of me - I'm too heavy, steer well clear of her.

What frightened her was ending up 'powerless' like her mother:

Valerie Because I feel that she, in a way, never did have her
(38) power. Or she may have had it when she was a young woman, a young, attractive, independent woman - but after she got married at 22. After that she never quite got into her own.

Valerie believed that 'marriage depletes our power, we put our resources into it'. Her vision of real power as a woman involved a refusal to be a victim:

Valerie: It's like, stopping being a victim in every sphere, and it
(38) is a sense of looking after myself that I associate with being powerful.

It was involvement with other women individually and identification with women as a group that was the greatest source of her power:

Valerie: Feminism gave me a sense that, out of the recognition of
(38) how bad things were ... a sense of what it can mean to be a

woman. A sense of both women's individual power for themselves, and also collectively.

Feminism gave women the opportunity to alter their lives in relation to the female chronology, both in terms of the sexual division of labour and their sexuality. But it also gave them the power to defy the oppression and to redefine some oppressive practices for purposes of their own liberation.

III. DEFYING AND REDEFINING THE OPPRESSION

A major shift in black consciousness and the black liberation movement took place when 'negroes' took the derogatory terminology of 'blackness' and applied it to themselves positively. Blacks turned the label 'black' from a term of abuse and denigration into a term of positive identity and empowerment: black power. Lesbians have also made positive statements out of negative stereotypes and co-opted the language of oppression for purposes of their liberation in the use for example, of the label 'dyke'. Mary Daly has proposed a similar policy of inversion and subversion with regard to the labels of 'witch' and 'hag' and exhorted women to demonstrate their 'power' over male power by using the negative labels positively.⁶ A similar process of inverting the practices of ageism and sexism was evident in this study.

DYING GREY HAIR Some of the women interviewed did and some didn't, but whatever they did, they did as a matter of choice. The ones who kept their hair grey did so positively and proudly as a way of 'being their real selves'. Some women, however, also dyed their hair not out of conformity to or compliance with the dictates of male approval, but as an act of resistance to the stereotypes - in order not to be unjustly stereotyped, labelled, categorised and discarded 'before their time', in order to maintain their sexual and economic eligibility.

Frances When my hair is grey, I become invisible, or
(39) categorised as 'old'. Some men referred to me
recently as the lady with grey hair. Imagine being

reduced to that! If I leave my hair grey, I am much likelier to be discriminated against sexually and economically. If I put henna in my hair and keep it red (which I usually do) I have more freedom. I remain eligible for more aspects of life.

LYING ABOUT ONE'S AGE: This was another 'liberationist' strategy adopted by some women who said they had 'no false pride'. They had discovered that if a potential partner or potential employer thought they were 35 instead of 45, it could make all the difference between acceptance and rejection.

Ros: I found as a woman approaching 40, I looked 25. I found very young men were chasing me. They found me sexually attractive, sexually viable, pleasant to be with, but if they'd find out my age, they couldn't run fast enough - the other way! I became sexually not viable. I feel I'm having a bad enough time as a woman competing in a man's world without having an age tag attached to me. To be labelled as a 'has been' at 40, when your relatives are living 'til 90, makes me a long time a 'has been'. And that's not on. My grandparents were still screwing in their 80s. But I feel as if I haven't got the right to have sexuality, the right to have lovers. And then the job - I went to get one at the Post Office. The woman immediately in front of me said she was 42, and they said, you're too old. Well, I was 40 - but now when they asked me, I said 32. And I got the job. Also I started lying to other women because I found they were not feeling good about their age, and resented me looking good - because they had allowed themselves to be put in the age category by men. They think I haven't got the *right* to be different.

Her strategy for survival and success was to lie about her age: 'I lie now about my age as an actual aggressive act' to gain access to 'the employment and the relationships with men that I do not have.'

Women found it necessary and useful to lie about their age in youth as well as in middle and older age: to get into pubs and clubs

when under the legal age of entry, or to see age-graded films, or as Jackie (19) did, to have under-age sex with an older man when she was under the age of legal consent to sexual intercourse. 'Early in life' economic, sexual and adult eligibility can require appearing to be older. Later, it can require appearing to be younger. Women, therefore lie about their age in order to be taken as older or younger, but always in order to try to obtain or maintain sexual and economic eligibility.

MAINTAINING HEALTH AND PHYSICAL FITNESS: Some of the women interviewed were concerned as much with the health and physical fitness of their bodies as with their 'beauty'. At 70 Eleanor went swimming at least once a week. Ros (48) was a part-time aerobics teacher. Julie (45) was a cyclist. Frances (39) cycled to work and jogged two or three times a week. Betty (28) played tennis and swam. Elaine (23) did weight-lifting and Jane (23) was a jogger. Physical strength and fitness are not qualities that are valued in women. In fact they are quite the opposite of the qualities of weakness and helplessness which characterise successful femininity. Nor are they criteria for successful sex objectification. Developing physical strength and participating in sports was therefore an assertion for these women of their value outside of sexualised categories at all ages.

COSMETIC SURGERY Perhaps most radical was discovering a new perspective on cosmetic surgery. Butchery it almost certainly is, on one level, and a consequence of the oppression of women. BUT a view

that emerged from this study is that if it buys women eligibility, (or another 10 years of eligibility) as it did in the two cases of the women interviewed, and it makes them 'feel better', then it becomes understandable, not at all an unreasonable response to the oppression, and can even be regarded as another way in which women can take control of maintaining some of the sexual and economic eligibility which they are denied. These women felt more powerful in deciding to use surgery to buy the life they wanted.

In this context, what are often regarded as contemptible or ridiculous behaviours, as signs of weakness and lack of courage (ie dying one's hair, lying about one's age, even cosmetic surgery) can be seen as strategies used by individual women to obtain or maintain sexual and economic eligibility, to reclaim some 'power'. In an ideal world, women wouldn't have to resort to these 'desperate' measures. But in an unequal world anything that can be found to empower women, individually and collectively, could be regarded as legitimate. All strategies had in common ways of minimising economic control and dependency on men, obtaining a purchase on male power and privilege through paid employment, and reclaiming sexual power.

IV. SEXUAL LIBERATION

Chapter Five described the many ways in which women's sexuality is manipulated and controlled at all life stages. It identified common myths and stereotypes, most of which conspired to disqualify women sexually from mid life onwards. These included the belief that older women are not sexually desirable or sexually active, a taboo on relationships between older women and younger men at all ages, and the myth that menopause means the end of women's sexual meaning.

SEXUAL ACTIVITY Many women maintained their sexual eligibility by maintaining their sexual activity without regard to age. Contrary to stereotype, there were no age barriers to sexual activity amongst the women interviewed for this study. This had, in fact, come as some surprise to them, and quite contrary to their own expectations of what would happen in later life, indicating how successful the stereotypes had been in misinforming them about their own lives in advance of living it. Some of the women interviewed here only discovered their own sexuality at an age when the stereotypes suggest that they should be 'past it' and sexually inactive: discovering either lesbian or heterosexual 'real love', sexual pleasure and satisfaction at the age of 50 or 60 or 70 for the first time.

Despite our youth-oriented society and cultural taboos against sexually active older women, sexual interest and activity is alive and well. Older women have diverse opinions regarding sexuality. Some say intercourse is extremely important. Some are indifferent. Others regard self-stimulation as important as relations with a partner. And some prefer to share their sexuality with other women.⁷

The data in this sample indicated that women were sexually active - and enjoying their sexuality - consistently until the age of 72 (the oldest respondent) whether they were heterosexual or lesbian. While heterosexual women had not expected this to be the case, lesbian women had looked forward to increased sexual activity and satisfaction as they got older.

It also emerged from this study that ageing did not hold the same terror for the black Afro-Caribbean women interviewed, who described their physical signs of ageing as less *definable or dramatic* and less devastating: their skin and hair, for example, didn't 'look' as old age-for-age as for caucasians. Additionally they were less likely to choose to be married and economically dependent in marriage, therefore more likely to be economically independent, and to maintain this during motherhood.

There is one category of women (and indeed men, too) for whom the kind of stereotype of sexual disqualification described here is a life-long experience: people who are disabled, and particularly those who are severely disabled. There is a similar belief that disabled people a) don't have sex and/or b) that they shouldn't, and/or c) if they do, it is disgusting. A disabled woman approaching mid-life would be already experienced in living with and negotiating around the stereotypes that able-bodied women face for the first time.

Certainly the 40 year old woman interviewed in this study who was severely disabled did not regard getting older as a problem any

different or of any greater magnitude than the 'problem' of her disability for which she had faced threats of sexual and economic disqualification from the beginning of her life. She regarded growing older and facing the consequent threat of sexual disqualification as a similar disability which she had already successfully resisted (having asserted her right to sexual qualification and marriage). She had also managed to resist the forces operating to disqualify her economically and to exclude her, on the grounds of her disability, from the labour market.

Fenella (40) had been severely disabled since birth, a wheelchair user who also needed assistance with mobility). She would have remained totally 'institutionalised' in residential care, unmarried and unemployed if she had accepted society's stereotypes of her as a disabled woman. She didn't, however. She married (at 22) a man who was also severely disabled (also a wheelchair user who additionally required assistance to meet his personal needs, e.g. eating, dressing). They had together organised an 'independent living scheme' to live in their own home in the community. Regarded as unemployable because of the stereotypes about disability, they both pursued advanced degrees, and at the age of 36, Fenella obtained her first paid employment. She had when I interviewed her, been the director of a major and very successful disability housing organisation for four years. With this experience behind her, Fenella was confident about negotiating whatever sexual and economic disqualification she might face from mid-life onwards.

Fenella was the only heterosexual woman in her age group who was not worried about her appearance and ageing. Having been 'written off' as a disabled woman, she did not have the terror of being 'written off' as an older woman:

Fenella I'm not worried about the physical aspects of ageing because
(40) I have already accepted a degree of deformity because of being disabled.

Her experience suggested that ageing for women was itself a disability and that the signs of ageing in women are regarded as 'deformities'. It is therefore no wonder that women fear ageing and take (sometimes drastic) steps to stay looking young and regarded as 'able', rather than disabled.

BREAKING THE OEDIPAL TABOO: The taboo of older women having relationships with younger men applies to women of all ages, not just older women (not just the Mrs Robinson's as portrayed in the deeply misogynist film THE GRADUATE). At the same time as there is a taboo against relationships between 'older' women and 'younger' men, the reality is as always often different than the stereotype would suggest. Thus, while 90% of women marry an older man first time round, only 65% do so in a second marriage and '6% of women marry men ten years or more younger than themselves'.⁹ Certainly, of the 29 heterosexual women interviewed in this study, 14 (nearly half) were in or had been in relationships with men considerably younger than themselves.

Natasha (43) was married to a man 16 years younger than herself. She had a 19 year old son from her first marriage, only 8 years younger than her second husband. She was concerned with constructing a valid and valued sexual identity for herself as a heterosexual woman different than the stereotype of 'middle-aged women' as sexless and the sex objectified stereotypes for younger women.

She decided when she began to 'look older, at 34-35' that she wasn't going to give up looking beautiful', but that she was going to define her beauty 'in her own terms'.

Natasha Don't take that as an ego trip. Your face becomes transparent (43) when you re older - when you are young you just look handsome, beautiful. But when you start ageing, you can read a person like a book. And I decided to become beautiful inside - so it would show. What is attractive is what you are. I've seen very old women of 70 being lovable persons, and I'm sure they attract people.

She wanted her 'beauty' to be a reflection of her life and experience.

She felt her mother was a good model:

Natasha My mother looked sexy and attractive til the age of 62. And (43) now it is only the skin that is getting dry. And she is still very attractive - she is 65. She doesn't look at all like a grandmother. She wears tight white jeans with a very open silk blouse - she has nice breasts and does not wear a bra. She is blonde and very tall. A bit fat, but men like the shape. She attracts attention, she is really a spectacular woman. People say she is very beautiful.

Natasha felt she was now more 'successful as a woman and sexually' than when she was 20, and had been extremely beautiful in a sex-stereotyped way.

Natasha I was extremely pretty - always the most beautiful woman (43) around. It was a terrible handicap and a barrier for people. I didn't realise it 'til I lost that beauty.

She felt because she had been successfully 'conventionally' beautiful, she could appreciate the real value of not being beautiful in that sex-stereotyped, sex-objectified way. Natasha had suffered so much from being sexualised in her youth, that she felt relieved, to some extent, to be free of it. Having been the successful sex object, she could recognise it as part of her oppression as a woman.

MENOPAUSE The data in this study suggests that it is not the biological realities of menopause, but the cultural attitudes towards older women which gives menopause its negative meaning. In the experience of the women influenced by feminism interviewed in this study, menopause was Not a problem in any way with regard to age, sexuality and identity. When asked about the menopause, the women who were experiencing it or who had experienced it were unanimous in their view that it was not problematic psychologically whatever physiological symptoms might occur (and these varied in kind and degree).

Lauren: It was just like blinking one's eye, I can hardly remember. (61) Maybe I was 51 or 52. No flushes, no problems. One month my period was a day less, the next another, then it just died away. I thought about it, and thought - well it is another initiation. I didn't want to dread it or be overcome by it.

I think it is one of the greatest things that happen to women. I'm not unsympathetic to women who do have the physical problems, but if they can just get over it and get it out of the way, their lives are so much better. The whole burden of birth control is gone forever. I was never so free sexually - not promiscuous, but free in myself. My doctor once said, 'How many flushes a day?' He just assumed it - conditioning said that all women have flushes. No one talked about the women who don't, no one talked about the freedom.

Many of the women past menopause simply said they'd experienced 'nothing negative', or 'no problems', 'nothing', 'no big deal'. Hazel (48) was currently going through the menopause, she thought, but only because her period was changing, *not because of any hot flushes or anything.*

Hazel: My mother tells me she doesn't even remember going through (48) the menopause. It's only that everyone says you get hot flushes that makes you think you will. But if everybody said you didn't, you wouldn't. I do think I'm going through my menopause right now, but I even doubt myself because I expect factors like depression. I can't believe one just sails through it.

Hazel indicates the power of the stereotypes to define women's experience in complete contradiction to the reality of that experience. Weidinger discusses the power of the myths to instill false expectations and fear of ageing:

Once menopause is identified as the end to the best time of life, it naturally looms as a life crisis and its impending occurrence exerts formidable pressures on younger women. These fears and pressures convince women that they had better accept the definitions of femininity which accompany the equation of youth and fertility with blessing, since these appear to be the only rewards available and they are rewards with a limited timetable.⁹

Jill (44) said: 'I've some anxiety about menopause because I don't know much about it.' Her mother had, in fact, suffered from the menopause in the mode of the myths - with nerves and insomnia'. But Jill had come to believe that there were other very probable reasons for this - her mother's lifelong experience of depression, her ulcers, her unhappy marriage. Jill talked about male generated attitudes to menopause: the reality was, she thought, quite different.

That menopause is socially constructed - and nothing whatsoever to do with age itself - is affirmed by the evidence of 'early' menopause, ie, when menopause ends early either because of natural or spontaneous reasons or as a result of surgery. Julie (45) had her menopause unexpectedly at the age of 38, and she knew of women who had experienced the menopause in their early thirties and even in their twenties, at ages when the menopause could in no way be associated with ageing. Three women in this study had had hysterectomies in their 30s and 40s, one with the removal of her ovaries and no hormone replacement. They all described their 'menopause' as nothing. They went on to active and successful sexual experience, in one case (after a hysterectomy at 36) to a passionate love affair and marriage to a man seven years younger.

The reality of women's experience of menopause is reflected in the views of the following women:

Martha I think far too much is attached to it. Everyone gets a bit
(59) irritable now and then, and hot and flushed and depressed. I
have not thought about menopause much at all.

Joan: I never had a menopause as such. My periods stopped at 47 -
(72) dead, it's another myth there will be discomforts. Your body
is changing, but it's the beginning. I remember a woman
doctor telling me that life begins after the menopause. Sex
gets better, no fear of pregnancy, you can just let go. And
it's lovely. So many women don't know this. It's kept from
us.

This pattern, so contrary to the myths of menopause, has also been
discovered in a larger and representative random national sample which
questioned older women specifically and in considerable detail on
their experience of the menopause, and obtained similar results: none
of those respondents had found menopause a problem either. The
truth of women's experience - now beginning to be acknowledged in
feminist research and writing - functions to expose the misogyny in
the myths and misrepresentations and reveals the extent to which women
are despised outside the categories in which they are sexualised, the
categories that define them as sexually attractive and sexually
available (youth and beauty) and sexually useful (reproduction): the
categories which are defined by men, which make women dependent on
men, which enable women to be controlled by men, which sexualise
women's value in relation to men.

V. THE LESBIAN EXPERIENCE

The one group of women to whom the sexualised stereotypes, and the sexual and economic disqualification did not apply were lesbians, for whom growing older was regarded unanimously in this study as being positive in every respect except for the 'normal' anxieties about disability, physical deterioration and death which apply equally to heterosexual women and men.¹¹² Because of the differences in attitude and experience to age communicated by lesbian women which began to emerge early in the research process, the original sample was extended to include lesbian women at all life stages. It emerged from the data that the lesbian response to female socialisation was different and more resistant. It also emerged that for lesbians, sexual status was often enhanced with age, sexual eligibility maintained, and opportunities for sexual activity and sexual relationships increased with age.

Certainly, it was only the heterosexual women interviewed who felt that older women were less attractive than older men, and most of the 29 heterosexual women interviewed felt this to be true, whether they liked it or not. The lesbian women, however, emphatically did not feel that older women were less attractive than older men. 16 of the 46 women interviewed were lesbians, ranging in age from 23 to 72, and all the lesbian women thought 'older women were more attractive' (Sue 62).

Ann
(30) I just find women who are older than me very attractive both physically and personally. I have always liked women older than me ... There is nothing intrinsic in older women being unattractive.

Jean: I like older women. I respect them. They are fascinating. I
 (35) don't feel negative about age ... I don't perceive of older
 women as not being sexually active.

Carol believed that 'women were very beautiful in their middle age',
 but women were conditioned so that they were not aware of it.

Carol: You see, we are all programmed, nobody sees that women are
 (47) attractive when they are older.

The 'programming' as she saw it was in 'heterosexuality', in male
 approval.

The lesbian women, unlike the heterosexual women, were generally
 quite happy with the physical signs of age in their bodies.

Sandy: I don't have that attitude that older women's bodies are ugly
 (42) or disgusting.

Debbie had been heterosexual, was now lesbian and now liked her body
 at the age of 40 for the first time in her life:

Debbie: The way it expresses what I feel, its softness, its
 (40) sensitivity. It's a whole new medium of communication for
 me that is non-verbal, that is beyond verbal. And it's
 wonderful. This is since 33. My body has actually begun to
 work for me - everything has happened back to front. Before
 it was too short, it was 'it' - whether it was, it was an
 'it'. But it's not 'it' anymore now, it's me.

Debbie had an equally positive attitude towards the signs of ageing in
 her face:

Debbie: What my face is, is what I have been. And a lot of those
 (40) wrinkles are laughing wrinkles and a lot of them are crying
 wrinkles - and both are true, and both are me.

For lesbian women, being older was perceived as an advantage, as a gain rather than a loss, in terms of sexual attractiveness, value and viability:

Barbara: Partly because of being attracted to older women, I'm quite (28) looking forward to being older. I associate being older with being more confident, more experienced and feeling better in every area to do with my physicality and sexuality, rather than less so.

Alice, in common with all the lesbians interviewed and unlike most of the heterosexual women had a very positive attitude towards ageing and getting older:

Alice: I am moving on into what Jung would call the afternoon of my (35) life, which is very different. It's like ... everything has a meaning. He talks about the thinking, the feeling, the intuitive and the sense part of us. The afternoon of life, for me, is when all those things become integrated, and one becomes an individual and is making more and more conscious choices. That relates fundamentally to myself and my sexuality. Because it means that on a conscious level all those 4 areas of myself are being integrated, and my sexuality and expressing myself sexually is so powerful that it involves all those parts of myself. It's not something that is done out of habit or out of desperate need or manipulatively in a game situation or to prove a point. I see it more on a different level now, as a progression to a much more peaceful sexuality - even though I know I can feel passion, it's a passion that involves tenderness and caring, and it's not the same as it was before. I think I'll probably have the same ideas when I'm older as now, because I'm not afraid of losing any sexual potential.

Alice saw her sexual potential and her potential for sexual activity as 'increasing' with age. Other lesbian women shared the feeling:

Helen: Over the last year or two, I've had the best sex in my (61) life - between 59 and 61 years.

And Elaine (23) was looking forward to being sexually active: 'I wouldn't mind being 70 and still going'. This anticipation of sexual longevity was in marked contrast to the experience of heterosexual women, with the exception of the black Afro-Caribbean women who also did not feel threatened by sexual disqualification.

For all the lesbian women, relationships between older and younger women were not the problem or the taboo as they were between older women and younger men. Carol (47) who was in a relationship with a woman 17 years younger than herself said: 'As regards feelings, age makes no difference at all'. Jill (44) had had a long-term relationship with a woman 19 years younger than herself. Jill was not worried about being sexually unattractive, quite the contrary:

Jill: Kate, with whom I lived before, we have an agreement on my (44) 69th birthday she is going to give me a massage - because I'll be old then. And she is 19 years younger.

Ann (30) said: 'the lesbians I know are attracted to women of all ages'. And for herself:

Ann: The older I get - I generally get on better with women who (30) are ten or fifteen years older than me. When I'm 60 I shall presumably be getting on best with women who are between 70 and 75.

Pam (54) was in a permanent long-term relationship with a woman 15 years younger. She was not worried about her sexual attractiveness.

The decisive difference in experience and attitude for lesbian women was the fundamental fact of their economic independence, of not

being married and economically dependent on a man:

Alice: Being a lesbian, one is always concerned about one's work
(35) life. We have to survive independently of men and of that
structure. There is non-one else going to take care of me so
I have to be really self-motivated and self-directed.

This was, as it would be, true of all lesbians interviewed. Alice's
experience was typical in other respects also. 'I always forget my
age', she said.

Alice: Age hasn't had that much of an impact on me in my life.
(35) Because I am economically independent of men.

Just as it is arguably women's economic dependence on men in marriage
(and the sexualising of her economic value) which is the site of
women's oppression, it is equally arguable that the economic
independence of lesbians frees them from the age/gender constraints
and the sexualising of women's value which derives from economic and
emotional dependence on men, and the need for male approval.

Like the heterosexual women, the lesbians in this study had also
been influenced by feminism. They included women who identified
themselves as lesbian feminists, lesbians who were active in the
Women's Movement, and lesbians who were aware of the influence of
feminism in their lives. For them, like the heterosexual women,
feminism had assisted them in changing their lives - their identity
and their opportunities. Some had made radical changes, moving from
heterosexual marriages to lesbian lifestyles and lesbian 'politics'.

Debbie's (40) story illustrated classic, and very rigid, conformity to the stereotyped marriage (and motherhood) script; doing everything 'automatically' and to the timetable because she felt she ought to and couldn't think of any reason not to. She left her marriage eventually with the children, having had a number of lesbian relationships in the last years, as 'bi-sexual' and then 'lesbian'. 'I'm a real lesbian, through and through,' she said. She had come to think she always was, not in rejection of men (whom she still liked and had loved) but in rejection of socially constructed femininity and the 'female chronology'; 'I began to understand a lot more about my own sexuality and the way it was constructed as one way of keeping women down',

Leaving her marriage and becoming lesbian had changed her entire outlook on her life and herself. At 40, her outlook was wholly positive:

Debbie: I feel for the first time in my life that I've got
(40) everything in place to actually begin. I feel I'm beginning my life now. I think in retrospect that I've never before been happy. And now I am. It feels as if every bit of that life has been leading to this. I'm not frightened, I'm not retreating, I'm full of life, I'm happy, I'm strong, I'm full of joy and delight, and I just feel I've got so much to give, I just feel it kind of pours out of me.

Becoming lesbian had liberated Debbie with regard to ageing as well as sexuality:

Debbie I've gone from being engaged and then married in a very
(40) middle-aged type relationship - very staid, unexciting, routinised, mechanical, doing all the things that middle-aged people do, like see certain friends on certain nights and the women talk and the men play chess. I didn't think of my body ageing, I just felt bored and - have I had my life? I was middle-aged when I was 23, but not now - in terms of my lifestyle and habits, attitudes. And then my

experience has been from 32 onwards to actually come alive. And the more I've come alive and literally 'come out', the more my body has changed. It's stronger, I use it more, I'm not inhibited, it's me.

She thought she would feel quite the opposite if she were still heterosexual;

Debbie: Because I would still have been concerned about whether I was (40) attractive to men, and getting older would mean that I wouldn't be. That wouldn't have been just in my head, I would have been approaching an age when men would tend not to find women who are getting as old as I am very attractive. But that's not in my framework as a lesbian now because all my friends and the kinds of women I want to relate to are getting older too.

She identified the 'female chronology' as the source of women's devaluation, particularly in mid-life;

Debbie: One grew up thinking that men come into their own in middle (40) age - and women have already been into their own and on the way out. Middle-aged men are more confident, have more understanding, are less ridiculous, can often afford to think more seriously about things than younger men who are still busily establishing themselves. Whereas women begin to lose confidence in middle age and see themselves as having done their bit - marriage and children.

Her view about growing older was positive and also realistic:

Debbie: I can't imagine what being old will mean to me other than (40) maybe certain bits of me will stop working so efficiently. But nothing I couldn't or wouldn't do apart from physically not being able to do some things as I get older. It won't be a measure of my beauty, attractiveness, value.

Significantly, while heterosexual women were actually aware of their decreasing 'value', Debbie as a lesbian felt that she faced no 'loss of value'. And when I interviewed her, she said: 'I am 40, and very happy to be so'.

Jill (44) had had a similar transformation from heterosexuality to lesbianism which had in her belief freed her from major aspects of age as well as gender oppression. She literally saw two decades of her life as 'lost'. The expectations had been clear: 'go to university, become a teacher, (this from my parents), then to get married in the final year of university or soon after, marry an engineer, have a station wagon and two children. To become an independent woman wasn't really a choice for me'. Her 20s she described as : 'confusing, boring, depressing, terrible around relationships - the worst experiences of my life, with men'. In her teens and 20s, she viewed herself as 'a total loss as far as men went'. But then she learnt 'the things I must do to get a man's attention and by my mid-30s, I was masterful at it'. But, she said, 'underneath there was this thing that I was trying to prove that I was heterosexual'. Also in her 30s she'd 'reached a point when life was fine, I was in a secure job and socially I was feeling much more powerful'. She also had the cosmetic surgery which she had later come to regret.

Jill (44) believed that what women actually did in marriage and as mothers was extraordinary and required unusual qualities of strength; she had a 'total conviction of how important mothering and childrearing are as work: the problem she felt was that it was 'not valued'. In fact, she herself, at 44 and in a long-term lesbian relationship, was seriously considering having a child through self-insemination. She definitely did not feel she was too old. She thought her body, whatever the medical profession said, was fit and

strong. And she did not feel that having children in *her circumstances* would be oppressive.

Jill (44) If you can become a mother at 44 by AID or self-insemination independently of men, then your value ceases to be defined in terms of heterosexuality/reproduction. So you would not be under the same pressures as regards age, your value would be independent of those things which make women lose their value as they age.

She thought there were links between marriage and ageing, or attitudes to age. But by becoming a mother independent of men and marriage, she believed she could avoid the sexualising of her value. She felt she had escaped the 'biological clock' as it affected heterosexual women: not so much that a woman is too old to have a baby, but too old to 'land' a man, the prerequisite of having a baby.

Like Debbie and unlike most of the heterosexual women interviewed, she had a wholly positive outlook on the future:

Jill (44) I'm 44 and half of my life is over. I feel I can enjoy life more, and enjoy people more than I've ever done in my life - men and women and children.

Both Debbie and Jill were looking forward as lesbians in their forties to a very positive experience of getting older and of old(er) age..

Joan's experience as a lesbian at 72 provided some evidence that this anticipation was well-founded. She too had been influenced by feminism and moved from heterosexuality to lesbiansm, but later in life. Joan (72) provides a model of positive image and attitude for

older women, for women who would in fact be labelled 'elderly' by the health and social services.

For most of her life Joan (72) a working class Scottish woman, was typically heterosexual and her life followed the predictable patterns for most heterosexual women. She was, as a teenager, 'lucky because I was always very slim', 'had boys by the score', but 'kept my virginity 'til I was 21'. It was 'fear of getting into trouble' that kept her chaste. 'I was quite attractive', she said. Ironically, in the event, she got married because 'she had to', 'I got pregnant'. She 'didn't want to get married' even then, but she did because 'my mother threatened to put her head in the gas oven if she didn't'. She had the baby - 'and the next, because he didn't like sheaths'. '3 children in 2½ years' until she took 'charge of the contraception' and had a 5 year break. She then went on to '6 kids' and becoming a single parent at 36 when she discovered her husband 'was passing himself off as a single man'.

Joan: I went back to how I was before I was married. There were (72) men, but I wasn't interested. My life was getting those kids reared. My life was so full with the kids. I didn't need men.

She was 'celibate' during those years, but knew she was attractive because she 'had to fight men off'. She 'went out to work when they were older - typing' and just as 'the kids were growing up' when she 'was working full-time' and 'earning enough for a home-help', she had another baby.

Joan: Then Marilyn came along, just when I felt I had accomplished
(72) rearing the 6 kids.

She was 39 at the time of becoming a mother for the 7th time, and she then became a grandmother at 46 - 'very young' - and had to cope with fitting the stereotype of a granny while still being the mother of a young child:

Joan: When the grandchildren became older, I was seeing them a lot,
(72) and I began to take on the image of a granny. And the only way I can describe it is that *my inside wasn't* matching the outside image.

She 'didn't feel like a granny' and at the age of 50 thought:

Joan: Right, I'm going to start living the way I feel. I know how I
(72) feel - and I stopped trying to look like a granny.

Most 'ungrannylike' at the age of 60, she 'found herself involved with a younger man' - he was 40. She was discovering that life was different than the 'Darby & Joan' stereotypes:

Joan I know how I am feeling, yet it doesn't tie up with my
(72) conditioning of what a woman of my age ought to be feeling or ought not to be feeling. I'm 70. I meet this woman who's 60. We get together and have a relationship. Yet I'm told I shouldn't be feeling like this, life is finished at 70, you don't fall in love at 70. We're still living, very much living. I'm 70 and I'm passionately in love ... I'd thought that was impossible! And I'm not senile, or immature because my life has been full of experience - I do have something to measure this experience with. And it's wonderful.

At the age of 72, she was involved in the love affair of her lifetime with a 'younger woman' of 60:

Joan Tell the world that I'm 72 and having a love affair with this (72) woman - I mean we sleep together, you know. I think your emotions get more intense as you get older. As your body begins to fall apart - and that is nature, the trees fall apart, everything does - but I discover that as the outside does this, the inside is growing - in every way. I've always been into nature and music - I'm still trying to work it out, but it is tremendous, wonderful - your emotions are deeper - you can get natural highs.

Clearly lesbianism provided for the women who were lesbian an effective alternative to the female chronology which freed them from the dictates of male approval and the dependency of marriage, but which included motherhood as an option, organised and/or conducted independent of men. The alternatives were not so clear cut, for heterosexual women, who by definition, could never be free of emotional 'dependence' on male approval because of their sexual orientation and preference. But the heterosexual women in this sample had also discovered a variety of strategies to prolong their valued life, to alleviate the worst effects of the sexualising of their inequality.

IV. ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL TIMETABLES

Women Returners

Nearly half of the women interviewed were occupationally upwardly mobile from their 'working class' family of origin. Half the sample had further or higher education and 14 women 'returned' to higher education 'later' in life. The sample was therefore unusually educationally mobile (ie in moving in and out of and returning to education) and upwardly mobile educationally.

Characteristic of the educational mobility of this sample, but uncharacteristic of the general population, a number of the women in social classes 3 to 5 returned to education while they were married and/or childrearing, and were able to return to employment at a higher socio-economic status. In this sample, it would appear that 'economic inactivity' in marriage and motherhood created an opportunity for educational and occupational upward mobility that was not typical for women generally, for whom the downward mobility of motherhood puts them at a permanent disadvantage with regard to employment and therefore with regard to occupational or socio-economic status.¹³

At the same time, the women interviewed had far far greater potential educationally and occupationally than they ever reached in spite of the fact that they were an unusually educationally and occupationally mobile sample. In some cases they were seduced away

from pursuing their educational and occupational ambitions by men, marriage and motherhood, almost without realising it at the time. In other cases they were quite brutally forced to abandon their dreams and goals by parents who discouraged certain careers (e.g. medicine or law) in favour of others regarded as more suitable for girls (hairdressing, teaching), or who quite literally didn't allow them to pursue the further and higher education of their choice. Almost all of the women interviewed were aware at the time of abandoning their dreams and settling for second best, but resigned to it as the only possibilities for women.

In spite of all barriers and obstacles to pursuing opportunities in education and employment, and the conflicts and confusions which arise from compliance with the female chronology, women in this study managed to negotiate the system in pursuit of self-fulfilment (opportunity denied by conformity to the female chronology) and self-realisation (i.e. identity independent of the stereotypes). Lauren (61) who had been forced out of school at 15 and into dull office work, returned almost immediately:

Lauren It mattered a great deal to me that my formal education had (61) ended but I was determined to go on learning. I went to evening classes on literature, art and music. I had always been a great reader and from the time I left school I read everything I could and in two or three years had read most of the classics in English and in translation. I went without lunch and went to the theatre, opera and ballet 4 or 5 times a week. At weekends I went to museums and galleries with two friends who, like me, were determined to widen their knowledge of the arts.

This was a female who had 'failed' in the education system. She later became a reader and editor in publishing (although typical to the female pattern in employment, free-lance and part-time).

Liz, (30), had also, as a young black woman, been faced with a similar dilemma. She left school at 16, left home and had a baby at 17 and then worked in a series of factory and clerical jobs. She had managed to 'return' to education as a 'mature' student at the age of 29 on a Headstart Course (aimed specifically at black 'under-achievers') leading to a social work qualification. Her greatest disappointment was 'not having taken school as seriously as I should'.

Miriam (at 38) was doing an Open University degree in art and music. Jean (at 35) and having previously trained as a teacher, was doing an MA in Women's Studies, as was Julie (at 45) who had worked all her life as a secretary and had been allowed to 'return' as a postgraduate, although she had never been an undergraduate. Carol (47) had eventually achieved the degree in English Literature which had been 'lost' at the time her parents insisted she did teacher training. Eve (72) began working as an artist when she was widowed at 62, attending adult education classes.

A Case Study in Combining Education and Childrearing

Sheila, (38), from an upwardly mobile working-class family, had been very clever at school. Her father had pushed her to do well and was very proud of her 'brains'. She was thought to be cleverer than her brothers. She remembers being held up as an example by the teachers to other older but less bright children - feeling both pride and fear of what was expected of her. She took a mock 11+ to see if she could take the exam a year early, and was told she had failed it. She was horrified, so was her father. He complained and found out that she had got 97%, but they simply had enough children taking the exam who were 'of age', so had told her she had failed instead of the truth. The feeling of failure afterwards nevertheless stuck, and she had to stay on a year doing nothing, bored and frustrated. She was very conscious from an early age that her father expected her to go to university and have a great career.

Sheila: I wanted to be a lawyer. A lawyer was something quite contrary to the expectations of my convent school where all the girls were expected to do nursing or something and then go on to marriage and motherhood. It was also something my father once wanted to be himself. Everyone thought I would make a good lawyer - but I wasn't so confident, and could never explain this to people.

Sheila said she too 'probably expected to get married', partly because of coming from a large extended family, as well as the social pressures.

Sheila: My parents presumed, rather than expected me to get
(38) married - they would not have been horrified had I not done so, there was no discussion about marriage like there was about career ambitions.

Sheila did go to university to do law, but only lasted one year and was 'thrown out' after she failed her exams. She got a job (shop work) and applied to teachers training college. But, in that year at university, she had 'met my husband' and got married. They 'did not use contraception' and she 'got pregnant straight away' before she could take up her place to train as a teacher.

Sheila: When I did get married and have children, my feelings about (38) that were of failure - that this was second best - at the same time as thinking that I was not the sort of person destined to be a wife and a mother and a drudge. So, being a wife and mother became something I decided to take up as a career. I became a militant parent almost and believed that this was a deeply significant thing to do. But I was always apologetic about it, especially to myself.

Sheila experienced common obstacles facing women in the education system, with the additional confusions attached to working-class upward mobility. She was intelligent and academically gifted, but with the competing pressures of parental and social expectations and, additionally, with the mixed messages with regard to education and career versus marriage and motherhood, she became understandably confused and ambivalent, 'failing' academically and 'falling into' marriage and motherhood. She became a full-time 'career' child-rearer;

Sheila: I felt then that it was up to me to stay at home and look (38) after the children - not because I was their natural mother, but that in our circumstances, I was the one most capable of doing it, the most responsive to other people. My husband felt a great need to have a career. And I did not think it inappropriate not to have a career and to look after the children. I thought they needed one person to look after them, and if I had a career they would have to be farmed out to other people and this would do them harm. I don't necessarily believe this is so now, because I have seen that others have managed perfectly well. But, I think children must feel they

are not being pushed around, not just part of the furniture. There must be circumstances where people look after them and care about them and are always there, but I can see now that doesn't have to be just one person. I used to think nannies were improper, but not now. If I had a child now, I would be more inclined to park it on my mother so that I could do the things I want to do. But I would not take on a job that was inflexible and did not allow me to cope with the children, that made me put the job before children. I'd want to be free to choose.

Sheila decided, after the birth of her second child, 'to enquire about going back to education'.

Sheila: I didn't feel to myself that I was inferior in being just a mother at home, but I felt other people thought this. I hadn't managed to go to night school to keep anything up because I never had babysitters and my husband always came home late, which I resented. But when Sam was 4, I went to tech. when he was at playschool to get History A-level. I was 31.

But she 'failed' again:

Sheila: I only got an E pass, not enough to get me a university
(38) place. I felt a great failure. But I took the exam again and passed high enough, and started my BA at 32. I remember being called Mrs. T. instead of my first name like the young students, and I hated that. I felt frightened and inadequate at first, but things got better. I was very much on my own too then, because my husband had a job working in Thailand. And I was doing all the childrearing too. I felt different as a mature student, older and more confident than the other students. I didn't experience the ageism shown to the young students, but I also hadn't become an 'old lady' or disapproving or respectable, and I was pleased to discover I had 'grown up without growing old'. I passed with a 2/1. I enjoyed working for the BA. I felt it an honour and a privilege. A year later I did an MA in English at the University of London, which I enjoyed and also got a very good pass, again.

In 'her own time' she succeeded, and when I interviewed her, she was doing a Ph.D. She felt her degrees were of 'enormous significance':

Sheila: They make me feel terrifically important. I want to tell
 (38) everyone about it. When I get a letter with MA on it, I get a
 terrific charge out of that. It gives me a huge sense of amour
 propre. I feel grand. I always used to say that the main
 reason I wanted to carry on was because we would get our bank
 statements sent to Dr. and Mr. T. Yet I have a woman friend
 who is a 'doctor' and people always address them as Dr and Mrs
 B.

Sheila's ambition was for an academic career, but having triumphed over the
 ageism and sexism in the education system, she feared that she had yet to
 face the same barriers in employment:

Sheila: I would like to have an academic career, but it is very
 (38) difficult to find work. And I wonder how much continuing to
 study is putting off the evil day when I have to find a job.
 But I can't see myself staying at home dusting the furniture, I
 just get depressed. I'll be 39 when I finish the Ph.D. I feel
 worried about being 40 and looking for a job. My job has been
 raising the children. Now I am a highly educated woman with
 this experience as a housewife and mother behind me, on the
 job market. But I feel a man would get a job rather than me,
 if we were both applying. He would have been spending his
 life until then teaching and would have that experience. My -
 experience as wife and mother is not valued at all on the job
 market. I would lose a job to a man my age because he was a
 man with past experience. And to a *young man just because he*
is young and a man. So, a combination of my age and my sex
 leaves me still at the bottom of the heap on the job market.
 I've spent all these years doing all this work, but the
 prospects are not hopeful jobwise.

Sheila mentioned that her husband had been 'supportive' and 'had not
 made a fuss about not having clean shirts'. She, however, still felt
 'guilty about that'. 'I feel my place is to make a home for him and I find
 it hard to throw off these feelings'. The conditioning of femininity and
 the sexual division of labour runs deep, dividing women from themselves and
 an independent identity, as well as from the opportunities to forge an
 independent life. Oakley describes how identity is defined by the
 stereotypes rather than being determined by the reality of women's lives,
 in just the way that Sheila experienced it:

Within the gender-role structure of the family, women are reduced to a common social type: the housewife-wife-mother. The woman doctor, shop assistant, professional engineer, primary school teacher, ballet dancer and factory worker all become Mrs. Y, the mother of Mr. Y's children, the support of Mr. Y's career/job, the washer of his clothes, the caretaker and creator of his home, the centre and symbol of his family life.¹⁴

Sheila's story demonstrates the double bind of ageism and sexism at all stages of her life: the power of the conditioning in shaping self-image, attitude and ambition, the absence of choice, the ambivalence it creates. It also shows how she triumphed over the constraints of the female chronology, and the fundamental contradictions between the aims of the education system and the patterns of women's lives.

One of these is content, what is learned, the curriculum. The main agenda is the education of young people for the market place. In practice this means education for the male chronology with the assumption that employment (or institutionalised unemployment) will follow education. The agenda takes no account of the fact that the female chronology of marriage, motherhood and work is different from the male chronology of work. Indeed it takes no account of the fact that males will also marry and become fathers. In this sense, the educational system fails to educate for the 'real' lives of either males or females. And it is particularly incompatible with the timing of the female chronology.

There is a hidden agenda, however, or sub-text to the education of women. While the education system is not educating girls for their work as wives and mothers (or boys their work as husbands and fathers), it is very

much educating them into their respective positions in society. Girls are educated in subordination: femininity and inferiority are actively reinforced. Because of the assumption that women will marry and mother, expectations with regard to education and employment are lower. The age/gender oppression combines to lower women's own expectations in line with limited opportunities. This explains the 'abandoned dreams' syndrome of this data. Girls receive mixed and very confusing messages. They are being educated simultaneously to conform to the female and the male chronologies and this is impossible, in practice if not in theory: because another contradiction between education, employment and the real patterns of women's lives is timing.

Thus the peak period of educational competition and achievement coincides with the period when, if girls are to succeed in the female chronology of marriage and motherhood, passing tests in successful femininity is more pressing, if not more important, than passing exams.

"It is important to recognise that young women are making transitions through the sexual and marriage markets as well as through labour markets, and that they have to balance social and financial pressures in the hope of getting a good job and a boyfriend or husband".¹⁵

In this context, educational failure of the sort that Sheila experienced can be seen to be almost programmed and timetabled. A further contradiction with regard to education and timing is that even if girls succeed academically, they are not in a position to follow the timing of the male chronology. The life pattern of most women (the 80% who are mothers) means that employment will be combined with marriage and

motherhood **in time** (as a double shift, or with part-time work) or **over time** (leaving education and/or employment and returning later to education and/or employment).

The education system does permit the return of *some* women at later life stages, at the times in their lives that they are freed from the 'imperatives' of marriage and motherhood, in a way that relates to the *real* patterns of their lives. But, the education system is not structured to account for those patterns - and needs - in the first place. It does not satisfactorily take account of the female chronology, and particularly the sexual division of labour. One of the changes in the decade of feminism was developments in adult and 'continuing' education aimed specifically at the needs of women returning to education 'later', in 'their' time in relation to the female chronology: access courses, accreditation of prior learning, non-standard entry. Both Julie (45) and Jackie (30) as well as Sheila (38) had been able to take advantage of these opportunities.

VII. STRATEGIES FOR ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

When this research started in 1982, there was evidence to show that women's labour market situation had changed quite substantially after a decade of feminist influence and of sex discrimination legislation. The reality of women's lives was very different from the stereotypes of femininity, female socialisation and sex stereotyped, sexually objectified representations of women discussed in Chapter 3. There had been an

overall increase in women's economic activity over the previous thirty years.¹⁶ In 1980, women were 40% of the labour force and 63% of all women worked.¹⁷ There were more women working in 1974 and 1979 at all ages than in 1954, 1959, 1964 or 1969.¹⁸ Since the 1940s, each generation had a higher proportion of women working than the previous one.¹⁹ The overall increase in women's economic activity was 'chiefly accounted for by the dramatic increase in the labour force participation of married women who have in growing numbers returned to the labour market after a period of domestic absence and who have done so after increasingly short absences from the labour market.'²⁰

Unlike previous generations, marital status had no effect at all on whether women worked.²¹ 60% of married women were working in 1980, but the majority worked part time: 33% compared with 3% of single women.²² More women with children were working: 65% with children aged 5 - 10 in 1974 compared with 40% in 1954, 78% with children aged 11 - 15 compared with 66% in 1954.²³ More women were working between marriage and the birth of their first child: 88% in the 1970s compared with 62% in the 1940s.²⁴ More women returned to work within six months after their first birth. In 1950, half returned 9.7 years after first births, in 1979 this had reduced to 3.7 years after first births.²⁵ There had been a steep rise in the labour market participation of women in their thirties and forties since the 1960s,²⁶ including women like the members of the Older Women's Group who had been influenced by feminism and fled from marriage into the labour market.

Overall, women are spending an increasing proportion of their lives in employment, though very few adopt the typical male

pattern of continuous lifetime employment as a full time worker.²⁷

During the decade of feminism, there had also been a significant decrease in the earnings gap between women's and men's pay. The difference between women's and men's income had shifted from 63% in 1970 to 73% in 1982 (based on hourly earnings). In response to the Equal Pay Act the gap closed dramatically from 64.4% in 1973 to 72.1% in 1975. There was a further change following the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, to its lowest differential of 75.5% in 1977. Between 1977 and 1987 women's earnings fluctuated between 73% and 74% of men's.²⁸

Coinciding with women's increased labour market participation were demographic changes in the age of marriage which came later in the female chronology. Age of marriage for women moved from 22.6 in 1971 to 24.1 in 1986.²⁹ The proportion of first marriages of women under 20 halved between 1971 and 1986. Women had stopped complying with the timetable of the female chronology and the pressures to marry early. There was a corresponding demographic shift in the age of women at birth of first child from 23.9 in 1971 to 26.2 in 1986.³⁰ The fertility rate had fallen for women in their twenties and increased for women in their thirties.³² Fewer women were having babies early, more women having children later in the female chronology.

There was a rapid rise in the proportion of illegitimate births to 20% in 1986.³³ More and more women were resisting marriage and in spite of the cultural taboos having children outside of marriage, either as

cohabitees, or as single mothers. As further evidence of women's increasing independence of marriage, the number of divorces more than doubled between 1971 and 1986.³⁴ So in 1985, one in seven families were single parent families, 90% with a female head of household.³⁵

These statistics on women's labour market participation and demographic changes with regard to marriage and motherhood, are interesting because this study of women influenced by feminism has suggested that the best way for heterosexual women to survive the 'disability' of ageism and sexism at any age and stage is to be economically independent and particularly by obtaining and maintaining economic independence during marriage and motherhood. In spite of the conditioning and female socialisation that defines successful femininity in terms of female dependency, in spite of structural inequality and age/sex discrimination in the labour market (which is arguably an inducement to women to marry), and in spite of the sheer difficulties, double shifts and hardships of combining motherhood with paid employment, the women in this study used employment to free themselves from the subordination they experienced as wives and mothers,

This was also true of the DOE/OPCS national sample of women. Martin and Roberts found that '... the vast proportion of domestic and caring work which has to be done in our society is done by women, is unpaid, and affects women's ability or willingness to compete as workers on equal terms with men.'³⁶ However, they also found that paid work was important for a sizeable proportion of wives both in financial and social terms.³⁷ They also found that non-working wives showed higher stress - -

scores and working women suffered less psychological stress than non-working women.³⁹ Above all, they found that women worked because they wanted to. Financial reasons were one motive (for 69% of women), but 52% of women said they worked because they 'enjoyed working'.³⁹ There was also a change in attitude between 1965 and 1980. Women had come to believe in 'women's right to choose and to stress employment rather than staying at home.'⁴⁰

Amongst the heterosexual women interviewed in this study there were eight effective alternatives to the traditional stereotyped marriage and motherhood scripts - all of which offered the women concerned positions preferable to a 'career' of marriage and motherhood. In every one of the eight alternatives, paid work and economic independence were common and decisive factors. In the majority of cases, the women had attempted to live by the marriage script, found it wanting and then influenced by feminism found alternatives. This included about half of the lesbian women.

The alternatives to the female chronology which provided models of independence and freedom from both age as well as gender constraints were:

- 1) Combining marriage and motherhood with full-time work;
- 2) Motherhood without marriage, but with long-term relationships and full or part-time work;
- 3) Leaving marriage (divorce), single mothering with financial independence through earnings or state benefits;
- 4) Being left (divorce) and becoming financially independent;
- 5) Being left (death) and becoming a widow;

- 6) Leaving marriage (divorce) *and* motherhood, becoming financially independent;
- 7) 'Spinsters'.
- 8) 'Career' women.

All of these alternatives seemd to lengthen the 'useful life' and increase the 'value' of the women.

1. Marriage, Motherhood & Full-Time Work

Maureen was unusual for the heterosexual women of her age in saying that she found 'ageing a relief':

Maureen (38) I think it's wonderful, as I grow older life gets easier. I look at the lines, and I think, I don't care. I'm having a great time, I know who I am, I'm doing exactly-what I want to do. Except I think about extreme ageing - and I don't like the thought of my body running out and not being able to do things physically. So in early middle age, I've become aware of how important it is to be fit, to take care of your body and eat the right foods and do exercise. I was very careless of myself in my 20s.

Asked what she thought was the difference between her and women who were bothered about ageing, she said it was working - and not marrying until very late in the 'female chronology':

Maureen (38) ... that I have always worked. Whereas they married at 21. I only did at 31, and kept it a secret for 4 years. I seemed to know marriage was not a good thing for me. They all seemed to marry the first person who asked them if they liked them enough, they didn't seem to make that choice. Also they had children and it seemed to me not because they wanted to, but to conform to some external pressure and norm, and they didn't seem to enjoy those small children much except in a rather dutiful way. Then at around 30 some of them questioned what they were doing. I think there was something in me - and it wasn't that I didn't completely not believe in the white charger thing, because I think there are myths so deep in all of us, instilled since

childhood - I just think I thought luck wasn't on my side, or maybe I mistrusted myself sexually in terms of my looks, or perhaps just that I always loved working, - and was quite successful at it.

She thought that it was marriage that 'aged' them: 'cocooned them, stopped them thinking of themselves'. Like the other women, she had been 'cautioned' about the value of education for women:

Maureen I remember a friend of my father's saying, 'It doesn't really
(38) matter about your BA, what matters is your MRS'. I was confused by this, then deeply horrified. I was about 18. He was talking about going to university, which he obviously regarded as a superior kind of marriage market, especially Trinity College, Belfast, where there were more men than women, and from wealthy English families. But I don't think many of us went into it for that. I didn't. I worked hard.

She also 'met someone who wanted to marry' her: 'and I said yes which was a terrible mistake, which I realised later and broke off the engagement'. After university, she entered into a long-term relationship but her 'career' (in television and publishing) was her passion ('I loved it - the people and the control over things'). The difference between her and the women who had married and settled down: 'I had much more freedom than they, they were trapped by marriage, but I was pursuing my self-fulfilment'.

She became pregnant shortly after starting a new and coveted job ('something I really wanted to do, I was 30'), but there was 'no question' that she 'would give up work'. ('I'd done what I wanted to do, I was happy in my work'). She went back to work full-time when her first child was 4 months old, and also four months after the birth of her second

child which followed on ('we both wanted another child'). But then the exhaustion of full-time childrearing and full-time paid employment hit her: 'I felt I had the worst of both worlds'. She went part-time for a while, but having arranged with her employers to keep her full-time post open to her. She made a similar arrangement when her husband went to work abroad: 'I freaked out at the thought of no job to return to'. When they returned, she 'went back to full-time work because I was asked to'. Her position was a marked contrast to the women who abandoned their education or careers to follow their husband's moves developing a career. It appeared to make *all* the difference to **Maureen** in maintaining her independence and positive identity both before and during marriage and motherhood.

Things got more complicated when at 37, she decided she wanted a third child, although her husband 'certainly didn't'. However, she 'got pregnant very quickly' and was then 'worried about keeping her job and coping with three children'. She said she could 'just have taken her six months maternity leave', but had decided, just before I interviewed her 'to go freelance'. She was 'loving it' - but she was on a 3-month contract, renewable every three months without sick pay. For the 'freedom' she needed to continue the three careers of marriage, motherhood and paid employment, she had lost her job security and the statutory rights of full-time employees. She was vulnerable to unemployment: non-renewal of her freelance contract. A man would not have had to pay this price in his career on fathering three children. And she was pulled in two directions - wanting to work, but also really wanting to be with her children: 'I was dying to see that child', she said.

Maureen felt that the secret of success in her life 'was the negotiation between the two worlds of family and work, rather than the choice of one or the other'. She felt at 38 that she was 'absolutely in the prime of her life' - but she was aware of her vulnerability in marriage as well as in the labour market. She was aware of friends whose marriages were breaking up or having affairs:

Maureen When I have rows now I think they have a more fatal tone to (38) them and I must be more careful. I am independent and could cope well on my own, but I think I prefer living with someone else. Splitting up, especially with kids, strikes me as the hardest thing ever.

Only one of the younger women shared a similar understanding about maintaining her 'freedom' as a wife and mother. At the time of the interview, she was married, but had no children.

Jane What excites me is being successful in whatever I do. In work, (23) that is. I'm not prepared to have children unless I have a lot of help to have them, and can still be myself. I've seen so many women ruin their lives by having children.

The ruin she was referring to was loss of work or career and independence.

2. Motherhood without Marriage, but with Work

While some women identified the point of women's vulnerability as motherhood, others identified the source of personal loss (of independence and identity) as marriage. Valerie (38) was the woman who had her

children 'late' (after 30) and who'd felt (with 'a needy little girl inside') confused about her 'identity' as an adult. She'd decided in her late 20s to have a baby on her own at 30 if she hadn't acquired a partner. But, she found a partner who was 5 years younger than she. They had 2 children, but didn't marry. Their relationship lasted 6 years and ended very traumatically:

Valerie ... the sticking point between us was that I wanted to get
(38) married, when we first got together, but he said he wanted his freedom. And the more he said that, the more possessive I became.

She had 'wanted to get married between 21 and 25':

Valerie But I'd been suspicious of marriage because my parents marriage
(38) was awful - they vowed they loved each other and were very sentimental, but I felt they were horrible to each other. And they were so interdependent. I sensed that from an early age, I was determined my marriage was going to be different.

By the time the relationship with the father of her children ended, she had adopted a different attitude towards marriage and decided she wouldn't marry ever (although she had then entered into a very satisfying long-term relationship with a man of her own age):

Valerie I came to realise that it was all a nonsense and the way to
(38) solve the emotional problem about marriage for me was to just cut - just don't get married! I don't need to. So I came to think marriage was not important - though I had a lot of explaining to do - because if I wasn't going to marry the father of my children, then I would never get married, to anyone else. And my parents found that hard to take. They never quite got their minds round it - that Mr. Right would not turn up.

Valerie said she 'sometimes feels younger than women who are younger than me and married'. She felt 'good about that', but felt it was double-edged because being married conferred upon a woman the status of 'a grown-up', and this added to her confusion about having the identity of an adult.

The other 3 heterosexual women who were not married and had no intention of marrying, although being mothers was central to their lives, were the Afro-Caribbean women interviewed. There was Jackie pregnant at 19, with no intention of marrying. And there was Liz who'd had her baby at 17 and was 'returning' to study for a social work qualification at 30. Her parents had 'never talked about her getting married and having children' and she 'didn't expect to get married'. She was another one 'put off marriage by seeing theirs'. When she got pregnant, she knew she wouldn't marry:

Liz (30) Ken decided that he loved me, but he had someone else as well. So I had to get on with life myself, and make plans for the future. I knew that he was the sort of person that one woman would not satisfy his needs. He is 4 years older than I - but men mature far slower than women! So he was still into this ego thing, and parties. He didn't want to settle down. He is the same now - he'd have another woman tomorrow if he was offered it. It doesn't bother me, because I understand him. If he is going to do it, he will do it, and there's nothing I can do to stop him - so if I let him get on with it, he probably won't do it. We don't make a big deal about it. I don't fight it. Because you grow old, and what if I'm there worrying and getting old and he decides he's leaving me - who wants me after he's made that decision? He's gone and I'm left looking haggard and no-one wants me. So I look after myself. And if he decides he'll fall in love, well, go ahead, I can too. I don't worry about it. That's life.

For both Liz and Jackie, *not* marrying seemed to be a criterion for maintaining the long-term relationship. Liz and her partner were indeed still together and had just bought a house jointly when I interviewed her. Their son was 14. They were each economically independent and they were 'happy'.

Jennifer (36), also black, had just had her second child at the age of 35. She was in a long-term relationship. She and her partner had bought a house together. But she had no intention of marrying. Both she and her partner had been married and divorced. They felt there were 'no legal or economic benefits to marriage - no advantages and no measure of commitment'. She had been economically independent since leaving home and school at 17, and after the birth of her first child at 22. She was in a senior local government post and had arranged to job-share during the year after the birth of her child, so she could return to the full-time employment that guaranteed her economic independence and identity as an individual.

3. Leaving Marriage with Children

Miriam (38) who'd found 'marriage meaningless and frustrating', but 'motherhood exciting and fulfilling', 'left' her marriage after a year, although it was many years before she actually got legally divorced. She said she felt 'liberated' by leaving the marriage and by the divorce:

Miriam I divorced Jim and immediately felt very different, quite free.
(38) It made a tremendous difference to be legally unmarried. I seemed to stretch my legs then and question everything anew.

When I interviewed her, she felt more positive than she ever had about her self, her life and her future:

Miriam Like a baby, I want to cram as much into life as possible - you
(38) only get one life, it doesn't come round again.

She defined herself as 'middle-aged' and was happy with this, especially with 'being freed from the terrible sexual bondage of earlier'. She now valued her 'emotionally satisfying relationships with women'.

Julie (45), who'd seen the female chronology so clearly and then fallen right into step with it in spite of herself, left her marriage after 10 years at the age of 29. She was very clear that it was marriage that trapped her and not motherhood. So she decided to have a third child and to leave her marriage at the same time.

Julie I knew that I wanted him out of my life, and another child, in
(45) an obsessive way. So I got pregnant. That sounds cold blooded, but it was more working to a light at the end of a tunnel - I knew I did not love him, it had to end, but that I would have the child before. I wanted to come out of it with my kids and a roof over my head. So I found a flat, and I had the baby - he was still there, but becoming more violent. So I stopped doing his washing, and after a week of that he left for good, and I filed for divorce. I was 28-9.

'I date my life from then', she said significantly. And subsequently, she made sure that she maintained both her emotional and economic independence.

Ros (48) left her marriage after 17 years and for her too it was the beginning not so much of a new life, but of life itself:

Ros (48) I was much more in charge of my life when I was 15 than when I was 35 and married. But now I feel I can do anything. I feel totally confident, that anything that happens in my life is my own doing.

Ros had been one of the young females who'd felt equal to the boys and had resisted being forced to grow up 'to be a lady'. Nevertheless, she had married at 20, abandoning her ambition to be a doctor, to support her husband through university. She said she hadn't wanted to get married until 28, 'but I did'. They appeared to be an 'ideal couple' throughout the years of their marriage ('we kept up appearances') and the birth of their child ('I loved being pregnant, loved the birth and loved him'). But she said 'we were atrophied in the roles'. And it was eventually she said, the influence of feminism that motivated her to come out of the 'death grip' of her marriage at the age of 40.

She was aware of the gender and age discrimination in employment which she now faced, and also the threat of 'sexual disqualification' as a heterosexual woman.

Ros (48) ... I am sensitive about my age, I feel very vulnerable. After a marital break-up, you find yourself fencing around, and all the guys are a lot younger. I was sensitive about my age when I came on the job market and the sexual market, after the break-up.

Having acknowledged the oppression. Ros had a sense of positive identity too.

Ros (48) But I have got rights and I can do anything I want that I'm capable of doing. Look at me, middle-aged, I have lots of friends, I'm doing exactly what I want, and I've got a young lover too! I'm having a good time, I'm enjoying life! But I'm not supposed to be!

The prescribed role would have her as 'a 40 year old woman - her kids raised, down getting valium off the doctor, depressed, repressed - and another 40 years of that! Not for her. She felt she was fighting for her very life: the combination of age and gender oppression was conspiring to deny her the only life she would ever have.

The most eloquent stories were those of the 'older' women who having freed themselves from marriage, had than achieved economic and sexual autonomy. These were women who *CHOSE* to leave long marriages for 'something better' and to find new beginnings, and who, having finally made the break, said they wouldn't go back for any amount of money. There were marriages of 15, 18, 20 years or longer which were ended by the desire of the wife to be a free woman, to become emotionally and economically independent of men by choice. They felt they had the power to choose a positive identity in older age, in spite of the age oppression they were aware existed. Katherine (68) left her marriage after 26 years at the age of 50. She had married at 24 ('My friends were getting married, I was a bit worried'). She said she went to university 'to have a good time and look for a husband'. She felt she had had 'an exciting life' with her husband, but that she'd been-deprived 'sexually as a woman'.

Freed at 50 and working full-time she 'started having lovers' and 'fell in love for the first time' at 55 with a younger (black) man: 'a wonderful lover and companion'.

She had, in fact, followed in her mother's footsteps:

Katherine And I did exactly what my mother did, stayed married to a
(68) man for 26 years. Mother was resentful, sarcastic about my
 father. But her whole message to me was passivity.

But her mother too had had a 'burst of freedom in her seventies':

Katherine ... before my eyes she became sixteen, after my father
(68) died. My father had cut my sister off when she married a
 black man, and forbade my mother to see her, but when he
 died *mother reunited everyone and was very proud to have*
 the black children to stay, and instinctively, because of her
 support for the underdog, mother got in with the black
 friends of my sister. Also she began painting when father
 died. At 70. And had a black lover. She just soaked up
 new experiences'.

Katherine had likewise blossomed and she believed that: 'both of us had denied ourselves playing out the role of the passive wife in marriage'.

Of her life, which 'began at 50', now approaching 70 she felt utterly positive. Her career had developed successfully after she went back to education to do an MA. And she had gradually discovered and been influenced by feminism:

Katherine ... I love women, have lots of women friends, and decided
(68) years ago that women were far more interesting than men,
 because ~~men have such a narrow kind of life and vision--~~

If she could do her life differently she said:

Katherine I would have been sexually active as a young woman, 19, 20.
(68) I would have liked to have had more self-confidence, been more aware of intellectual things earlier. Have married later, 27, 28. Travelled. I would have liked to have learned to be a feminist earlier. Ended my marriage earlier.

Significantly, she still included marriage as part of her scenario. She was satisfied with her life now: 'If I died tomorrow I would feel I had made a contribution'. 'Sometimes', she said revealingly, 'I feel guilty because I'm having such a great time'. She regretted being invisible as a sexual being ('no longer sexually available, or of sexual interest') but had given up feeling hurt about it, because she accepted that it was part of the culture and nothing to do with herself: 'It's hard to realise I'm nearly 70, only when I look in the mirror, I don't feel that old, even physically'. When I interviewed her, she was on her way to do research on women in China.

4. 'Being Left' (Divorce)

The women discussed above all decided, to leave their marriages (although in practice it was often more complicated, passivity persisting in spite of the desire to leave, until their husbands provided a catalyst, usually in the form of 'another woman'). Nevertheless, they *felt* they had made the choice - by wanting their marriages to end and trying to end them (at this stage the husbands usually 'begged' them not to go). They *felt* they had ceased to be passive and this made a positive contribution to their identity, even if the 'parting' with the marriage and their

partners was still painful, even if divorce worsened their economic situation. One of the attractions of marriage is as we have seen, that women are usually financially better off as a couple than single. All of these women were poorer on divorce, but they became financially independent: the level of income mattered less than that it was their own. This applied as much to being in receipt of state benefits as being in paid employment. Being financially dependent on the state did not have the same meaning in terms of identity as being financially dependent on a husband in marriage.

It was definitely more difficult for the women who were 'left' at 50 than those who did the leaving. Janet (50) who had 'married for life' was not prepared for anything else. Sarah was divorced at 62, shortly before I interviewed her and in her words 'it did come as a shock': 'I can't say I was terribly surprised, but nevertheless at my age it is a shock'. What made it worse was, like the others, she had tried to initiate a divorce previously and failed. He'd talked her into staying: 'So I, being reasonably easy going, thought, well, what have I got to lose, I'll just continue as I'm living now'. In fact, she had a lot to lose, having made such an investment in marriage over a period of 32 years, and raising her son who was born with a severe disability. When her husband took the initiative and left, she was understandably bitter, but she was also 'coping'.

What made *all* the difference to Sarah was her work. She was past the official retirement age for women (60 at that time), but was still working as a nurse: 'I've been nursing all my life', she said. - She'd

stopped work until her child was five and went to residential school. She believed that working had made her emotionally as well as financially independent and that this independence had always put a strain on her marriage. Sarah said she thought working kept her young and fit.

Sarah I think I shall just continue as I am until I get too tired to
(62) do what I want to do - that will be my first sign of age - when I'm unable to.

She didn't 'look her age' and was often taken to be ten years younger.

She put this down to having her own independence and work:

Sarah I don't consider myself an old woman. I don't consider myself
(62) as a young woman, but people have never looked on me as an old woman, they've never commented on my age, a lot of people wouldn't know my age, because naturally it's not a thing you divulge to a lot of people. And I think if I told people what my age was some of them would be quite surprised, probably by the way I act or go about daily carryings on, I mean, it's just - I don't feel old.

5. Being Left (Death)

Significantly with these women, it wasn't necessarily an issue of a 'good' or a 'bad' marriage, but of marriage itself as 'the problem'. Katherine's was 'good' or at least 'not bad'; Sarah's was 'bad' or at least 'not very good'. Eve's was, by all accounts, an 'ideal marriage': except that he didn't want her to continue her career as an artist when they married, he wanted her to be a wife and mother of their 4 children.

Eve (72) I always wanted to be an artist. And of course the two things always clashed. Being an artist and being a woman. When I got married, I couldn't do it.

During the 33 years of her marriage, she kept her artistic talent 'alive' by being 'creative in the home really'. It never occurred to her to leave her husband: she was 'happily married'. But when he died when she was 62, her life was transformed. He had been a wealthy businessman with his own construction company. She joined the Board of Directors and took an active part in directing the business, standing up to a lot of sexism ('I have to put my foot down and be firm when they start to patronise me - killing me with kindness'). She got her own studio and started working again as an artist ('which was fantastic'). She started a small art gallery, exhibiting and selling the work of local artists. She worked in the local Citizens Advice Bureau, travelled to Italy and Greece ('all the artistic things I wanted to see'), to the Far East and Russia, did a creative writing

class, was writing poetry, joined the Peace Movement and the Women's Movement. It was feminism, she said, that had the biggest influence. When asked why she only acted after her husband's death and not before, she said:

Eve Because now I have the opportunity to do it. I have no more (72) ties. I am freed from being a wife and a mother. My husband's death liberated me. I became a different person. I became me. I had to become a different person to make my marriage work, and to give a happy life to the children.

She said the past 10 years had been the best years of her life: 'I have been me'. Because she was 'happily married', her response to her husband's death is all the more extraordinary and revealing of how far women are prepared to sacrifice their 'selves' and their 'lives' to it. After his death, she thought:

Eve Now my time has come, I've waited for it for so long. You (72) know, I'd *lived* for that, for the moment to be free. To do. To be myself. To do what I had always wanted to do. I thought - now I must have this. I felt that I wouldn't have lived if I hadn't got that.

Asked what she would have done if her husband hadn't died, she said:

Eve I don't think I would have submitted to him as I did before. I (72) don't think I could have given in any longer. It's an interesting question to think about. I have thought about it many times, but when I think back, he had it all his own way all the time. He had sport. He wasn't even very much a family man either. This is why I feel strongly that when he retired, I would have thought of myself a bit more. Because he had it all the way he wanted all of the time. It would have been time I had it my way.

Eve was passionate about her eventual self-realisation and self-fulfilment, but in the long wait for freedom in widowhood, she risked

losing it through her own death. And although she says she *thinks* she would 'have thought of herself a bit more', her tone is ambivalent rather than assertive, as if she is trying to convince herself that she would have had the courage to break free. Her story is symbolic of the lengths and the *time* that some women are prepared to sacrifice for the sake of the others which society 'says' they should care for and please.

6. Leaving Marriage and Motherhood

Some women took a risk of a different kind to escape the waste or the loss of their lives: they left their marriages, leaving their children behind and therefore risked losing their reputation and self-esteem as 'good mothers' as well as their children. Frances made her bid for freedom from marriage after 17 years, and described her decision as very much influenced by feminism.

Frances The most important thing is that I'm in charge of what I do.
 (39) And I didn't see that before, I didn't realise how powerful I was until I actually took stock of what I had done in my life and how I'd broken through so many barriers - a long, long time and it came very late. I was appreciating I was strong when I had to start from scratch, I had no place to live, no assets to fall back on, because he kept the house and everything. So I started from scratch with my children.

The youngest of her 3 daughters who was 6 at the time 'decided to go back and live with her father'. Frances said the guilt factor was great:

Frances People tried to lay a lot of guilt trips on me and on her.
 (39) The ones on me were, how could you do such a thing, the ones on her were, you poor little thing, your mother has left you. And she and I felt fine about it, we used to talk about it and say that we still loved each other just as much, that we could always get in touch with each other by telephone and

she could always come and be with me when she wanted. So we've ridden that pretty well. And it is OK to live without your children living with you, to be just as close and loving with each other.

She had relished her economic and emotional independence:

Frances (39) One of the things I've cleared up by living on my own is that we don't belong to anybody except ourselves, we really belong to ourselves. And that changed my whole relationship with people I was sexually interested in. My children too, they don't belong to me, they belong to themselves.

She believed that 'the role of the woman being financially dependent on a man, created by sexism in our society' was bad for men as well as women. She felt her whole 'family' benefitted by her leaving - including the grand-daughter she had at the age of 39, an age when it would have been difficult for her to adopt the stereotyped 'role' of grandmother had she ever wanted to do so. But she didn't:

Frances (39) My relationship with my grand-daughter is very close, very intimate and loving, but I don't get my fulfilment out of her. I get it out of my whole world.

Jean (35) had left her husband and daughter the year before I interviewed her. She had got her own income, and had come into contact with feminism and she 'realised how much I had lost touch with myself'. 'But', she said, 'to get me out of that marriage took an earthquake'.

Jean (35) A real wrenching of that bond. Having to decide to consciously stop liking this bloke and being nice to him - for no reason at all that he knew of. And having to let the child go. And say goodbye to all those friends. Giving up security, status, everything. The only way I could have done it was by leaving the county.

Leaving marriage and motherhood was a matter of principle and she did it by an act of will, or decision, as much as by inclination. She had to 'disconnect herself economically and emotionally', particularly in order to obtain her 'fair share' of the property. She described herself now as '100 per cent independent', but also with 'terrible guilt' because she saw motherhood as 'something she could no longer give in to' either. Yet she said that she was 'available' to her daughter: she'd 'not rejected her' by moving out and away. She had got her 'independence', and now had to cope with what to do with it. She felt her 'freedom' was worth the cost:

Jean I don't care if I die of poverty tomorrow. I feel like I have
 (35) found a centre to myself. I don't have to put on faces all the
 time. I can think about what my real skills are. I've faked
 for years - everything - orgasm, intelligence, *success*, *ability*
 - never did I put *myself* into anything.

She was now economically independent and emotionally involved in a lesbian relationship.

7. 'Spinsters'

The only category, or label, for an unmarried older woman is 'spinster': a category of womanhood traditionally to be pitied. In Elaine's (24) words: 'For me spinster has a bit of a sinister ring about it, whereas 'batchelor' is lovely'. Yet these women - often unmarried and *celibate* by choice (a notion not at all contained in the language of the label), financially independent and with careers - do not as a rule pity themselves or regard themselves as in any way pitiable. Two of the women interviewed in this sample would fall into this category of 'spinster'. Work was central to their lives which

they regarded as full and fully satisfying. One of these was a Catholic nun.

Sister Patricia (56) said she had been 'like everyone' else as a teenager:

Sister Patricia (56) When I was 16 I liked dancing, mixing. Somehow when I went to a dance and I came back, I was dissatisfied - I enjoyed myself, but there was something niggling at the back of me - like, is that all you're going to do. I didn't know what it was, I was just dissatisfied about myself.

Her mother (Irish and working class) had definitely expected her to 'get married and have a family':

Sister Patricia (56) My mother never said anything about entering the church. Eventually it came to me that God wanted me to give myself completely to his service - a very gradual thing. I had to battle against it, I didn't know what was happening.

So, at 16, she left Ireland for England and took up her 'first profession': 'we took the vow of poverty, chastity and obedience - to observe first for three years'.

She did A-levels, then teacher training (and taught), went on to a university degree, became a head-teacher, and then as a result of a 'spiritual crisis' had left her 'career' to do community work as a nun. She never felt that she was 'giving up' marriage and motherhood:

Sister Patricia (56) Marriage didn't come into it. I wasn't rejecting marriage as such. I would have felt I was rejecting something in me if I did not respond to the call. So therefore marriage wasn't considered, because I wasn't involved. For me it was my final decision to leave and enter, I was answering a definite urge, I suppose like someone in love -

they are blind to all the snags. You may as well tell someone who is going to get married that it is not going to work out - but they cannot see it.

For her, her 'vocation' had worked out. When people would say to her 'Look what you are giving up', (meaning marriage and motherhood), she would say 'Look what you are giving up' (meaning freedom and independence). She had the profoundest respect for women, for marriage and for mothers, but saw the 'choice' of marriage and motherhood as involving 'loss' just as much as and no less than her chosen vocation. Nor was it a matter of being unattractive to men: she had been sexually attractive as a teenager and was aware that she still was:

Sister I always liked to appear good, I still do. I had a good
 Patricia appearance, I was very attractive to people, and I'd say
 (56) men were drawn to me, and I often feel they still are, even
 as a religious - and I am aware of that, I have to be on
 my guard, if you like, I have to think about it.

She described herself as-'happy, very happy' and she said that although she would officially retire at 60, 'mentally I will never retire', and she would continue working in the 'community' indefinitely. She had only recently looked in the mirror and seen 'age' in her face. She didn't feel any different, and it didn't bother her.

Eleanor was working class too and was still working full-time at 70. Work 'meant a lot' to her:

Eleanor Because I can't be stuck indoors. I like figure work, see,
 (70) I've done work with accountants all my life, so figure work is interesting to me, and I get the satisfaction of knowing it's done properly, you know.

She had worked all her life, from leaving school at 14 - starting with clerical jobs and after serving in the WRENS during the war and becoming trained in book-keeping, she worked in 'accounts'. She had retired at 60 to the country, but she 'nearly went mad'. So at 66 she arranged for a swap of her council-house in the country for a flat in London and got a job. She loved her work, but equally she did not 'love' living in poverty on her pension:

Eleanor (70) See, if I've only got *my* pension, I can't get out and buy a dress or anything like that, or treat myself, whereas for my job - I only get £16 for it, when I've got it - but with that I can save a little bit for clothes or anything, and if I want to go to the theatre I can treat myself. But once you're back on your pension, it's deadly, it's not worth living, really, with today's pension - you see, you put your TV away, your policy, electricity, gas, rent, and then you think, I've got £5 left in my purse, after you've put all your bits away, for food. It's not enough to live a respectable life.

As it was, she could only afford one cooked meal a week. But she managed to save for an annual holiday in Capri with her life-long friend, Gracie Fields. She had just returned recently before I interviewed her - and had been shortly 'before Gracie had died'. That meant a lot to her: and she had travelled in spite of having injured her back and been in pain. She described herself as 'happy on her own' and said she never 'regretted not marrying'. She'd had the opportunity on two occasions and it hadn't interested her in the way that working did.

8. 'Career Women'

Work as a 'career' meant for some women - and particularly older women like Eleanor (70) - that they were never financially dependent

in marriage, whether they were married or not, and that they also had a meaningful and distinct identity in and through their work. Hilary at 64 was approaching retirement age. She was a regional director of an international relief organisation: the only woman at her level. She had 'ended up totally with a career' and she was (rightly) proud of her achievement, having worked to get herself educated from her working class background. Like most women, she had expected to 'get married and have a family'. She *had* married, 'late' at 29 ('I thought if I'm going to settle down, I should be doing it now'). She did not have children, as she had, for medical reasons, a hysterectomy at 36 ('I'm sorry that having a family never materialised'). She'd 'assumed that when I met the right man I'd get married'. While she had worked after leaving university and before getting married, she had still seen marriage and not work as her career. And when she married, typical of the patten of the 'female chronology', she stopped work ('I didn't have to work for the money, so I kept house, went where my husband went'). It was only when he left ('the marriage terminated') that she 'started thinking about a career'. She thought:

Hilary ... that I would always be working, not dependent on a man.
 (64) And that I not only must do a job, but do it better, so that I could advance, and have a career rather than just working. When I decided to go for a career I was able to completely adjust to that without looking back. I did very well and was in a directors position within a year, from being a case worker, then another promotion after two years.

She was 38 when she started her 'career' and 45 when she decided to marry, for the second time, a man 8 years younger than herself. Her 'second husband had the traditional view of himself as provider':

Hilary "When I married, my career became secondary to his, insofar

(64) as I would go wherever he was assigned and get a job there. But I was able to keep within the same system and advance.

She 'had already worked in very responsible positions and I wanted to work'. Under pressure from her husband she stopped work: 'it was extremely difficult for me to adjust to not working'. But her husband died after 3 years of marriage and she returned to the career she had only left for a year. She said she thought if her second husband had lived she would have adopted 'marriage as an alternative to a career'. But circumstances of widowhood, fortunately, or unfortunately, did not give her that choice. And in her third marriage (to a man 10 years younger which ended in divorce after 7 years), she continued with her career (this husband did not want 'the responsibility of provider').

In one sense, Hilary achieved her work career by default, not choice: i.e. through her lack of success in marriage. But, she also felt it had given her 'identity, purpose and worth'. Her story illustrates, in spite of her particular combination of marriage and career, the extent to which women are forced to see it as a choice of either/or, and the precedence that marriage takes over work, even when work is an obvious source of independence and positive identity.

Charlotte (66) was a successful businesswoman with her own business: a hairdressing salon. She was still working 'full-time'. She, typically, had married at 19 and had two children by the age of 23. She was still married to the same man. She'd 'worked outside the home before I was married, then stopped when I had children, and started working again when I was 36, and it really changed my life. I

was still a homemaker, but I also had to become a businesswoman. I started out small and I grew'.

Charlotte (66) I don't think about age, and as time goes on and it hits me I think, what am I doing at this stage of the game doing this! But you must go ahead and live your life as if you will live for ever, and look to the next thing that's coming along. And this is what keeps me happy and young.

She 'felt more important and like I was my own self, and was able to do things, and just felt better about myself' as a result of her work: 'I think you can still love your family and still be involved in the outside world'.

She 'hadn't ever planned to go back to work' after marriage ('those were the days when women just didn't work'). She'd started to just help a friend out, and her husband hadn't wanted her to work, but when the opportunity came to take over the business, he agreed. He was happy with her success and so was she:

Charlotte (66) Had I known what I was getting into I probably would not have dared. But it has been really good for me. So it really is my life and it is difficult for me to think of retiring.

She wanted to 'stay well and look good as long as I live'.

For Ellie (40), marriage was anathema: 'a total trap'. She was married at 21 and 'ended up leaving him 9 months later':

Ellie (40) I was 2 stone lighter, a nervous wreck, absolutely penniless, I mean, I didn't have a bean, the only thing I had left was my car - the house, absolutely everything - I didn't take a thing. I went and borrowed some money off my mother to get some clothes.

She was so desperate never to get caught in the trap of marriage again that she waited for 10 years to get a divorce:

Ellie I realised that once you get a divorce you have to decide if
(40) you want to get married again.

She understood, as Delphy has argued, that divorce is part of the institution of marriage: that if there wasn't marriage there would be no divorce, that divorce enables marriage to continue. For Ellie, a successful career (and financial independence) without children gave her the greatest freedom from the constraints of the female chronology. She was acutely aware of the ways that age and gender operated together to limit opportunities for women and to construct identity negatively. As the owner of a successful West End hairdressing salon (after her divorce she 'started up in business') she was also in a position to see women struggling with the pressures to maintain their youth and beauty. She had had many opportunities (i.e. invitations) to marry, including her long-term business partner and lover:

Ellie I finished with Al because it was a question of finishing with
(40) him or marrying him. I'd been going out with him for 4 years and he said, Well, why won't you marry me. And that is most of the times why I've finished with men because they have made me make that decision. And I couldn't.

She wouldn't marry because she valued her economic and emotional independence too much. Her financial independence also meant she didn't need - for the economic reasons discussed earlier - to marry:

Ellie It gives me confidence, being independent. I find that I
(40) don't have to go out looking for a husband. A lot of women of my age, most of them are normally divorced, and they're still looking - they usually aren't as independent.-----

Being independent she thought also made her less attractive to men as a marriage partner. She was slim and had long blonde hair - conventional, beautiful in a sex stereotyped way.

Ellie Now that I'm so independent, it's very difficult for me to
(40) find a man. I frighten half of them off. Or I find weak men. See, strong men I frighten off because I think they feel it would be like a competition of strength.

If a criterion of successful marriage is female dependency as the literature has suggested, then an independent woman like Ellie would find it difficult to fit the mould. She, like Maureen, felt the secret of her success and happiness was her work/career. She had missed out on the marriage and motherhood that should have been her 'destiny', but her friends who had fulfilled their 'women's goals' were the ones who felt they had missed out: they have said to me, 'life has passed me by'. She did not feel that 'life had passed her by. She also felt she had spared herself the worst experiences of age and gender categorisation connected with marriage and motherhood. She had always had relationships with men considerably younger than herself. She 'looked' 10 years younger and was always regarded by others as younger. She had also avoided age/sex discrimination in employment which her friends were facing in having to start 'a career' at 40 after a 'gap' of 20 years of childrearing, so she was 'free' of those constraints. She felt she faced only what all heterosexual women face: physical deterioration, loss of youth and beauty, loss of male approval and sexual disqualification. But even the sexual disqualification was, she believed, mitigated by her economic independence.

There was a definite correlation at all ages between positive self image and economic independence. This was true not just of middle class women with a career, but of working class women. It was not so much a matter of what kind of work, or its pay or status, but of WHETHER women worked in paid employment. Furthermore, if women were economically viable, they were likelier to both feel and to be sexually viable, less vulnerable to being sexually disqualified at all ages.

Conclusion - 'Happily Married Women'

Most women in this sample had found alternatives to marriage as a career, and most had found marriage unsatisfactory in terms of personal satisfaction and self-fulfilment. Chapter five has sought to discover why this might be the case and found answers in the 'economics' of marriage: in the appropriation of women's work as wives and mothers, in the dependency, isolation and loss of identity which appear to be part of the marriage package. What is interesting is that even 'happily married' women found marriage unsatisfactory: they might be happy in their personal relationship but not with the conditions of marriage. Eve (72), for example, described herself as 'happily married', but was liberated by widowhood, although she grieved the loss of her partner. In spite of the sample being biased in its selection of women influenced by feminism, in the proportion of divorced women and in the extended sampling of lesbians, there were still 'happily married' women in this sample. They included Mary (18), Jane (23), Betsy (28), Maureen (38), Sheila (38), Fenella (40), Alison (60), Charlotte (66), and had included Eve (72). They included

women of all ages. But what these women had in common which distinguished them from 'unhappily married women' was that they were economically independent of their marriage. Paid employment not only provided economic independence, but also a source of identity independent of marriage.

The women here who found strategies for economic independence had been assisted in their search for an autonomous identity by feminist ideas. And the changes in women's labour market participation which occurred during the decade of feminism had increased women's opportunities for employment. There were more married women and women with children working, and there was a decrease in the earnings gap between women and men. But the growth in the number of women in the labour force had not significantly altered the structural inequality of women within the labour force, or led to 'significant improvements in pay and conditions.'⁴¹ Thus, women earned only three quarters of what men earned (73% in 1987), based on hourly rates and even less based on weekly rates: ie 66.3% in 1987.⁴² Women earned less than men even when they were in the same occupations.⁴³ This was because of occupational segregation (ie the segregation of women into low paid, low status work, predominantly carried out by women and labelled 'women's work'). Women worked in a much more restricted number of occupations than men, with markedly fewer women in the top jobs.⁴⁴ Men still predominated in higher grades and childrearing continued to have a negative impact on women's employment status.

Most women spend a period of time out of the labour market followed by a return to part time employment frequently associated with occupational down grading.⁴⁵

In spite therefore of increased labour market participation women's status and position in the labour market had not changed following the decade of feminism. Women are still found primarily in low paid service sector work where their position has remained 'relatively stable over the last 15 years.'⁴⁶ Only 1% of women are in professional occupations compared to 6% of men.⁴⁷ Only 11% of managers are women while three quarters of clerical and catering workers are women.⁴⁸ Three quarters of women are found in social classes three to five.⁴⁹ Most women are working part time in manual service jobs (70%).⁵⁰ Part time workers are paid less than full time workers, even when they are doing the same job.⁵¹ Part time work is low paid, status, insecure and receives less employment protection than full time employment. The big increase in women's labour market participation was in fact in part time work. Three quarters of part time workers are married women.⁵² Most married women and most women with children work part time. In 1985, 2/5 of married women and 2/3 of women with children were working part time.⁵³

The majority of part time workers were married and had a child under 16.⁵⁴

The presence of children and the age of the youngest child are by far the most important determinant of whether or not women work.⁵⁵

The longer women are away from work, the likelier they are to return to part time employment.⁵⁶ There is a notable occupational downward mobility for women returning to work after having children.⁵⁷ Thus in 1980 51% of women returnees changed occupational level and 37% of these moved down.⁵⁸ Pressure of children determined whether women were coping or not. Thus, although women's position in the labour market improved, influenced by feminism and equality legislation, women were still enormously disadvantaged by the competing demands of child care and paid employment and significantly discriminated against within employment (in low pay and low status work).

The nature of part time work presented some contradictions. On the one hand it had enabled an increase in the labour market participation of married women and women with children (who put 'convenience of hours' above all other considerations when evaluating a job). At the same time it is the area of the labour market in which women are most disadvantaged, discriminated against and exploited. In addition, it seemed that women with children had increased their labour market potential in the absence of any increase in childcare provision either by the government or in the work place. According to Martin and Roberts most put husbands as their major source of childcare.⁶⁰ They obviously 'fit part time employment in on top of their domestic and childrearing work: 54% of wives working full time and 77% of part time wives also did all or most of the housework.⁶¹

By the end of the eighties, at the time of completing this study, women's position in the labour market was in the process of

changing yet again, this time as a result of demographic changes in the population as a whole. Due to the low birth rate in the seventies, there would be fewer young people available to enter the labour market in the mid-nineties. To meet the skills shortage, employers were, at the time of writing, looking to women as a 'reserve army of labour'.⁶² Consequently, employers were looking to address the needs of women with children and to assist women to develop their careers into senior positions. This included childcare provisions (workplace nurseries, contributions to childminding expenses, school holiday care), career breaks, programmes for 'women returnees', training and career paths into non-traditional areas of work, accelerated management training and career development.⁶³

In a period in the eighties which has been described as 'post-feminist', the position of women in the labour market was ironically in the process of changing for demographic and economic reasons as much as it had during the decade of 'active feminism' in the seventies. However the body of theory and practice developed by feminism was providing a basis for childcare policies and provisions that would enable women to combine childrearing with paid employment: to remain economically independent of marriage and motherhood. Thus, the decade of feminism was instrumental in changing women's attitudes and awareness (identity) and enabling women to increase their opportunities independent of marriage in the labour market. This happened as a result of the influence of feminism, but without effective changes to structural inequality in employment. In the next period, the combined influence of feminism, demographic change and

labour market skills shortage looked set to produce structural changes that might actually institutionalise some of the gains of feminism. The decade of feminism and women influenced by feminism - like the ones in this study - had paved the way.

Chapter 7 - Footnotes

1. Jackson, S. (1982) p. 24.
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3. Ibid, p. 53.
4. Rich, A. (1981), p. 20.
5. Ibid, p. 23.
6. Daly, M. (1981), p. 14.
7. Benjamin, R. (1982), p. 34.
8. Guardian (1981)
9. Weideger, P. (1978) p. 208.
10. ESRC/University of Essex 'Ageing and Life History Study', 1985-1988. See Thompson, P. Itzin, C. and Abendstern, M. (1990).
11. Rakusen, J. (1987); Fairlie, J. et. al. (1987); Leiblun, S.R. and Swartzman, L.C. (1986).
12. Itzin, C. (1986a).
13. Martin, J. and Roberts, C. (1984), p. 13.
14. Oakeley, A. (1974) p. 93.
15. Allatt, P. and Keil, T. (1987) p. 5.
16. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 11.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid, p. 118.
19. Ibid, p. 136.
20. Ibid, p. 11.
21. Ibid, p. 15.
22. Ibid, p. 13.
23. Ibid, p. 24.
24. Ibid, p. 121.
25. Ibid, p. 128.

26. Ibid, p. 136.
27. Ibid, p. 187.
28. HMSO (1988) p. 45-46.
29. Ibid, p. 5.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid, p. 8.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid, p. 9.
34. Ibid, p. 11.
35. Ibid, p. 10.
36. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 115.
37. Ibid, p. 114.
38. Ibid, p. 94 and p. 115.
39. Ibid, p. 77.
40. Ibid, p. 191.
41. Mintel, (1989).
42. HMSO, op. cit. p. 45.
43. Ibid, p. 47.
44. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 188.
45. HMSO, op. cit. p. 45.
46. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 32.
47. Ibid, p. 23.
48. HMSO, op. cit. p. 36.
49. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 23.
50. Ibid, p. 32.
51. Ibid, p. 58.
52. OPCS (1989).

53. HMSO, op. cit. p. 30.
54. Martin & Roberts, op. cit. p. 15.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid, p. 128.
57. Ibid, p. 189.
58. Ibid, p. 152.
59. Ibid, p. 78.
60. Ibid, p. 45.
61. Ibid, p. 114.
62. Breughel, I. (1981).
63. Itzin, C. (1989).

PART FIVE - FORMAL THEORY

Chapter Eight:

A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS OF AGE AND GENDER OPPRESSION,
IDEOLOGY AND INTERNALISED OPPRESSION

I. DEVELOPING A POWER THEORY

Using a life history approach, it has been possible to 'describe the psychological and social world of 'women' as revealed by participant observation with the North London Older Women's Group and by the life history data collected from the respondents aged 15 to 72: two samples of women influenced by feminism, interviewed after a decade of feminist influence. Previous chapters have also provided some explanation of these 'worlds' drawn from the literature on female socialisation, the sexual division of labour and female sexuality. From this data and discussion it has been possible to see some of the processes and effects of the social construction of opportunity and identity in the lives of the women interviewed: how age/gender oppression operates at all life stages to control women economically and sexually and how this oppression is internalised in the form of attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. It has also been possible to see the ways in which women have resisted compliance with the female chronology and increased their opportunities within the constraints of the oppression, particularly influenced by feminism. At the same time, the results of this research have produced conclusions which require some further explanation.

From this data it would appear that age/gender constraints operate similarly in the lives of working class and middle class women, that attitudes, beliefs and to a large extent behaviour

appear to be similar regardless of social class. Some of the similarity can perhaps be explained by the unusual bias towards upwardly mobile working class women in the sample. But the similarities are still surprising, given the evidence that exists of social class differences in other areas (e.g. health, education) and evidence of poverty accelerating the ageing process. They seem to demand some theoretical explanation. So does the fact that attitudes, beliefs and behaviour seemed to transcend changes in historical circumstance: given the changes in women's labour market participation, and reproductive technology and contraception. For example, why should women of 68, 40, 23 and 18 all be describing their feelings and perceptions of themselves and their opportunities in such a similar way?

The links between age and gender beyond the descriptive level produced by this data also demand theoretical explanation. That age and gender are connected in the lives of women has been demonstrated, but how do age and gender come to be constructed together? What explains their apparent symbiosis?

'Parental influence' on attitudes and behaviour runs as a refrain throughout the data. Not only does it appear to be a common denominator, it seems to have an inexorable quality which also transcends social class differences and historical change. What is the nature and power of that influence? The data demonstrates that women do internalise aspects of their oppression, and are aware of doing so, but appear to find themselves powerless

in the face of that process. To some extent women are victims of their oppression. But this data has shown that women resist as well as comply, that they are active in their resistance and agents in their own social change. It has also shown that women do not remain 'victims', that they can and do, with for example, the resources of feminism, after their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. The literature provides explanation and evidence of 'influences': the different ways in which male and female infants are handled, the sexism in children's books, sex objectified and sex stereotyped representations of women. But these accounts leave unanswered how these influences operate on an individual basis. What is missing is a theory of ideology and representation that can satisfactorily explain how ideas have the power to influence attitudes and behaviour, especially when it is evidently so very much not in the interests of women that they should do so.

Symbolic interactionism and social construction explain the connections between environment and emotion and replace the concept of biological determinism with a concept of social conditioning. The data has demonstrated quite convincingly the extent to which women are a product of their conditioning: in femininity, for example, or in following sexual, marital or mothering scripts. But the theory of social construction can appear over-deterministic and fail to account for why some women are more or less successfully conditioned than others, why some women successfully resist certain aspects of conditioning, why and how women can and do change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. What is required is a theory

that accounts for the dialectical process that operates between the social structures of oppression, its ideology and representations, and the individual (identity and opportunity): a theory which accounts for both stasis and change.

The need to include an understanding and an analysis of 'institutionalised power' and to develop a 'power theory' was identified in the review of the literature on women, the life cycle and socialisation. Neither symbolic interactionism nor social construction have satisfactorily accounted for the function of power in the processes they describe, and neither has explained the actual process or psychology of socialisation and the role that representation and ideology play in that process. Throughout the discussion of the data the issue of power - the institutionalised power structures and the structure of power in relationships - has emerged as a major factor in explaining the position of women at all life stages. This is not power conceived ideologically, as an abstraction or an idea or a source or a feeling, but (as Foucault would have it) the 'machinery of power', 'the concrete mechanisms and practices through which power is exercised' and institutionalised in the structures of society or (as Delphy would have it) power that is concrete and material.²

This is power manifested concretely and materially in every realm, in all social relations and personal relationships and in all processes, including the 'ideological' and the 'psychological'. This is power, specific identifiable and tangible, in the obvious

structural inequalities in the labour market, in the appropriation of women's labour in marriage and motherhood, in socialisation, and in the interaction between ideology and identity.

What is required is a theory that acknowledges power as a factor in every social and psychological process and which also makes a distinction between institutionalised power and the power of individuals. For this data has provided evidence of both and thrown up an apparent contradiction between the power of the oppression to control, the power of that oppression to be internalised and operated by the individual against herself and others, and also the 'personal power' of individuals to resist the oppression in the first place and then to change themselves, their identity and their opportunity at later life stages. Theory needs to account for women as victims (or survivors), conditioned participants or actors in the scripts of the oppressive society, but also as authors of their own lives.

In the final phase of the 'grounded theory' approach of this research, it therefore remains to develop a 'formal theory' of age/gender oppression which 'makes sense of the social world of the people studied', which provides an explanation of the power that the oppression exercises over women's lives and its power to be internalised, but also an explanation of the power of women to triumph over the oppression and internalised oppression, to take control and institute change in identity and opportunity. In **theory** what is constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed:

the power to oppress can be reclaimed as the power to liberate. It is necessary to acknowledge the power and processes of the oppression to make people victims in order to reveal the power and processes available to individuals to resist and to change.

A materialist analysis of age/gender oppression, of internalised oppression or socialisation, ideology and representation, provided an explanation of these issues raised by the research data. It makes a distinction between differences (in gender and age), divisions (sexual and age) and discrimination (sex and age) and explains the distinction in terms of inequalities in economic, political and sexual power. A materialist analysis accounts for the structural power differentials between women and men within the sexual division of labour, the question of the value of women's and men's roles, the value of women's and men's work, the value of women and men. Feminism has contributed a sound theoretical basis which acknowledges the interface between the personal lives of women and the external structure of power relations.³

II. A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AND SEXUAL OPPRESSION

Theories of women's oppression fall roughly into three categories: the liberal view, the Marxist-feminist view and the radical feminist view. They all acknowledge the existence and significance of biological sex differences, but they do not reduce their analysis of women's oppression to biological determinism. In the broadest sense they see divisions between women and men as being 'socially constructed', but in different ways, to different degrees and with different implications. The liberal view:

... assumes that there are inequalities between women and men and that these are a result not of biological differences but of tradition, custom and prejudice. More specifically it asserts that inequalities are a result of individual acts of discrimination which have been perpetuated by prejudiced individuals.⁴

The liberal view sees the law as regulating both prejudice and discrimination: it does not take into account institutionalised oppression.

The Marxist-feminist view sees women's oppression as institutionalised in the sexual division of labour as defined by the organisation of production in a capitalist society.

Men as a group have a different relation from women as a group to the means of production. Women enter commodity production, and, like men, produce goods which circulate as commodities; they thus share the exploitation and experience of alienation of male workers in capitalism. But, because

within the social division of labour in capitalism, the task of maintaining and reproducing commodity producers is largely given to women, the expenditure of female labour power in procreation and in the nourishing of men and children at home determines how much female labour can be expended in the production of commodities.⁵

Women's relation to production is thus determined by her relation to reproduction defined by Rowbotham inclusively as child-bearing, child-rearing and housework:

Men and women are brought up for a different position in the labour force: the man for the world of work, the woman for the family. This difference in the sexual division of labour in society means that the relationship of men as a group to production is different from that of women. For a man the social relations and values of commodity production predominate and home is a retreat into intimacy. For the woman the public world belongs to and is owned by men. She is dependent on what the man earns but is responsible for the private sphere, the family. In the family, she does a different kind of work from the man ... The social relationships in the family ... are different from those outside, although they hinge on commodity production. Thus these differences in the way in which production is structured serve to shape the consciousness of men and women. In the case of women who go out to work, the main responsibility is still the home.⁶

In the Marxist-feminist view what 'defines, shapes and explains the social world and people's position within it' is ideology or 'prevailing ideas, beliefs and attitudes'⁷ which contribute to the socialisation of individuals into their positions of structural inequality.

The radical feminist view sees 'women as a social group ... dominated by men as a social group' with this domination of women

by men occurring 'within a set of institutionalised relationships called patriarchy':⁸

... this situation between the sexes now and throughout history is ... a relationship of dominance and subordination. What goes largely unexamined, often even unacknowledged (yet is institutionalised nonetheless) in our social order, is the birthright priority whereby males rule females. Through this system a most ingenious form of 'interior colonization' has been achieved. It is one which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring. However muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power.⁹

Like Marxist-feminism, radical feminism sees the subordination of women varying culturally and historically in its *specific forms*, but always in the context of patriarchy:

The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office and finance - in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands ... While patriarchy as an institution is a social constant, so deeply entrenched as to run through all other political, social or economic forms, whether of caste or class, feudality or bureaucracy, just as it pervades all major religions, it also exhibits great variety in history and locale.¹⁰

Like Marxist-feminism, radical feminism recognises the importance of the family:

Patriarchy's chief institution is the family ... Mediating between the individual and the social structure, the family effects control and conformity where political and other authorities are insufficient ... Serving as an agent of the

larger society, the family ... encourages its ... members to adjust and conform ...¹²

Both the Marxist-feminist and radical feminist theories conceptualise women's oppression, or subordination, in concrete terms and both have important contributions to make to a full and accurate understanding of women's oppression. Thus, it is clear that women are oppressed and exploited within the social class system, either advantaged or disadvantaged according to their social class position. But there are sex differences within the class system, and as workers, women are even more exploited than men. Women are also subordinate to men economically (in marriage), physically (as victims of violence) and sexually (in pornography and rape).

Rubin, for example, credits the sheer 'explanatory power of the Marxist theory of class oppression', but points out that it excludes to explain key aspects of the oppression of women:

... to explain women's usefulness to capitalism is one thing. To argue that this usefulness explains the genesis of the oppression of women is quite another ... Women are oppressed in societies which can by no stretch of the imagination be described as capitalist. In the Amazon valley and the New Guinea highlands, women are frequently kept in their place by gang rape when the ordinary mechanisms of masculine intimidation prove insufficient ... And pre-capitalist feudal Europe was hardly a society in which there was no sexism. Capitalism has taken over, and rewired, notions of male and female which predate it by centuries. No analysis of the reproduction of labour power under capitalism can explain footbinding, chastity belts, or any of the incredible array of Byzantine, fetishized indignities, let alone the more ordinary ones, which have been inflicted upon women in various times and places. The analysis of the reproduction of labour power does not even

explain why it is usually women who do domestic work in the home, rather than men.¹³

Rubin proposes a concept of 'sex/gender system' or 'the social system that creates sexism and gender' as an alternative to 'mode of production/reproduction' or 'patriarchy':

... a 'sex/gender system' is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied.¹⁴

The structures are neither biologically determined nor ahistorical:

Sex/gender systems are not ahistorical emanations of the human mind: they are products of historical human activity.¹⁵

Rubin borrows from anthropological and psychoanalytic theory to develop a theory of women's oppression which includes:

... the evolution of commodity forms in women, systems of land tenure, political arrangements, subsistence technology etc. Equally important, economic and political analyses are incomplete if they do not consider women, marriage and sexuality.¹⁶

In Rubin's view, it is the 'interdependence of sexuality, economics and politics' which defines the oppression of women. It is clear from the life history data in this study that women's position in society with respect both to gender and age is explained by a

theory which includes all three of these categories as equally relevant to women's subordination.

Theoretically, an understanding of women's oppression rests on a question of categories and hierarchies. The appeal of Marxism is that it offers both a theory of the development of class society and the reproduction of class divisions, and a method of social analysis. It sees class divisions based in material (i.e. economic) social relations. Traditionally it has liked to see sexual divisions as an additional (i.e. secondary) result of class divisions: reproducing the labour force which produces the capital.

But analysing women's oppression as an aspect of class oppression has failed to take into account some key characteristics of women's oppression. First, that the sexual division of labour is:

... not simply a division of labour between men and women, but a division that places men in a superior and women in a subordinate position.¹⁷

Furthermore, men of all classes and races share a dominance over women: 'patriarchy allows men of all groups to control at least some women'.¹⁸ Male dominance also pre-dates the class divisions of capitalism: it existed in the feudal system and it has existed in every form of society, through history and across cultures. The precise forms the subordination of women can take vary, so that in one society a particular activity when performed by women may have

a high status and the same activity a low status in another society. But in every society women will be defined as subordinate and controlled by men on some criterion.

There is another respect in which Marxist analysis of women's oppression is inadequate. Capital creates hierarchies, but:

Nothing about capital itself determines who shall occupy the higher and who the lower rungs of the wage labour force.¹⁹

Marxism may account for which classes occupy which positions, but it doesn't account for which gender or which race occupies those positions. Women, and blacks, with the working class, occupy the 'lower rungs'. This can only be accounted for by reference to separate and autonomous systems of dominance and subordination (i.e. sexism and racism) which already define certain groups as inferior and whose members are therefore also suitable to the exploitive purposes of the capitalist class systems (i.e. the power and benefits accruing to men in the sex/gender system or to whites in the racial system).

Hartmann is one Marxist theoretician who questions the ability of Marxism to account for women's oppression. Delphy is another, but she also recognises the value of the method, and extends its concept of 'materialism' to an analysis of women's oppression. She refers to the 'unpardonable confusion' which thinks:

... that capitalism 'invented' exploitation, and that capitalism *is* exploitation, and that exploitation is capitalism ... This 'error' has political meaning which feminists have clearly recognised: it makes the antagonism between the proletarians and the capitalists - which is one of the possible forms of exploitation - into the principal conflict wherever it exists, into the model for all oppression, and finally into the very definition of exploitation.²⁰

Delphy points out that all 'accounts of the world' take the 'oppression of women as given'. This includes Marxism:

'It is concerned entirely with only the male part of the working class. All the concepts used by Marx, and then by the others, take as a structural and theoretical definition of the worker's condition the lot of the male worker. Women workers are invisible: they are absent from the analysis of the labour market on the one hand, and their domestic work and its exploitation is taken as given on the other.'²¹

Delphy sees as the implication of this, that women are so exploited and oppressed that they are not regarded as worthy of being exploited in their own right, but only regarded as being exploitable in relation to the exploitation of men as workers:

In other words, it is clear that women are perceived as *unworthy of even being exploited*. Their oppression can only be explained, given theoretical status, if it is put forward as mediating another oppression. This clearly means that they are *no more worthy of being exploited for themselves than of living for themselves*. Their exploitation, like their existence, must be justified by something other than itself: by its usefulness for the lives or for the exploitation of men.'²²

Delphy develops a materialist analysis of women's oppression as *women*, using a Marxist methodology to demonstrate how women are

exploited within marriage through the appropriation by men of their work as wives and mothers. This is discussed in Chapter 4. She assumes 'the existence of an economic aspect to the oppression of women',²³ and she casts a new light on the meaning of 'roles' and role theory:

'To approach the role of women from an economic angle is to see housework as work, and conversely, to see housework as work is to take an economic angle. When approached from another angle, for example, that of role-playing, housework is no longer work, nor was it before the women's movement: it is a hobby, a vocation, a proof of love, a character trait, in brief anything and everything except work.'²⁴

She concludes, like Rubin, that 'men are the class which oppresses and exploits women:'

... the existence of patriarchy as power of men over women ... [as] power structured ideologically and economically ... [which] determines an oppression [having as its] end the maintenance of the appropriation of women by men. It is supported by an economic exploitation based on the unpaid *domestic work of women/wives*'.²⁵

Delphy defines patriarchy as the:

... system of subordination of women to men in contemporary industrial societies, that this system has an economic base and that this base is the domestic mode of production those exploited by the domestic mode of production are not paid but rather maintained.'²⁶

The data in this study has confirmed this view of women's position in marriage.

Delphy's analysis provides a necessary and useful convergence of Marxist/feminism and radical feminism, and is thoroughly consistent with the theory of a sex/gender system proposed by Rubin and others. Delphy herself uses a concept of 'sex/class':

I use the term 'class' to refer to the division between men and women. I do this because the concept of class allows an object, the oppression of women, to be broken down into small sections...The concept of class starts from the idea of social construction and specifies the implications of it. Groups are no longer *sui generis* constituted before coming into relations with one another. On the contrary, it is their relationship which constitutes them as such. It is therefore a question of discovering the social practices, the social relations which, in constituting the division of gender, create the groups of gender called 'of sex'.²⁷

Guillaumin also uses the concept of women as a class and analyses the appropriation of women under the headings of:

a) The labor market b) Spatial confinements c). Show of force d) Sexual constraint e) The arsenal of the law and customary rights.²⁸

She defines 'the labour market' as including waged labour (on low pay) and 'employment as wives.' Spatial confinement includes the restrictions on women's movement in and out of the marital home as controlled by husbands. She includes physical violence and sexual constraint (rape, sexual harrassment) as part of the 'material' base of the exploitation of women, and all the laws and customs which regulate marriage (e.g. the taking of a husband's name by a wife).

In a similar vein, Wittig defines the category of sex in relation to marriage, to sexuality and to heterosexuality:

The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual ... The compulsory reproduction of the "species" by women is the system of exploitation on which heterosexuality is economically based. Reproduction is essentially that work, that production by women, through which the appropriation by men of all the work of women proceeds.²⁹

Like Guillaumin and Delphy, she sees the appropriation of women ('the reproduction and production of women and also their physical persons') by means of the marriage contract. She also sees the exploitation of women in their objectification as 'sexual beings', as 'sexually available to men':

Although women are very visible as sexual beings, as social beings they are totally invisible ... For the category of sex is the category that sticks to women, for only they cannot be conceived of outside of it. Only *they* are sex, *the* sex, and sex they have been in their minds, bodies, acts, gestures: even their murders and beatings are sexual.³⁰

Delphy also defines the *material* base of women's oppression as including the category of sexuality: of 'sexed violence and sexual violence,' as well as the economic exploitation of women as wives and mothers.

The domestic mode of production therefore does not give a total account of even the economic dimensions of women's subordination. It certainly does not account for other dimensions of this subordination, in particular those oppressions which are just as material as economic exploitation, such as the general violence from men to women

and the violence associated with sexual relations between them.³¹

These materialist theories of women's oppression as women both economically (in the labour market, in marriage, in motherhood) and sexually (through institutionalised heterosexuality and sexual violence) account for the exploitation, subordination and social control of women in every aspect of their experience at every life stage as revealed by the data in this study. None of the other theories adequately account for all of the aspects of the oppression of women as women. With a theory that distinguishes women's oppression on the grounds of gender for women's oppression on the grounds of class or race, the results of this research which showed similarities between women of different social class are no longer surprising. For, with respect to women's experience of age, what women have in common as women appears to be more significant than what they experience differently according to social class. This is both explanation and evidence of the autonomy of women's oppression. It also accounts for the other perhaps unexpected result of this research: that women's experience of age is similar in spite of historical change. This finding would simply confirm what the theory suggests: that the subordination of women in relation to men, that the system of male power, has persisted over time as well as cross culturally.

Marxism and Marxist - Feminism, sees a hierarchy of oppression with classism at the top, to which sexism (and racism)

is secondary. But Marx made a mistake. This hierarchy of oppression is a very simplistic and distorted view of the complex interconnecting network of oppressive systems which exist.

Cutting across all the categories is whatever system of economic exploitation operates culturally, currently or historically: now, in the west, free market capitalism and in the east state capitalism (called communism), and prior to industrialisation, the feudal and slave systems. The economic system - whatever, whenever - exploits gender, age, race, class and ability; it takes advantage of these existing divisions and incorporates them within itself to its advantage. But each of these systems of oppression is autonomous in some of its aspects. Thus, men benefit from the subordination of women, white people benefit from the subordination of black people, owning class and middle class people benefit from the subordination of working class people, able-bodied people benefit from the subordinate status of people with disabilities.

At the same time as being autonomous, each of these systems is also inter-dependent and inter-connected within the system of economic exploitation (capitalism, for example) which benefits from the pre-existing dominance and subordination within all of the other categories. Thus capitalism both benefits from the existing age and sexual divisions and exploits these divisions even further to its needs. It benefits from race and class and gender divisions and also exploits them further for its needs.

The basis of each system of oppression is economic and the reason for the exploitation is always economic, though the excuse may be biological (e.g. reproduction, skin colour, age, physical ability, intelligence) and the methods for maintaining the oppression will be 'psychological'. Opportunity is determined by one's position and power in each and any system of oppression. Identity is determined by a combination of the unique (genetic) qualities of each individual and by the oppression which is internalised through the coercive process of socialisation.

II. A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS OF AGE OPPRESSION

The case for considering age as well as sex as a category for distinguishing between members of dominant and subordinate groups and for study by sociology has been convincingly argued by Leonard:

'Over the last hundred years social class has generally become recognised as a social categorisation, not founded in biology, and classes have been seen as counterposed: one cannot study the 'position' or the 'problem' of the dominated class in isolation from the dominant class ... Age and sex, however, are still largely treated by sociologists as biologically determined: and women (or the young and the old) are still studied as 'problems' without consideration of the dialectic of the relationship 'of 32 women' (or 'young' and 'old') with 'men' (or 'adult').³²

Mathieu also presents the case for 'problematizing' the dominant group, the need to define and study 'adult' status in relation to the status of 'youth' or 'old age:'

It would seem that the problematics of age categories - which, as we have seen, is historically more recent - still needs to deepen its systematization by defining and make it possible to describe adult status.'³³

Mathieu also points out that both 'youth' and 'old age' have been socially constructed as categories as a result of distinct 'material' social processes:

The sociology of youth really began to develop after the Second World War, at the same time as the demographic bulge and the problem of education and employment that it gave rise to. Similarly, old age was constituted as a field of sociological investigation only after its establishment as a real social group, brought about by the obligation, imposed

by the rich societies, to retire from production at a given age.'³⁴

Thus, by logical extension, must adulthood be a social construction consequent on social processes, including and particularly, on economic processes. Adults can be defined, at the very least, as those with access to economic and decision-making power, from which young people and old people are excluded. There is thus an economic base to the construction of all age categories independent of gender. Rosenmayr connects age divisions with their 'material' economic base in society:

Age is the product of internal social necessities: it is not just the result of a role system in society. The age structure and often conflicting and changing *age norms are derivatives of production, instruction and school systems* at all levels ... Age norms regulate access and are also the result of the power conflict over the fruits of production.'³⁵

Mathieu points out that there is a hierarchy of value and power with regard to age, just as there is a hierarchy of value and power with regard to social class and gender.

Infant dependency, which is 'real' in the earlier stages of human life, and the needs of people in older age to be dependent on others to meet some of their physical needs, becomes the biological excuse for this oppressive system, just as reproduction and mothering have been used as the biological excuse for the oppression of women:

The biological role that woman played as child bearer and the roles that developed from that fact, created the excuse for her oppression. As property and inheritance became important, male control of property and the desire to pass it to 'his children' became the bases for control of woman. Her biological tie to birthing children became the *excuse*, not the reason, for the oppression. There is not and never has been anything inherent in being female that would justify in any real sense her oppression.³⁷

Skin colour has been used as a 'biological' excuse for race oppression. Likewise physical differences, or needs for dependency (for limited periods of time in the case of children and women, or over long periods of time in the case of old people and people with disabilities) are 'exploited' and used as the rationale of an oppressive system in which one group has economic and decision-making as well as physical power over another group.

As with other forms of oppression, the reason for age oppression is material and economic: exclusion from employment and access to money and power. Older people are compulsorily retired (until recently, women at 60, men at 65).³⁸ Physical dependency or decline or weakness is the excuse, but retirement ages are arbitrarily fixed through legislation and are changeable to meet the needs of the economy. Thus, for example, in the present economic recession, the policies of monetarist capitalism have created a terminology and practice of 'early retirement' or 'voluntary redundancy' to obscure the need to lose part of the workforce - to create unemployment in the interests of increased profits. And in the next decade of demographic change and skills shortage in the school-leaving age group, there will be recruitment of older people

out of retirement, or the construction of 'flexible' retirement ages beyond the age of 65.

Children, like older people, are also excluded from employment. It may seem 'natural' and even be desirable that they should be. But historically, depending on the needs of the economy 'childhood' ended at earlier ages with entry into the labour market. Thus, the 'school leaving age' was age 14 in 1918. It was raised to age 15 in 1947, then to age 16 in 1972. In the recession of the early eighties, the government considered raising the school leaving age to 18.³⁹ This is not in response to the welfare or necessarily to the real interests of young people, but in response to the demands of the economy. In this sense, the age 'category' of childhood is as arbitrary and economically determined as the categorising of people as 'elderly' in relation to retirement age:

Age limits on rights are incoherent because children become adult, and thereby acquire those rights, at different ages in different areas of activity. A child is criminally adult at ten, sexually adult at 16, and politically adult at 18. Because these age limits vary across time and cultures, arguments about rights based upon age become quite arbitrary.⁴⁰

Such arbitrary contradictions have been highlighted in periods of time when the 'voting age' has been set at age 21 and the age of male conscription has been at age 18: old enough to die for one's country, but not old enough to vote for the politicians who send one to war.

'Age norms' and age constraints', also operate powerfully and prescriptively throughout adult life:

Expectations regarding age-appropriate behaviour form an elaborate and pervasive system of norms governing behaviour and interaction, a network of expectations that is imbedded throughout the cultural fabric of adult life. There exists what might be called a prescriptive timetable for the ordering of major life events: a time in the life span when men and women are expected to marry, a time to raise children, a time to retire. This normative pattern is adhered to, more or less consistently, by most persons in the society. Although the actual occurrences of major life events for both men and women are influenced by a variety of life contingencies, and although the norms themselves vary somewhat from one group of persons to another, it can easily be demonstrated that norms and actual occurrences are closely related. Age norms and expectations operate as prods and brakes upon behaviour, in some instances hastening an event, in others delaying it. Men and women are aware not only of the social clocks that operate in various areas of their lives, but they are aware also of their own timing and readily describe themselves as 'early', 'late' or 'on time' with regard to family and occupational events.⁴¹

Age divisions gender or class or race divisions are socially constructed and the attitudes internalised on the ostensible basis of physical difference or need, but really in relation to inclusion or exclusion from economic power and as a mechanism of social control:

... the present investigation proceeded on the assumption that age norms and age expectations operate in this society as a system of social control.⁴²

The term ageism was originally 'coined' and defined in precisely these terms, as a process of:

...systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin colour and gender.'⁴³

Ageism is usually regarded as affecting the lives of older people. Like age, however, it affects every individual from birth and throughout the life span. In this way the chronology of ageing (a physiological process) becomes the hierarchy of ageism (a form of oppression). In most systems of oppression any individual is either in one group or another and bound by birth or up-bringing to remain either in the 'oppressor' position or in the 'oppressed' position. (Class and disability are slightly different because of the opportunity of upward mobility through the education system and the accumulation of wealth, or downward mobility through loss of wealth and property, and the fact that able bodied people can and do become disabled). Thus, the very real damage and loss experienced by those who seem to benefit and who are in the 'oppressor' position is obscured. Ageism, however, is a system in which nobody can be seen or said to benefit because everyone is, or once was, a child, and everyone (who survives) will eventually be an old person. Yet, the system - in which adults have rights and privileges which are denied to young people and old people - continues, to the detriment of everyone.

The reason for this lies in the ways in which ageism itself operates on and is transmitted to every human being in their earliest years:

'Childhood is not merely a natural state, for as well as being a stage of physical development, it is also a social institution ... it is taken for granted that children's lives should be organised in a radically different manner from that of their elders.'⁴⁴

Children and childhood are separated in many ways and by a variety of practices from adults and adulthood. There are the laws which prohibit children/young people from participating in particular activities (from sex, alcohol, drugs, gambling and 'ADULT' entertainments of a sexual nature). Children are excluded by practice from many adult gatherings and outings, conversations and knowledge. At the same time, the culture is geared towards catering for what are regarded as the special needs of children and young people: in education, in leisure, in toys and clothes:

... adults are independent, children are dependent; adults productive, children non-productive; adults work, children play; adults are involved in the serious business of life, childhood is supposed to be 'fun'. It is not simply that children are treated as people who have yet to learn the skills and conventions of adult life, but that they are regarded as beings of a different order with needs quite apart from those of the rest of the community.'⁴⁵

In this sense, according to Jackson, 'children are a subordinate social group'.⁴⁶

This view of childhood as subordination and of children as property is central to the theories of Alice Miller:

Contempt is the weapon of the weak and a defence against one's own despised and unwanted feelings. And the fountainhead of all contempt, all discrimination, is the more or less conscious,

uncontrolled and secret exercise of power over the child by the adult, which is tolerated by society (except in the case of murder or serious bodily harm). What adults do to their child's spirit is entirely their own affair. For the child is regarded as the parents' property, in the same way as the citizens of a totalitarian state are the property of its government.⁴⁷

There are parallels between the position of, treatment of and attitudes towards young people and old people which demonstrate the similar ways in which ageism is institutionalised both at the beginning and end of the life span. Institutionalised ageism can take a variety of forms, but always includes the denial to older people of personal rights and the power to control one's own life. As part of this process of subordination within the structures of society, old people as a group are systematically treated as insignificant, unintelligent, incapable, inadequate, inferior: they are isolated, invisible and ignored. They are often regarded as stupid, boring, useless, helpless, pathetic - a burden on society, their lives less valued than those of adults. Feelings associated with old people include disgust, exasperation, embarrassment, anger. These are typical of the attitudes held about old people and which old people hold about themselves (which constitute the internalised oppression).

The ageism institutionalised at the early (childhood) end of the life span involves a similar denial to children of rights and power to control their own lives. Like old people, children also are often regarded as difficult, boring, stupid, inferior, insignificant, helpless, a nuisance if not a burden. These are the attitudes people hold about children and that children come to hold about themselves and each other, learned by

everyone when they are members of that subordinate social group: children.

It is, however, the particular combination of ageism and sexism which constructs the identity and opportunity of women. What happens to children as children happens to them as human beings regardless of their sexual differences, of their being born male or female. It happens to both boys and girls indiscriminately. At the same time, there is another experience, another education taking place: that of gender learning, of learning to be masculine or feminine. Whatever other divisions of class or race or religion may exist, all human beings are born either male or female: the world is bisected by gender:

The distinctions we make between masculine and feminine are as great as those we draw between childhood and adulthood, but whereas the status of child is a temporary one, gender is permanent and inescapable.¹⁴⁹

Additionally, children learn that 'one gender is not valued as highly as the other.'¹⁵⁰

The subordination of children is recognised by Goffman as a decisive factor in the construction of gender identity:

The parent-child complex - taken in its ideal middle class (sic) version - has some very special features when considered as a source of behavioural imagery. First, most persons end up having been children cared for by parents and/or elder sibs, and as parents (or elder sibs) in the reverse position. So both sexes experience both roles - a sex-free source ... Second, given inheritance and residence patterns, parents are the only authority in our society that can rightly be said to be both temporary and exerted 'in the best interests' of those

subordinated thereby. Newer voices have been concerned to show how parental authority can be misguided, oppressive and ineffective.¹⁵¹

Miller's is one of the newer voices and she has identified the same theme in the justification and perpetuation of oppressive child-rearing practices: Goffman notes that it is done 'in their best interests' and Miller 'for their own good.'¹⁵²

Goffman observes the 'license' children have: the behaviour Jackson describes as being completely unacceptable in adults. He also recognises the price children have to pay for this license:

... subjected to control by physical fiat ... subject to various forms of non-person treatment ... talked past and about as though absent ... teased ... taunted ... treated as a target of attention (without permission being sought) ... time and territory seen as expendable ... It is as though the world were in the military uniform of one army, and all adults were its officers.¹⁵³

The military is an appropriate metaphor of the oppression of young people by adults. Goffman also makes the connection between this oppression (which he calls the 'parent-child complex') and other forms of oppression:

It turns out then, that in our society whenever a male has dealings with a female or a subordinate male (especially a younger one) some mitigation of potential distance, coercion, and hostility is quite likely to be induced by application of the parent-child complex. Which implies that ritually speaking, females are equivalent to subordinate males and both are equivalent to children. Observe that however distasteful and humiliating lessers may find these gentle prerogatives to be, they must give second thought to openly expressing displeasure, for whosoever extends benign concern is free to quickly change his task and show the other side of his power.¹⁵⁴

The 'other side of his power' - the opposite of benign - is violence. Thus, the first oppressive power relationship experienced by all people is the subordination of young people by adults: ageism. But as Goffman also recognises, in it's 'learning' is linked the learning of gender subordination. Kappeler describes the female child as a 'double victim', 'doubly caught by the superimpositions of two kinds of oppression and power disequilibrium that of adult-child and that of male-female'.⁵⁴⁼

In later life, it is still the combination of 'ageism' and 'sexism' which constrains the lives of women, and operates as a form of social control:

The main areas of social control experienced by women provide powerful undercurrents to the lives of older women. Economic dependence and exploitation at home and work produce poverty and reliance on state benefits in the final years of a woman's life.⁵⁵

In fact, as the data in this study has shown, the double jeopardy of ageism and sexism operates throughout the life span and not just in later life, but Phillipson is correct in identifying economic dependence and exploitation as the key aspects of the systems of 'ageism' and 'sexism' which characterize them as oppressive.

Age status and sex status are interlinked in the construction of opportunity and identity for women throughout the lifespan. In specific terms, this means that not only is gender an excuse for restricting women's access to employment and economic 'power', but so is age. Not only is gender an excuse for controlling women's sexuality and sexual activity, so is age. Indeed, the data in this study has shown that for women,

gender and age do not operate as independent factors, but in specific combinations at different stages of the life course. The processes of gender and age socialisation are not only similar, but simultaneous throughout the life of an individual, operating in combination to construct the subordination of women. In the early years, age is the key factor in the construction of identity and the internalising of all forms of oppression, whether it is age, gender, race, disability or social class oppression.

IV. A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY AND REPRESENTATION

The relationship between structural inequality and individual identity (the institutionalised oppression and the internalised oppression) has not been successfully conceptualised. It has traditionally been psychoanalytic theory that has dealt with and attempted to explain the attitudes and values internalised by the individual and the behaviours these produce. Freud's theory of the 'psychical consequences of the anatomical distinctions between the sexes' has been one of the most influential:

According to Freud, around the age of five, children become aware that they either possess a penis or do not possess a penis. This recognition leads them to develop a particular fantasy involving their genitals (or lack of) and their parents. Out of that fantasy comes a resolution of feelings about the genitals and the parents. This resolution entails identifying with one of the parents, and, consequently, internalizing the values of that parent, and eventually exhibiting the same behaviours as that parent. *Since the parents' behaviours are (presumably) gender-typed, the child's will be also.*⁵⁷

For Freud, gender equalled genitals and he hypothesised 'unconscious and semi-conscious fantasy [as] the process that links gender identity to gender role'.⁵⁸ There have been various developments in psychoanalytic theory from Freud ⁵⁹ but they all include in the concepts of 'introspection' and 'identification' the notion of 'internalisation' of attitudes and beliefs - of identity:

Psychoanalytic theory postulates a mechanism (identification with the parent having the same genitals) to explain why children learn 'appropriate' gender role behaviours ... Identification is defined as the imitation and incorporation of complex values and behaviours without specific external pressures to do this.

Evidence for identification comes from studies of parent-child similarities in values and behaviours.⁶⁰

The problem with traditional psychoanalytic theory is precisely that it does not 'recognise external pressures', that it views parent child 'identification' as happening on a purely individual and psychical level, without recognising the social context within which the parent has been constituted and currently lives. For that reason, social learning theory has seemed to offer a more satisfactory account of the process of identity formation:

In brief, the theory states that through observation children learn behaviours associated with both parents. They learn these behaviours without any direct reinforcement because they see their parents as powerful, effective, and as having control over rewards. (This, according to social learning theory, is the process of identification).⁶¹

Eventually, through 'differential reinforcement from parents, teachers, peers and others, children begin to know what they can and cannot do':

They begin to anticipate the consequences of various behaviours, and they begin to value gender 'appropriate' behaviours because they are rewarded and to devalue gender 'inappropriate' behaviours because they are punished or ignored. The child learns the label ('boy' or 'girl') appropriate to the rewarded behaviours, and learns to apply that label to her/himself. Through generalization, the child learns to value that label, since it stands for valued behaviours and to see the label as an important part of her/his self-concept.⁶²

Gender identity, according to social learning theory, is just another name for this self-label, and no assumptions are made about the age at which any of these processes takes place. Though social learning theory

has explained the process of internalisation, it has not included a concept of subordination: it still sees socialisation as a strictly individual experience.

The process of internalisation and its direct links with the social structure have been discussed within a number of disciplines. Weinrich identifies four ways in which socialisation occurs through the primary agents of 'parents, teachers, peer group and media':

First, skills, habits and some types of behaviour are learned as a consequence of reward and punishment. Second, parents and others provide models for roles and behaviour which children imitate. Third, the child identifies with one or both parents, a process which is more powerful than imitation, through which the child incorporates and internalises the roles and values of the parent or other significant adult. Fourth, there is the part played by the growing individuals themselves. They actively seek to structure the world, to make sense and order of the environment. The categories available to the child for sorting out the environment play an important part in this process.

Script theory originally identified the 'intra-psychic' element of socialisation⁶³ and it has defined socialisation as the:

... group of processes by which subjective realities and social constructions are brought into convergence ... through socialisation, social constructions are internalised ... [and] the kernel of individual identity is formed.⁶⁴

Laws & Schwartz argue that 'routines, structures and meanings' are institutionalised and that institutionalisation exercises 'social control over behaviour and feelings' and therefore identity: -

The process whereby identity is constructed from institutionalised practices and meanings occurs *unawarably*.¹⁶⁵

Identity - ideas, attitudes and behaviour - is thus internalised *unawarably* in the process of interaction between the individual and social institutions, or in the process whereby institutionalised practices impinge on the individual.

In writing about social class and ageing, Rosenmayr also identifies the links between institutionalised inequality and the construction of identity. In searching for a sociological personality theory, he considered psychoanalytic internalisation theory and concluded that:

... the actually existing elements of a culture at any specific time will be taken up, enforced and internalised by youth ... these values then survive over one's entire life.¹⁶⁶

He makes significant distinctions between socio-economic disadvantage, the internalisation process and 'self-oppression':

The internalisation of socio-economic disadvantage and the gradual acceptance of low standards depresses expectations even further and reduces or extinguishes aspirations. The individual, as the last part of this chain of causation, becomes instrumental in his or her own handicap, so that we may speak of "self-induced social deprivation".¹⁶⁷

Bernard makes the same point about institutionalised inferiority and internalised inferiority, particularly the problem of 'self-oppression':

For most of human history most women ~~have spent~~ most of their adult lives gestating, nursing, and caring for small

children: these functions have pre-empted their entire lives. They were ignored for all high-level purposes, shut out from the world that supplies the conditions for productivity ... Women are only now beginning to enter the world that makes productivity possible, and even yet there are many barriers ... women themselves have accepted their own inferiority: they have accepted the low value placed on them. They have a frighteningly poor opinion of themselves.¹⁶⁶

Bernard argues that overcoming 'the low opinion women have of themselves' is a major barrier to altering institutionalised inequality. This 'low opinion' is, according to Rich 'the double think many women engage in, and from which no woman is permanently utterly free.'¹⁶⁹ Barry describes it as the process of 'internalising the values of the colonizer and actively participating in carrying out the colonization of one's self and one's sex.'¹⁷⁰ For Wittig, it is the internalised oppression that 'grips our minds' and for her it matters less what it is than how it happens.¹⁷¹

Harrison sees the process of socialisation as the 'internalisation of negative images' or 'stereotypes' which present 'women in a negative derogatory fashion,' and which 'serve to maintain a situation in which they are denied power within a patriarchal social structure.' Furthermore, she sees a mutual inter-change between the social structure and the internalised ideology:

Indeed, those are the very attitudes which result in discrimination and oppression and reinforce social structures which portray old age, especially for women, as an unhappy experience ... an exploration of oppression will not only involve an examination of structures, but must include an assessment of the extent to which the less powerful comply with their situation of powerlessness. The construction of negative self-images through the socialisation process, will, according to such an analysis, result in the sustaining of their subordinate positions by those who are themselves subjugated. Such an analysis reveals the ways in which a stereotype regarding elderly

women is constructed and reinforced, both through social structures and the process of internalisation.⁷²

Allatt and Keil refer to "the displacement of the structural to the personal, the phenomenon whereby constraints arising from the social structure are perceived as personal problems or as choices which are made at the individual's own discretion." They regard this displacement as a "means of ideological control".^{72*}

The incidence of depression in women discussed in chapter three offers the most convincing evidence of the connections between the social construction of subordination and the internalisation of its ideology through the process of socialisation. Furthermore, the very high incidence of depression amongst women, (much higher than amongst men), is often linked chronologically to life stage transitions for women. Indeed, depression in women could be regarded as the feelings which might predictably result from subordination within social structures of institutionalised inequality, and depression in women could arguably be defined simply as the internalised ideology of subordination: as 'internalised oppression'.⁷³ There is also a sense in which women's depression is an act of resistance as well as a symptom of defeat in the face of intolerable oppression. It makes the point at which the 'subconscious' says: no, enough, I cannot go and will not go on. This is intolerable. I cannot cope (see Chapter 7). Either way - as defeat or resistance depression is evidence of the internalised oppression.

The structural connections with or causes of depression are often obscured, but the structurally determined and very limited opportunities available to women appear to be coincidental with the experience of depression. The low status and lack of remuneration for housework has been shown to be connected with depression.⁷⁴ Having children (post-natal depression) and rearing children has been shown to contribute to the incidence of depression.⁷⁵ As additional evidence of the connections between the social conditions of being wives and mothers and the experience of depression is the finding that paid employment outside the home makes women less likely to get depressed⁷⁶ though women then face the stresses of low pay, competition, sexual harassment, exclusion from promotion and positions of power, and often the double-shift of paid employment plus the work of wife and mother.⁷⁷ Oakley has found that marriage protects men, but not women from depression, and that employment protects both men and women from depression.^{77a} The implication - that the low status, low self-esteem, lack of pay and isolation of wives and mothers is more 'hurtful', damaging and conducive to depression than the real practical problems of paid employment - would also suggest that it is indeed the combination of institutionalised subordination and internalised ideology (identity) which predisposes women to depression.

Mid-life depression in women, which has traditionally been associated with the physiological changes of menopause is another example of the connections between institutionalised and internalised subordination:

For many women, both depression and alcoholism seem to be triggered by the middle-age identity crisis when there is a

dramatic change in their role of mother and wife. For women who may be unusually dependent upon their husbands and children for their identity and feelings of worth and purpose in life, the children's growing up and leaving home can be traumatic indeed ... Women who seem to be particularly at risk are those who are not clearly defined as persons in their own right - many never seemed to have thought of themselves except in relation to their husbands or children. Until very recently our culture has fostered the belief that women could find "real happiness" by devoting themselves sacrificially to their husbands and children and by living vicariously through them ... When this pay-off doesn't appear, the women who have lived by the 'rules' are bewildered and bereft. Their whole life-pattern seems meaningless.⁷⁸

Research has also shown the connections between female socialisation and depression. To be successfully a feminine female, women must internalise qualities and attitudes of helplessness, passivity and dependency which are handicapping to adult functioning,⁷⁹ which are ironically in complete opposition to the qualities actually required of mothering⁸⁰ and which are an obvious source of the confusion and conflict experienced in depression. The stereotypes of femininity function to:

•

... enable a dominant group to keep a subordinate group in their place. Certain personality characteristics are assigned to subordinates which confirm the dominants' belief that they, the dominants, are 'better' in some way. When people in subordinate groups take in these values, they feel ill at ease with themselves, without knowing the reason why.⁸¹

The early socialisation of women as passive, helpless and dependent:

... will tend to lead to an inability to respond directly and effectively to the environment and therefore to subsequent pessimism and despair about personal effectiveness, adequacy and self-worth. The social roles allotted to women further reinforce feelings of inadequacy, helplessness and low self-worth since opportunities for gaining direct control over the environment are limited by a structure which assigns tasks and positions to women, but from which the crucial decision-making and power

have been removed so that the results of actions are unpredictable.¹²²

Litman sees this 'sex-role stereotyping' as playing a key part in the 'aetiology and maintenance of depression in women.'

'What does depression express about being a woman in this society?'

asks feminist therapist Joanna Ryan:

Firstly, being depressed is a very typically female form of distress in the sense that it is a passive and socially inoffensive mode of being. Depression is containing, exhausting and stupefying. It exudes powerlessness and it is the antithesis of activity and control. In all these ways, it is simply an exaggeration of what women are too often still seen as. Secondly, depression involves an enormous amount of self-blame and self-hatred and collapse of self-confidence. It is an extremely self-punishing and undermining state to be in. Here again this is only an intensification of the ways in which so many women feel about themselves anyhow, their endemic low self-esteem and rampant self-blame...¹²³

Ryan sees depression as an aspect of:

... the disempowering of women, a crippling of their ability to act not just in the more public spheres of life, but to operate on the external world at all - a withdrawal into an inner world of despair and self-recrimination.¹²⁴

This illustrates again the connections between institutionalised subordination and the internalisation of a negative identity:

... the lack of control that women have over their lives, their social powerlessness and the connection of this to their very low self-image.¹²⁵

The origins and causes of depression in women indicate the power of the social structure (the institutionalised oppression) to construct constraints in opportunity, and the effectiveness of socialisation in defining women's identity negatively (the internalised oppression). Furthermore, it is in itself - as an 'illness' or a set of identifiable symptoms - often treated with drugs - concrete and material. Depression exists 'objectively' in the world. Depression therefore demonstrates the connection between the social construction of opportunity and the social construction of identity: evidence of what Delphy describes as the 'materiality of ideology'.

The 'materiality of ideology' has been recognised by Marxism in Althusser's conception of ideology existing in material apparatuses and practices.⁸⁸ But, in this case, ideology is construed as something 'subjective' or 'psychological' and therefore still separate from the 'objective', the material, the economic. Delphy argues emphatically for the 'materiality of ideology', but sees it as:

... complementary to an analysis in institutional and economic terms.⁸⁸

She does not see ideology as separate from other material factors. Instead she sees the acquisition of gender identity as essentially linked to the social construction of sexual divisions. She argues against the Marxist view that 'what goes on in the head is not objective, but rather is defined in opposition to what is objective' for implying that:

... 'sexism', the ideological expression of institutional oppression, the emergent part of patriarchy, constitutes all the oppression. This is to deny the existence of the institutional structure which causes sexism. It is above all to deny that the psychological structure, which is the relay of the institutional structure in the production of 'prejudices' and of the said 'sexism' ... is also just as *concrete* and *objective* and *exterior to the action of the individual* as the institutional structure.⁸⁹

Delphy distinguishes between 'idealism', as: '... the theory - in fact little theorised because it is precisely the dominant ideology - according to which the social structure is produced by ideas, which are themselves produced by nothing,' and a 'concept of ideology' which says 'precisely that ideas are the product of the social structure':

The notion of the existence of a material base and of its determining role is inherent in the concept of ideology.⁹⁰

Delphy notes that 'ideology obviously does not present itself as ideology':

... it appears as an exact reflection, as the *only possible* reflection of the world: as *the world*, in short, -like all representations.'⁹¹

Delphy sees 'a material exploitation and a devaluing ideology pertaining to the exploited' as demonstrating the materiality and mutual interaction of both ideology and exploitation:

Whereas the existence of sexist, or racist, or classist ideology cannot be explained without exploitation, the existence of exploitation *requires* the constitution of an exploited population, which in turn requires the creation of a sexist or racist or classist ideology.'⁹²

Delphy does in fact see a 'psychological' dimension to ideology 'because it is by its internalisation by individuals that ideology is most effective.' One of the most effective aspects of that internalisation, argues Delphy, is women's *feeling* that:

... we ourselves are unworthy of being directly oppressed, of being oppressed in some way *for ourselves*'.⁹³

Delphy therefore uses the concept of the 'materiality of ideology' to demonstrate why there is a resistance to identifying women as an exploited group - or class - in the same way that the working class is identified as an exploited class. She also believes that it explains why there is often a refusal by women themselves to seeing themselves as exploited or oppressed. She points to the 'incapacity to conceive of social antagonisms as existing other than between men ... the incapacity to conceive of women as a group of protagonists in a fight - hence as equals in a sense to their adversaries ... [and] the incapacity to conceive of women as social beings, and in the last resort as human beings.'⁹⁴ This she argues is regarded as 'reality', as 'natural', when in fact it is ideological and socially constructed:

But this 'reality' or this 'belief' - the belief that such is reality - is not only ideological, but is the very heart of the ideology (ie. of the representation of the world which supports the patriarchal system). There obviously also, there *above all*, the ideology does not appear as ideology, but as the reasonable presentation of reality, as reality itself.'⁹⁵

In this sense, Delphy defines ideology as part of the material oppression which oppresses women, just as much as and just the same as economic exploitation does. Ideology is a means of subordination and:

This material base on which the 'psychological constitution' of individuals grows, which reinforces and is reinforced by it, brings us back to the social structure.'⁹⁶

Ideology is the means by which the institutionalised oppression is internalised by individuals. It is, according to Delphy, just 'as concrete and objective and as external to individual action as the institutional structure.'⁹⁷

Kappeler argues in a similar vein about the materiality of representation.

Representations are not just snapshots or texts, disembodied and innocuous ... What lives on, in either case, is the structure of production and consumption...^{97*}

Kappeler regards representations as the concrete and material means (part of the means of capitalist production and consumption) whereby patriarchal ideology is transmitted, a part of the construction of women's subordination. She regards the representations as 'real' rather than 'ideological': real pictures of real women made by real people (within the structures of male power, usually men), with real cameras/technology, producing real pictures or words which real women and men see and whose images and ideas enter the real minds and influence the real attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of real people. In representations created within a system of male power, women are objectified sexually, denied their status as subjects and therefore constructed as subordinate. Representations are thus central to the subordination of women, to women's oppression and internalised oppression. The fundamental problem is that representations 'represent' how women are seen, and therefore how they are treated (and treat themselves).

Such images remind us of our status as objects, as decoration, as bodies. As we grow up with them, we may be unaware of the extent to which we internalise ideas of ourselves as sexual objects and how this structures our sense of ourselves as inferior and as worthy of contempt.^{27b}

Stereotyped representations - the sex stereotyping and sexual objectification of women, for example - are deliberately misleading, a form of misinformation. They perform the function of creating attitudes which, by their very nature, are negative attitudes. Negative attitudes are also created by the 'positive' stereotypes which idealise or sentimentalise: the virgin, the madonna, the sweet old lady, the dear kind granny. They function as a form of propaganda. They are the language of ideology, the way it is communicated. A stereotype, however, is not a representation of 'real' human beings. It is a representation of an idea or belief about people: an ideology. The aim of ideology and its stereotyped representations is to construct and maintain systems of oppression, of dominance and subordination (whether of women, blacks, Jews, or other subordinate groups).

So in this sense stereotypes are real. They are not, however, representations of real women, but rather representations of women's oppression. This - the oppression of women - is real. The material conditions of oppression are real, as is the ideology (and its armoury of stereotypes) which sustains the oppression. The message of representations is thus a message about the oppression of women, not about women themselves. Stereotypes reflect and represent the

oppression and assist in its construction. They teach 'the oppression', they enable it to be learned and internalised by individuals through the process of socialisation.

IV. A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS OF SOCIALISATION

With Delphy's concept of the materiality of women's economic and sexual oppression, together with her concept of the materiality of ideology and Kappeler's concept of the materiality of representation, it is possible to consider a materialist analysis of socialisation. This sees socialisation as the process by which ideology (ideas, attitudes and beliefs) is internalised. It includes as aspects of the process how gender identity (or race or class or age identity) is acquired; where and when it is acquired; and why it should happen: the source of its power to influence and to be internalised to different degrees. It accounts for the constant reference to parental injunctions by the women interviewed, to the patterns of belief and behaviour apparently handed down from generation to generation, or as Katherine (68) put it, how she 'did exactly what my mother did...'

What none of the available theories on socialisation has offered is an explanation of:

- 1) the *actual process* by which a child is socialised, by which attitudes are internalised, or
- 2) why any one would be prepared 'to learn' things, or to acquire attitudes, for example, which are demonstrably not in their interests to acquire (e.g. why males should internalise a need or desire to be violent or aggressive/oppressive or why females should internalise

victim attitudes/a victim identity and then 'agree' to be victimised).

Furthermore, the concept of 'internalisation' has been used in many different contexts with many different meanings, or shades of meaning: from Freud in the field of 'psychology' and Durkheim in the field of 'sociology' onward.⁹⁹ Internalisation is a key concept, but it can mean very different things to different people:

I think that we do have to avoid over-simple conceptions of our inner world as a direct reflection of what is outside. It is clear from all the accumulated knowledge of psychoanalytic and other therapeutic practice how complex are the workings of our minds, how many and various the unconscious processes involved, how utterly unique and creative each individual - something that never ceases to amaze me. At the same time, we do all have in common the social construction of our emotions, personalities and desires, and feminism has made great advances in understanding this. I think much more work needs to be done on how to integrate these two perspectives, the social and the individual, within one framework.¹⁰⁰

Some more work has now been done on the integration of the social and the individual into one framework, on theorising the relationship between social structure and socialisation, and on analysing the actual concrete and material process by which attitudes are internalised: 'the social construction of our attitudes, emotions and desires.' This work has been done within one particular discipline in the psychoanalytic field: that of Re-evaluation Therapy.¹⁰⁰

Re-evaluation Therapy offers a coherent theory linking institutionalised oppression and internalised oppression, and also a

convincing theory of precisely how 'identity' is formed: of the systematic processes operating through 'institutions' on and within the individual. It analyses the 'psychological structures' in a way that parallels the analysis of social structures in social construction theory. It is an example of the 'truly materialist psychology' which Delphy¹⁰¹ said was required in response to the materialist analysis of the social and ideological structures of women's oppression.

Re-evaluation Therapy conceptualises oppression as the systematic mistreatment of individuals 'from the beginning of their lives, initially as young people and then as members of sex, class, race, religious or age groups, or as people with physical or mental disabilities':¹⁰²

This mistreatment is institutionalised and reinforced by structures of society which determine that members of some groups have access to economic and decision-making power denied to members of other groups.

Physical power of members of one group over another, which can include the threat and/or use of violence, is often, also, though not always, a characteristic of oppression: for example, adults in relation to young and old people, men in relation to women, the able-bodied in relation to people with disabilities. Structures of society include laws, customs, cultural practices and all economic, social, educational and political institutions.

The basis of exploitation and oppression is economic and not based on any inherent difference between groups.¹⁰³

Furthermore:

...'the reasons for oppression are always directly or indirectly economic - one group having access to money and power at the expense of another group ... but the capacity to maintain oppression is primarily psychological.'¹⁰⁴

Within the perspective of Re-evaluation Therapy socialisation is seen as the process of 'learning oppression' - the process in which the ideas, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of the oppressor or the 'victim' of oppression are acquired. Both the content of the ideology and the process by which it is internalised are seen as concrete and material in the sense described by Delphy: through the specific and systematic use of 'invalidation' of the individual, intimidation (violence or the threat of violence), and misinformation (which includes stereotypes and inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, media representations or mis-representations). To become, or remain, oppressed (a victim of oppression).

'... a person has to be convinced that she/he should be oppressed and 'agree' to it. It is not the fault of the victims that they 'agree' to be oppressed. Systematic invalidation and mistreatment create distress recordings. Constantly reinforced and restimulated, these recordings condition the victim to submission and discouragement which create the 'agreement' or internalised oppression. The distress recording, which now includes this agreement to be oppressed, holds the oppressed in place. These submissions become socialised as group agreements within the oppressed group.'¹⁰⁵

Within the theory of Re-evaluation Therapy, people who are socialised into oppressive roles are indeed members of groups with social, economic and political power, but they are also seen simultaneously as 'victims':

Oppression, once set in motion, has a momentum of its own, whether it continues to serve a useful function for the oppressors or not. The oppressors' lives are not really bettered in any human sense because of the oppression, but distress recordings that have been installed and continue to operate on the oppressors also keep them from seeing that they would live better lives in a system where oppression did not exist. It 'feels' to people in oppressor roles that they would 'lose' if they were to give up their oppressive position.¹⁰⁶

Thus, the lives of members of oppressor groups - those with power - may be bettered in a material sense, but not in a human sense because on a psychological level, they agree to remain in an oppressor position because they themselves have been oppressed.

'It is very possible for a person to simultaneously be in the role of victim and the role of oppressor. All human beings have been oppressed at some point. Even the top people in the hierarchy of oppressors were victims at some point of the past, if not in some other way, then as children. The victim in the oppression often finds it more 'comfortable' if possible to move into the oppressive role when re-stimulated.'¹⁰⁷

There is thus a tendency 'for each victim to try to move to and occupy the oppressor role.' In this way:

'One can observe in practice how oppression is passed back and forth between oppressed groups. People are kept oppressing each other as they alternate between victim and oppressor roles.'¹⁰⁸

Oppressed groups are set against each other by the oppressive society. Each oppressed group co-operates in oppressing the others.

Another characteristic of oppression is its perpetuation through 'the oppression of each other within a group', where because of the

'internalised oppression' members of an oppressed group direct at others in the group 'the negative view' that has been directed at them. They also operate this 'negative view' against themselves to the extent that they have internalised it and 'feel' that it is true (e.g. women's self-hatred about body shape or image, the feeling of working class people that they are inferior or less intelligent than middles or upper class people).

Delphy identifies these feelings of 'unworthiness' in women and looks for 'an objective basis for the self-hatred' in the oppression of women as women.¹⁰⁹ And she identifies another characteristic of oppression:

... the major obstacle to struggling against an oppression is not feeling oppressed. Hence the first moment of revolt for women consists not in joining the battle for change, but rather in discovering themselves to be oppressed. It involves discovering that oppression actually exists, and discovering its extent...¹¹⁰

Delphy makes the analogy with racism: 'What is racism for the oppressor is self-hatred for the oppressed.' It is 'normal' therefore that women would not be 'feminist' (or aware of the oppression of women). Acquiring consciousness of oppression (whether of sexism, racism or classism) is a 'long, never-ending and painful' process: discovering, acknowledging and therefore feeling how one has been and is mistreated. It is not surprising then that people 'deny' their oppression, maintain the pretence to themselves, in collusion with the oppressive society whose interest it is to obscure the mechanisms of oppression, that they are not oppressed.

This belief that people maintain - that they do not feel oppressed and therefore are not - is taken as evidence that oppression does not exist: what might be called the 'happy victim' syndrome. But, as Delphy demonstrates: 'whatever their "opinions", women are oppressed.''' It is a characteristic of oppression, that as a self-protection against the pain and humiliation of *being* oppressed, 'victims' should either deny that they are oppressed or express satisfaction with the condition of being oppressed.

Simply to acknowledge being 'a victim' is part of the painful process of becoming aware of oppression, so there is an investment in the denial of being a victim of oppression. This is particularly true when there is no apparent way to cease being a victim of oppression or of ending oppression. Denial is also understandable when there is no acknowledgement that women are survivors as well as victims, that all 'victims' will also have resisted giving into and being oppressed, with varying degrees of success, but *always* with some success.'''^a Every woman is thus both a victim of oppression, but also uniquely herself and a survivor through her own strength.

It should be noted, also, that there are material conditions which determine why women would agree to be a 'victim' and deny their oppression: for women are often not in a position, economically, to change their circumstances of, for example, dependency on husbands or fathers. They are therefore not 'free' to acknowledge their oppression, and alter their attitudes, because they are not 'free' to change the material circumstances of their oppression. This data has

demonstrated that when women do acquire some degree of economic independence, they become free to acknowledge the oppression and to change attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. —

The process of invalidation, intimidation and misinformation occurs throughout the life span of every individual, but it occurs initially, primarily and most effectively in childhood. Childhood is the time and place where socialisation *can* take place - where oppression *can* be learned, ideas internalised, gender or class or race identity acquired because the child 'itself' is as we have seen in the previous section, a victim of oppression as a child, as a subordinate to dominant adults and therefore vulnerable and malleable:

The oppression children suffer as children (adultism) lays the basis for all other forms of oppression.''¹²

Re-evaluation Therapy conceptualises the 'oppression of young people' as 'adultism', part of an overall system of age oppression (ageism) which appears to particularly affect people at the other, older end of the life span, but in fact operates throughout the life span, and in the form of adultism is the oppression which enables all the other forms of oppression to be effectively internalised/

The foundations of a lifetime of age, gender, class and race socialisation (i.e. of internalising the ideas, attitudes and beliefs and behaviour of the oppressive society - its ideology) are laid during the period of childhood subordination or oppression. It is

because they are a subordinate social group - that is, an oppressed group - that children can be socialised:

Society not only suppresses instinctual wishes but also (and above all) it suppresses particular feelings (for instance, anger) and narcissistic needs (for esteem, mirroring, respect), whose admissibility in adults and fulfilment in children would lead to individual autonomy and emotional strength, and thus would not be consonant with the interests of those in power. However, this oppression and this forcing of submission do not only begin in the office, factory or political party; they begin in the very first weeks of an infant's life. Afterwards they are internalised and repressed and are then, because of their very nature, inaccessible to argument.'¹³

The foundations for this socialisation take the form of misinformation, invalidation and intimidation (violence or threats of violence). Laws & Schwartz suggest that this socialisation process works because the child's very survival is dependent on what they call 'effect dependence', 'information dependence' and 'emotional dependence'.¹⁴ The theory of Re-evaluation Therapy offers a similar explanation of how the socialisation process works:

1) **Misinformation:** The child has no way of knowing whether 'information' is accurate or distorted or false and has to rely on adults, and especially on parents, to 'trust' them as a source of information. The child has no choice but to believe, to accept the 'information' whether or not it is true or false, and to acquire the attitudes and beliefs of the parents in these respects. The penalty - of violence, or isolation, or loss of love - is too great.¹⁵ And children are universally in the position of being given partial, inaccurate or distorted information, or they are lied to, often

because they are children and regarded as less intelligent and therefore unable to cope with full and accurate information. Stereotyped representations are part of the socially constructed armoury of 'misinformation' which is used to misinform and to confuse youngsters. They are 'educated' on stereotypes, in children's books and then, in the education system itself.¹¹⁶ The literature on reference groups and attitudes formation supports these views on the pressures of conformity:

... attitudes, however, are not acquired in a social vacuum. Their acquisition is a function of relating oneself to some group or groups, positively or negatively.¹¹⁷

Power, and the relative power of groups and group membership, to influence an individual's attitudes, is a key factor:

If the potency of one of the groups is particularly high in relation to the others, he (sic) may adopt the attitude prescribed by this particular group...¹¹⁸

In a study of children, it was found that a 'group member is more likely to imitate the behaviour of those members to whom he (sic) attributes 'high power' and is 'more likely to accept the induction attempts of members with high attributed power.' It was also found that 'attributed power choices were highly related to the children's judgement of physical prowess and personal liking.'¹¹⁹ Although these studies were of children in summer camps, it is possible to infer that the people with the most physical and attributable power in a child's life will be its parents: therefore a potent influence on attitude

formation. There will also be a pull to identify with socially powerful groups: e.g. of boys with adult males.

2) Invalidation: In spite of the fact that childhood is almost universally sentimentalised, children are in fact treated as 'less than human' - regarded as being of limited intelligence, ridiculed, abused and humiliated in the 'normal' course of child-rearing.¹²⁰ Children are simultaneously 'subjected to indignities that would be insufferable to their elders' and encouraged to behave in a way 'that would be completely unacceptable for adults'.¹²¹ Children are under the ownership and control of particular adults and to an extent they must accept whatever life their 'owners' or parents arrange for them. There are organisations which protect the interests of children and sometimes intervene when there is serious abuse or neglect detected, but equally there are societies for the protection of animals in similar circumstances, so this does not necessarily say much for the value of children.

Children are dressed to please adults, their activities are regulated by adults, they are expected to please others, to play cute, to show off their accomplishments as if they were a dog's new tricks. Adults discuss them in their presence as if they were not there, laugh at them when they are doing something they take quite seriously, talk down to them and pat them on the head or chuck them under the chin just as if they were stroking an animal. All this is seen as perfectly acceptable, even as being kind to children. If a child shows resentment at treatment that most adults would find thoroughly humiliating, then she or he is cheeky or sulky or insolent. All this suggests that childhood is not just a psychological state, but also a social status - and a very lowly one at that.¹²²

This invalidation actually constitutes systematic mistreatment which is obscured by the sentimentalising of childhood:

Until we become sensitised to the small child's suffering, this wielding of power by adults will continue to be a normal aspect of the human condition, for no-one pays attention to or takes seriously what is regarded as trivial, since the victims are 'only children.' But in twenty years time, these children will be adult who will have to pay it all back to their own children. They may then fight vigorously against cruelty 'in the world' - and yet they will carry within themselves an experience of cruelty to which they have no access and which remains hidden behind their idealised picture of a happy childhood.'¹²³

It is, according to Miller, the apparently trivial and harmless practices as much as the overtly abusive which 'hurt' children: -

A mother can have the best intentions to respect her child and yet be unable to do so, so long as she does not realise what deep shame she causes him with an ironic remark, intended only to cover her own uncertainty. Indeed, she cannot be aware of how deeply humiliated, despised and devalued her child feels, if she herself has never consciously suffered those feelings, and if she tried to fend them off with irony.'¹²⁴

The power of invalidation can be inferred by what is known about the power of validation. In Re-Evaluation Therapy 'validation' is one of the key tools for assisting the healing process, for uncovering occluded memories of abuse. There is also evidence of the power of validation also in the experimental literature, for example on 'positive reinforcement'.¹²⁵

3) Intimidation: There is not only the increasing evidence of child neglect, abuse and sexual abuse, but an increased understanding that many of the 'normal', socially accepted and acceptable practices of child-rearing are violent and abusive - that children are '... victims of socially sanctioned and encouraged violence.'¹²⁶ Research from the

USA has shown that 'the majority of American parents not only hit their children regularly but believe they have the right to do so.'¹²⁷

In Miller's theory of 'poisonous pedagogy', the roots of violence in society (both individual acts of violence and the collective violence of war) lie in the oppression of children: the abuse that they suffer 'for their own good' in the process of learning to 'behave' in socially acceptable ways:

For some years now there has been proof that the devastating effects of the traumatization of children take their inevitable toll on society ... For their development children need the respect and protection of adults who take them seriously, love them and honestly help them to become oriented in the world. When these vital needs are frustrated and children are instead abused for the sake of adults' needs by being exploited, beaten, taken advantage of, manipulated, neglected, or deceived without the intervention of any witness, then their integrity will be lastingly impaired ... Later they will have *no memory of what was done to them*. Disassociated from the original cause, their feelings of anger, helplessness, despair, longing, anxiety and pain will find expression in destructive acts against others (criminal behaviour, mass murder) or against themselves (drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, psychic disorders, suicide). ... Child abuse is still sanctioned - indeed, held in high regard in our society as long as it is defined as child-rearing ... Our sensitisation to the cruelty with which children are treated, until now commonly denied, and to the consequences of such treatment will as a matter of course bring to a end the perpetuation of violence from generation to generation.'¹²⁸

Both Miller and Jackson would include all children and all child rearing practices in their terms of reference; they are not looking specifically at the pathological, but at the 'normal'. It is not just physical beating which they define as violence, but also the day to day 'trivial' practices of ridicule, and also the neglect of

inattention and insensitivity. Quite simply, they identify the lack of acknowledgement of 'children as people' or 'full human beings' and the damage that this does to them. These are also the basic tenets of Re-evaluation Therapy.

4) Dependency/Powerlessness: According to the theory of Re-evaluation Therapy, it is not only the experience of invalidation, intimidation and misinformation which makes socialisation possible, but the fact that these are experienced in a period of dependency, in the absence of power to refuse. so a child finds itself in circumstances in which it has no choice but to be socialised - as a child, as a male or female, in relation to class and race and according to age: to internalise the attitudes and beliefs and behaviours of the oppressive systems, either as oppressor or oppressed. It is a active, not a passive process. The child will have resisted with all the power it had, will have given in unwillingly, in the process will also have internalised the enforced powerlessness of the situation but will also have retained parts of their inherent humanness.¹²⁹ The data in this study has illustrated how women have resisted childhood gender socialisation.

The psychological need to idealise one's parents and one's childhood¹³⁰ and the social pressures to accept the practices of the oppression of children as normal and desirable have obscured both the existence of this form of oppression, and its significance in the socialisation process. All forms of the processes described above are concrete and material: objective not subjective.

This theory of how oppression is internalised provides a basis for understanding why there are individual differences in how much oppression is internalised by different women. Not everyone will have been equally invalidated, intimidated or misinformed. There will be the factor of conditioning with positive images and validating behaviour. And everyone will have resisted to the best of their ability with greater or lesser degrees of success.

Furthermore what can be learned can be unlearned. What is socially constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed. There is evidence from this data that women became aware, went through a process of consciousness-raising, came to understand how the oppression had been internalised and constrained their lives, and then redefined their identity and created new opportunities for themselves.

V. UNLEARNING AND DECONSTRUCTING THE MATERIAL OF OPPRESSION

This theory of how oppression is internalised also provides a basis for understanding why and how certain aspects of the oppression - attitudes, beliefs and behaviour - gets handed on from generation to generation in spite of objective social and historical changes, as this study has shown to be the case. In Alice Miller's perspective what is deeply buried and undealt with in the parental generation will inevitably be passed on directly to the child and become deeply buried unless dealt with. Miller's own particular practice of psychoanalysis has developed a theory and practice for uncovering this buried material of internalised oppression and dealing with it, thereby freeing the 'victim/survivor' to be less oppressed and less oppressive. Revaluation Therapy has also developed a theory and practice which enables the early damage to be uncovered and undone (deconstructed), leaving the individual free to reevaluate and reconstruct their own lives and also more effective (powerful) in dismantling the structures of oppression. And feminism, as this study has shown, has provided this resource to many women through consciousness-raising and collective action.

Daly is quite right to catalogue 'therapy' and 'psychiatry' amongst the tortures which women are subjected to by way of enforcing their compliance with the stereotypes of femininity and dependence on men.¹³ And indeed, therapy and psychoanalysis as it has evolved since Freud and become institutionalised is largely conceptualised in terms of victim-blaming and 'adjustment' and conformity to the systems that

make people 'sick' in the first place (including the use of drugs to keep people quiet and conforming).

However, this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that attitudes and beliefs are aspects of the 'mind' and 'the feelings' and the process of *deconstruction* in this case will be in the realm of what is called the 'psychological'. That attitudes and beliefs *can* be unlearned is evidenced by the consciousness-raising of women through feminism and the Women's Movement. This study provides evidence of the influence of feminism in changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. A similar process has occurred in 'black' and working-class liberation movements. Individuals in large numbers have shed the 'internalised oppression' - the attitudes and beliefs that they should be and behave in adherence to the stereotyped roles assigned and conditioned by the oppressive system: they have changed their behaviour and they have begun to change the structural inequality.

There are also a number of feminist and other therapies whose goals include the liberation of women from oppression, rather than enforcing their conformity to it. This includes Re-evaluation Therapy through which many individuals have, and *any* individuals can, acquire the skills and use their natural abilities to 'discharge' (i.e. deconstruct) the internalised oppression they have acquired.

The major contribution of Re-evaluation Counselling has been its understanding of oppression and the connections it makes between oppression and internalised oppression; - how individuals are, from the beginning of their lives, systematically mistreated initially as young people and then as members of sex, class, race or religious groups or as people with physical and mental disabilities; - how this mistreatment is institutionalised and reinforced

by structures of society which determine that members of some groups have access to economic and decision-making power denied to members of other groups;
 - how the institutionalised oppression is internalised by individuals.

And most important of all;

- how the internalised oppression can be eliminated through a natural (albeit often inhibited) process of emotional release or emotional 'discharge' - specifically and quite simply: crying, laughing, shaking or trembling, sweating and even yawning.¹³²

It is this process of 'discharge' or 'deconstruction' which enables personal change (in 'identity') and social change (in 'opportunity').

Re-evaluation Therapy consists of a simple, but reliable practice which relates to its theory of oppression and internalised oppression:

The theory is based on an understanding of human beings as essentially intelligent, loveable and loving, eager to learn and co-operate, able to function well. It assumes that everyone, however, has been impaired - emotionally and intellectually - by the distress acquired in the process of growing up in a society structured on inequality and injustice. Everyone also has the ability to recover from these hurts. This occurs automatically when the process of emotional release - or discharge - is allowed to happen and results in the elimination of internalised oppressions and in the ability to think and act more effectively.¹³³

The 'distress' referred to in Re-evaluation Therapy is the psychic injury incurred by each individual as a child in the *normal* and *socially accepted* processes of socialisation into an oppressive society:

As every young child moves through his or her world with natural curiosity, zest and interest, there occur various contingencies which *distress* him or her; indifference, frightening events, scoldings, frustrating obstacles and disappointments, punishment, physical hurts, and ridicule. The events are experienced in the form of noxious emotions

such as fear, pain, anger, grief, disappointment, sadness, humiliation, embarrassment, shame etc.¹⁴³

The socialisation process also includes inhibitions of the natural ability to discharge distress:

If the distressed child is not exposed to interference by others, he or she will discharge the distress thoroughly in the presence of an attentive, non-critical, supportive person. The *discharge process* has its external manifestations in crying, shaking, trembling, shivering, laughing, raging, screaming, violent movements, blushing, perspiring, yawning, stretching and eager and reluctant non-repetitive talking. The unsocialised child discharges spontaneously. As socialisation takes place, the young child is conditioned to limit or extinguish discharge entirely.¹³⁵

The necessary prerequisite for the effective functioning of the discharge process whether in a child or an adult is:

The existence of a proper balance of attention in the distressed person. This balance of attention is between present time (some other person who is warmly attentive and supportive) and the reactive material (the inner experienced distress). When there is an absence of an attentive person for the child, some discharge may occur, although there may be none, and the child may be overwhelmed with his distress. The continuing free attention of a supportive adult will help the child drain off all of his hurt, fear, anger, disappointment, embarrassment etc. by discharge. Typically adults, including us therapists, are not conscious of the need for *full* discharge in the distressed child as well as adult.¹³⁶

Adults can, and may, 'fully discharge' the damaging effects of oppression in early childhood socialisation: that is, discharge the 'internalised oppression' and become freed to change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour, and able to effect change in the oppressive social structures.

Re-evaluation Therapy is not an esoteric or elitist or exclusive form of 'therapy' but, as a form of peer co-counselling, can be learned in most parts of London, in many parts of the UK and in over 40 other countries. It has been used effectively on small scales to 'deconstruct' internalised sexism and internalised ageism. Thus, for example, it has been used by and with women to eliminate divisions between women as women (based on competition for men and male approval) and also 'class, race, religious and race divisions.'¹³⁷ This process has itself created theory and practice which has strengthened the women's movement and made individual women more powerful in their own lives and in movements for social change.

Similar processes have been used to deconstruct internalised ageism:

The goal of any 'oppression awareness' work *must* be to change policy and practice. Changing oppressive structures and assisting others to change the oppressive conditions of their lives is inter-dependent on changing attitudes. Ageism awareness work can and should be used as the basis for deciding on different, less oppressive ways of working. And, as eliminating internalised ageism is an essential step in eliminating institutionalised ageism (they go hand in hand), awareness work should also be used as the basis for deciding on goals, working out strategies and then acting on them, individually and collectively.'¹³⁸

These processes are effective and have had small-scale effects. They have, for example, produced new points of view and positive attitudes to women's experience of ageing. Jane Porcino, who like many of the women in the life history interviews, returned to education and employment at the age of 48 after raising seven children and has made use of the tools of 'consciousness-raising' described

here in a way which made her 'initial re-emergence and the realisation of 'new ways' possible.' She went on to write a 'Handbook for Women in The Second Half of Life' entitled 'Growing Older, Getting Better' and to found the National Action Forum for Midlife and Older Women.¹³³ Maggie Kuhn, who in 1970 founded the Grey Panther Liberation Movement in the USA to fight against discrimination on the grounds of age, has been an inspiration through her campaigning for positive images, positive attitudes and positive action for older people (and named, at age 73, one of the 25 most influential women in America). These processes have even larger-scale potential as tools for eliminating both internalised oppression and institutionalised oppression: for the re-evaluation of women's identity and increasing opportunity throughout the lifespan, enabling women individually to maximise their potential within the existing structures of inequality and collectively to dismantle the structures of oppression, through, for example, sex discrimination legislation, positive action in the workplace and changes in the structures and practices of marriage, motherhood and 'compulsory heterosexuality.'

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER EIGHT.

1. Driver, E. and Droisen, A. (1989), p. 101. The authors draw on a power theory to explain child sexual abuse.
2. Foucault, M. (1978), p. 44; see also Weekes, J. (1981), p. 7; Delphy, C. (1977), p. 49.
- 2a. Driver & Doisen, op. cit. The authors make a distinction between institutionalised power and 'personal power'.
3. Harrison, J., op. cit., p. 214.
4. Beechey, V. & Allen, R. (1983), p. 43.
5. Rowbotham, S. (1973), pp. 58-59.
6. Ibid, pp. 61-2.
7. Beechey, V. & Allen, R., op. cit., p. 48.
8. Ibid, p. 43.
9. Millett, K. (1970), p. 24.
10. Ibid, p. 25-26.
11. Ibid, p. 25.
12. Ibid, p. 33.
13. Rubin, G. (1975), p. 163.
14. Ibid, p. 159.
15. Ibid, p. 204.
16. Ibid, p. 207-210.
17. Hartmann, H. (1981), p. 7.
18. Ibid, p. 27.,
19. Ibid, p. 24.
20. Delphy, C. (1980), p. 86.
21. Ibid, p. 88.
22. Delphy, C. (1984), p. 134.
23. Delphy, C. (1980), p. 99.

24. Ibid, pp. 99-100.
25. Ibid, p. 102.
26. Delphy, C. (1984), p. 18.
27. Ibid, pp. 25-26.
28. Guillaumin, C. (1981), pp. 19-20.
29. Wittig, M. (1982), pp. 66-67.
30. Ibid, p. 68.
31. Delphy, C. (1984), p. 20.
32. Leonard, D. (1977), p. i/ii.
33. Mathieu, M.C. (1977), p. 19.
34. Ibid, pp. 18-19.
35. Rosenmayr, L. (1982), p. 35.
36. Ibid, pp. 36-37.
37. Balser, D. (1979), p. 4.
38. The difference in age of retirement for women and men was challenged in the European Court of Human Rights in 1986, on the grounds of sex discrimination. Following the success of that case, the National Health Service and local government have 'equalised' the compulsory retirement age for women and men at age 65.
39. Rae, M., Hewitt, P. & Hugill, B. (1986), p. 1.
40. Franklin, B. (1986).
41. Neugarten, B.L., Moore, J.W. & Lowe, J.C. (1968), pp. 22-23.
42. Ibid., p. 24.
43. Lewis, M.J. & Butler, R.W. (1972), pp. 223-234.
44. Jackson, S. (1982), pp. 22-23.
45. Ibid, p. 24.
46. Ibid, p. 26.
47. Miller, A. (1987a), p. 70.
48. Rosenmayr, L., op. cit., p. 32.

49. Jackson, S., op. cit., p. 84.
50. Ibid, p. 87.
51. Goffman, E. (1976), p. 4.
52. The best interests argument is used to justify the subordination of women also. See Ehrenreich, B. & English, D. (1979).
53. Goffman, E., op. cit., p. 5.
54. Ibid.
- 54a. Kappeler, S. (1986). p. 205.
55. Phillipson, C. (1982), p. 185.
56. Mathieu, N.C., op. cit., p. 8.
57. Kessler, S. & McKenna, W. (1982), p. 271.
58. Ibid, p. 272.
59. Horney, K. (1926); Kelin, M. (1928); Chodorow, N. (1978).
60. Kessler, S. & McKenna, W., op. cit., p. 276.
61. Ibid, p. 277.
62. Ibid.
63. Gagnon, J.H. & Simon, W. (1973), p. 19.
64. Laws, J.L. & Schwartz, P. (1977), p. 8.
65. Ibid, p. 9.
66. Rosenmayr, L. (1982), p. 31.
67. Ibid, p. 32.
68. Bernard, J. (1975), pp. 9-10.
69. Rich, A. (1981), p. 18.
70. Barry, K. (1979), p. 172.
71. Wittig, M. (1982), p. 68.
72. Harrison, J. (1983), p. 215.
- 72a. Allatt, R. & Keil, T. (1987), p. 7.

73. Mairne, K. & Smith, G. (1984), p. 61.
74. Ibid; Oakley, A. (1974); Oakley, A. (1980).
75. Brown, G.W. & Harris, T. (1978), p. 282; Wellburn, V. (1980a).
76. Ibid: Oakley, A., op. cit.
77. Nairne, K. & Smith, G., op. cit., p. 68.
- 77a. Oakley, A. (1987), pp. 28-29.
78. Litman, G.K. (1978), p. 124.
79. Broverman, I. et. al. (1981), pp. 1-7.
80. Bernard, J., (1975), p. 23.
81. Nairne, K. & Smith, G., op. cit., p. 45.
82. Litman, G.K., op. cit., p. 116.
83. Ryan, J. (1983), p. 16.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid, p. 24.
86. Delphy, C. (1980), p. 96; Barrett, M. (1980), pp. 84-114.
87. Mitchell, J. (1974).
88. Delphy, op. cit., p. 97.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid, p. 98.
91. Ibid, p. 100.
92. Ibid, p. 98.
93. Ibid, p. 103.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Delphy, C. (1984), p. 114.
97. Delphy, C., op. cit., p. 113.
- 97a. Kappeler, S. op. cit. p. 15.

- 97b. Coveney, L., et. al. (1984), p. 18.
98. Wrong, D., op. cit.
99. Ryan, J., op. cit., p. 23.
100. Somers, B.J. (1972); Scheff, T.J. (1972).
101. Delphy, C. (1950), p. 97.
102. Itzin, C. (1987b), p. 112.
103. Balser, D. (1979), p. 4.
104. Itzin, C. (1986c), p. 114.
105. Balser, D., op. cit., p. 4. A 'distress recording' is the original 'hurt' with all its constituent parts as it has been internalised and affects the attitude and behaviour of the individual. 'Re-stimulation' is any present day 'reminder' of the original hurt, usually some similarity to the contexts or circumstances of the original incident, which causes the 'distress recording' to play (i.e. the behaviour and feelings of the original incident to be re-enacted).
106. Ibid, p. 5.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid.
109. Delphy, C. (1984), p. 133.
110. Ibid, p. 112.
111. Ibid, p. 117.
- 111a. Driver, E. & Droisen, A. (1989), p. 101.
112. Balser, D., op. cit., pp. 127-128.
113. Miller, A., op. cit., pp. 127-128.
114. Laws, J.L. & Schwartz, P., op. cit., p. 8.
115. Jackins, H. (1981), p. 526.
116. Spender, D. & Sarah, L. (1980).
117. Newcomb, T.M. (1958), p. 275.
118. Charters, W.W. & Newcomb, T.M. (1958), p. 276.
119. Lippitt, R. et. al. (1958), p. 263.

120. Jackins, H., op. cit.
121. Jackson, S., op. cit., p. 24.
122. Ibid, p. 25.
123. Miller, A., op. cit., pp. 90-91.
124. Ibid, p. 115.
125. Verplanck, W.S. (1966), p. 32.
126. Jackson, S., op. cit., p. 26.
127. Ibid.
128. Miller, A. (1987b), pp. 281-283.
129. Jackins, H., op. cit. See also Driver & Droisen, op. cit.
130. Miller, A. (1987a), p. 19.
131. Daly, M. (1979), p. 254.
132. Itzin, C. op. cit., p. 112.
133. Ibid, p. 117.
134. Somers, B.J. (1972), p. 3.
135. Ibid.
136. Ibid, p. 4.
137. Itzin, C. (1985), p. 27.
138. Itzin, C. (1986c), p. 125.
139. Porcino, J. (1983), p. 2.

APPENDIX 1

TABLES 1 - 9

Table 1: Respondents by Age at Interview, Marriage, Age at Marriage, Number of Children, Race and Sexuality

Age	Pseudonym	Marriage	Age at Marriage	Children	Race	Sexuality	
1.	15	Karen	N	-	0	J	H
2.	18	Mary	M	18	0	I	H
3.	18	Emily	N	-	0	W	H
4.	19	Jackie	N	-	1	B	H
5.	23	Jane	M	19	0	W	H
6.	23	Brenda	N	-	0	W	L
7.	24	Elaine	N	-	0	W	L
8.	28	Betty	M	21	0	W	H
9.	28	Barbara	M/D	19	0	J	L
10.	30	Ann	N	-	0	W	L
11.	30	Liz	N	-	1	B	H
12.	35	Jean	M/D	22	1	W	L
13.	35	Alice	M/D	25	0	W	L
14.	36	Jennifer	M/D	22	2	B	H
15.	38	Leslie	M/D	21	1	J	H
16.	37	Valerie	N	-	2	W	H
17.	38	Maureen	M	31	3	I	H
18.	38	Miriam	M/D	22	1	W	H
19.	38	Sheila	M	22	2	W	H
20.	39	Frances	M/D	19	3	I	H
21.	40	Debbie	M/D	23	2	W	L
22.	40	Fenella*	M	24	0	W	H
23.	40	Ellie	M/D	21	0	W	H
24.	42	Sandy	N	-	0	W	L
25.	43	Natasha	M/D/R	20	1	B	H
26.	44	Jill	N	-	0	W	L
27.	45	Julie	M/D	19	3	W	H
28.	47	Carol	N	-	0	W	L
29.	48	Ros	M/D	20	1	W	H
30.	48	Hazel	M/D	25	3	W	L
31.	50	Janet	M/D	20	4	W	H
32.	54	Pam	N	-	0	J	L
33.	56	Sister Patricia	N	-	0	I	C
34.	59	Martha	M/D	20	3	J	H
35.	60	Alison	M	20	2	J	H
36.	61	Ruth	M/D/R	20	2	W	L
37.	61	Lauren	M/D	20	2	J	H
38.	62	Sue	N	-	0	I	L
39.	62	Sarah	M/D	31	1	W	H
40.	64	Hilary	M/D/R	29	0	W	H
41.	66	Charlotte	M	19	2	W	H
42.	68	Katherine	M/D	24	3	W	H
43.	68	Evelyn	M/D/R	22	1	W	H
44.	70	Eleanor	N	-	0	W	C
45.	72	Joan	M/D	21	6	W	L
46.	72	Eve	W	21	4	W	H

TABLE 1 - Total 46 Respondents

KEY

* Disabled

Marriage

N = Never	Currently married	- 8
M = Married	Divorced	- 18
D = Divorced	Re-married	- 4
R = Re-married	Never married	- 15
W = Widowed	Widowed	- 1

Total married at some time - 31

Married by age 21 - 16

Married by age 22 - 21

Married by age 25 - 27

Race

W = White	Black	- 4
B = Black	Jewish	- 7
J = Jewish	Irish	- 5
I = Irish	White	- 30 (42)

Sexuality

H = Heterosexual	Heterosexual currently	- 29
L = Lesbian	Lesbian currently	- 15
C = Celibate	Celibate currently	- 2
	• Previously married lesbians	- 7

Motherhood

Mothers	- 26
Lesbian mothers	- 5

Age

Teens	- 4
20's	- 5
30's	- 10
40's	- 11
50's	- 4
60's	- 9
70's	- 3

Table 2: Nationality/Geographical Mobility

Informants No.	Parental Place of birth	Parent's Emigration	Informants' Place of Birth	Informant Emigration	Husband's Nationality
1	South Africa	England	England		
2	Ireland	England	England		UK
3	England		England		
4	Jamaica/England	England	England		Black UK
5	England		England		England
6	England		England		
7	England		England		
*8	Germany/USA	USA	USA	Brazil/England	USA
9	England (Jewish)		England		UK
10	Ireland	England	England		
11	Jamaica	England	Jamaica	England	Black UK
12	Australia		Australia	England	Australian
13	USA		USA	England	UK
14	Wales/Jamaica	England	England		UK
15	England (Jewish)		England		UK
16	England		England		UK
17	Northern Ireland		Northern Ireland	England	UK
18	England		England		UK
19	Ireland	England	England		Maltese
20	Ireland/England	England	England		UK
21	England		England		UK
22	England		England		UK
23	England		England		UK
24	Ireland/England	England	England		
25	Egypt		Egypt	England	Egyptian/UK
26	Canada		Canada	England	
27	England		England		New Zealand
28	Australia		Australia	England	
29	Canada		Canada	England	Canadian/UK
30	England		England		UK
31	USA		USA	England	USA
32	England		England		
33	Ireland		Ireland	England	
34	Germany	England	Germany	England	UK
35	England (Jewish)		England		UK
36	England		England		UK
37	Russia (Jewish)	England	England		UK
38	Ireland/Italy	England	England		
39	England		England		UK
*40	USA		USA	England	USA
*41	USA		USA	England	UK
*42	USA		USA	England	USA
43	England		England		UK
44	England		England		
45	Scotland		Scotland	England	UK
46	Germany		Germany	England	UK

* Permanently resident in USA, temporarily resident UK

Summary

18 born in England of parents born in England
29 born in England of parents born in other countries who emigrated to
England
6 born in USA
2 born in Canada
2 born in Australia
1 born in Jamaica
2 born in Germany
2 born in Ireland
1 born in Scotland
1 born in Egypt

Table 3: Social Classification of Informants* by Father's Occupational Status (with information on mother's occupation)

* Indicated by Informant number

Social class 1-2	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Social Class 3-5	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Father's occupation upwardly mobile
1	Publisher	Publisher				During informants childhood
3	Bank Manager	Teacher	2	Labourer	Cleaner	
			4	Electrician	Caterer	
			5	Plasterer	Cleaner	
6	Computer programmer	Clerical				
			7	Publican	Secretary	
8	Business	Psychologist				
9	Mining Engineer	H/W				
10	Civil Service	Secretary				
			11	Bus driver	Shop assistant	
12	Undertaker	Hairdresser				
			13	Mechanical Engineer	Secretary	✓
			14	Market Trader	Caterer	
			15	Draughtsman	Clerical	✓
16	Civil Servant	Clerical				
17	Business	Nurse				
			18	Sales Rep	Secretary	
19	Civil Servant	Clerical				
			20	Sheet Metal Worker	Clerical	✓
			21	Fitter	Hairdresser	
			22	Skilled machinist	Psychologist	
			23	Builder	Clerical	
			24	Insurance Salesman	Shop Assistant	
25	Banker	H/W				
			26	Papermill Worker	Clerical	
			27	Farmer	Farmers Wife	
			28	Mechanical Engineer	H/W	✓
			29	Air Force (not officer)	Teacher	✓
30	Teacher	Teacher				
31	Teacher	Teacher				
32	Business	Secretary				
			33	Labourer	H/W	
34	Business	H/W				

Table 3 - Contd/...

35	Doctor	H/W	35	Furrier	Clerical
			37	Garage Mechanic	Shop Assistant
			38	Waiter	H/W
			39	Maintenance Engineer	Shop Assistant
			40	Meat Cutter	Cleaner
			41	Caretaker	Hairdresser
42	Teacher	Teacher	43	Lorry Driver	Cleaner
			44	Farm Labourer	Shop Assistant
			45	Painter/ Decorator	H/W
46	Business	H/W			

Table 4: Educational Mobility: Informant's School leaving age and age at Return to Education (Indicated by Informant Number)

14	16	18	Further/Higher Education	Age at return to education	Postgrad or professional qualification	Social Mobility**
	2					/
		3				-
	4		5			/
			6			+
	7		8			/
			9	27	✓	+
			10	29	✓	+
11			11	29		+
			12	34	✓	+
			13			+
14			14	21		+
			15	30	✓	+
			16			/
			17			/
			18	35	✓	+
		19		31	✓	+
20				29		+
21				18 (A levels)		+
				28 (univ.)	✓	
		22		28		+
23						/
			24			+
25				38		/
			26			+
			27	44	✓	+
			28			+
			29			+
			30			/
			31			/
			32			/
			33	22		+
		34				-
		35				/
36						-
37						/
38						/
			39			+
			40			+
		41				/
			42			/
43						/
44						/
45						/
			46			/

Key to Table 4:

* 1 - Still at school

** Social Mobility in Relation to Father's occupation.

+ = Up

/ = lateral (same level)

- = down

TABLE 5: INFORMANTS' MOTHERS WHO STOPPED WORK COMPLETELY ON MARRIAGE OR MOTHERHOOD (INDICATED BY INFORMANT NOS)

Stopped Work on marriage	Stopped Work on motherhood	Continued Working part-time
	2	
	3	
	4	
	5	
	6	
	7	
9		8
10		
11		
12		
13		
	14	
	15	
16		
17		
	18	
	19	
20		
21		
		22
23		
24		
25		
26		
27		
28		
	29	
		30
31		
	32	
33		
34		
		35
		36
	37	
38		
39		
40		
41		
		42
		43
44		
45		
46		
25	13	7 Total

Table 6: INFORMANT'S OCCUPATIONS * (INDICATED BY INFORMANT NUMBER)

Social Class 1-2	Name of Occupation	Social Class 3-5	Name of Occupation	Economically Inactive	Social Mobility
		2	Shop Assistant		/
		4	Clerical	3	/
5	Social Worker				+
6	Teacher				/
		7	Secretary		/
8	Artist/pt-time Secretary				/
9	Author				/
10	Teacher				/
11	Social Worker				+
12	Teacher				/
13	Lecturer				+
14	Local Government Officer				+
15	Teacher				+
16	Teacher				/
17	Editor				/
		18	Secretary		/
				19 (Student)	+
20	Teacher				+
21	Lecturer				+
22	Social Worker				+
23	Own Business				+.
24	Therapist				+
25	Artist/Art Therapist				/
26	Teacher				+
		27	Secretary		+
28	Teacher				+
29	Teacher				/
30	Teacher				/
				31	+
32	Teacher				/
33	Teacher				+
		34	Secretary		-
		35	Clerical		/
		36	Clerical		-
37	Editor				+
		38	Caterer		/
39	Nurse				+
40	Social Worker				+
41	Own Business				+
42	Teacher				/
		43	Factory		/
		44	Clerical		/
		45	Clerical		/
46	Artist				/

In Relation to Father's Occupation

+ = Upwardly mobile: / = laterally mobile: - = downwardly mobile
 Informant number; still at school *. All of the women had moved in and out
 of employment and between full time and part-time employment at different
 life stages.

Table 7: Marital Status and Husband's Occupation (Illustrated by Informant No)

Informant No	Husband Social Class 1-2	Husband's Occupation	Age at Marriage	Husband's Social Class 3-5	Husband's Occupation	Age at Marriage	Currently Married	Never Married	Divorced	No. of Children	Remarried
5		Solicitor+	19	2	Traffic Warden	18	✓	3		1	
8		Teacher+	21				✓	6		7	
9		Teacher	19					7	✓	10	
12		Manager+	22					10		11	
13		Lecturer+	25					11	✓		
14		Local Govt Officer	22						✓		
15+		Lecturer+	21						✓		
17		Author	31					16			
18+		Teacher+	22				✓		✓	3	
19		Lighting Engineer+	22				✓		✓	1	
21		Lecturer+	23	20	Dockyard Worker	19			✓	2	
22		Researcher+	24	23	Sales Rep.	21	✓		✓	3	
25		Business	20					24	✓	2	
27+		Farmer	19					26	✓	1	✓
29+		Editor+	20					28	✓	3	
30		Lecturer	25						✓	1	
31		Teacher	21						✓	3	
34		Business	20					32	✓	4	
35		Teacher	20				✓	33	✓	3	
37	Advertising	Director	20	36	Farmer	20			✓	2	✓

Table 7 - Contd/...

39+	Master Craftsman+	31				1	
40	Army Officer+	29			✓	2	✓
41	Business	19			✓	3	
42	Teacher+	24			✓	1	✓
46	Director	27			✓	6	
			43	Book Keeper	31		
			45	Painter/ Decorator	21	✓	
						Widowed	4

+ = Upwardly mobile during marriage
 + = Upwardly mobile during marriage
 - = Downwardly mobile on divorce

Table 8 Contd/....

	46				Pt 1-2	43				Pt 3-5
	Nil	P/T	D/T	Nil		P/T	D/T	Nil	P/T	
46	46			46						
					43	43	43	43	43	Pt 3-5
					45	45	45	45	45	Ft 3-5

NM = Never Married
 NC = No Children
 SC = Based on informants own occupation.

* Appearance of informant number under more than one heading indicates movement over time: e.g. out of full time employment, later into part time employment and even later into full time employment again.

* * 1 - 2 and 3 - 5 indicates occupational social class of informant on return to work

TABLE 9: INFORMANT'S SELF DEFINITION OF SOCIAL CLASS

Middle Class (social class 1-2 Self Definition)	Own Occupation	Husband's occupation if married	Working Class (social class 3-5 Self Definition)	Own occupation	Husband's occupation
3			2	Shop Assistant	Traffic Warden
6	Student		4 5	Clerical Social Worker	Lift Maintenance Solicitor
8 9 10	Artist Writer Teacher	Teacher Teacher	7	Secretary	Publican
12	Lecturer	Lecturer	11	Secretary	
16 17 18 19	Teacher Editor Secretary Teacher	Writer Teacher Lighting Engineer	14 15	Local Govt, officer Teacher	Local Govt, officer Lecturer
24 25	Therapist Artist/Art Therapy	Banker/teacher	20 21 22 23	Teacher Lecturer Social Worker Hairdressing Business	Dockyard Worker Lecturer Social Worker
28	Teacher		26 27	Teacher Secretary	Farmer
30 31 32	Teacher H/W Teacher	Lecturer Lecturer	29	Writer	Editor
34	Secretary	Business	33	Teacher	
36 37	Secretary Editor	Farmer Advertising Director	35	Secretary	Teacher
			38 39	Caterer Nurse	Master Craftsman
			40 41	Social Worker Own Hairdressing Business	Army Officer Business

Table 9 - Contd/...

42	Teacher	Teacher	43	Factory	Bookkeeper
			44	Clerical	
			45	Clerical	Painter/ Decorator
46	Artist	Company Director			

APPENDIX II

The Interview Schedule

APPENDIX IITHE INTERVIEW SCHEDULESPART ONE: GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE SUBJECT/ISSUES

FROM THE RESEARCHER: This is a research project about women and ageing: what the experience of ageing is like for us as women (what's good, what's difficult), how we feel about it, what attitudes we hold about the process of ageing, what attitudes other people have and how these affect us. (Note, this is the basic introduction to the interviews. It was not presented by rote, but in relation to the individual being interviewed).

Q: Have you ever been aware of age particularly in your life? When? In what ways? (This initial question was then followed up in response to the issues raised by the respondent. This part of the interview usually took about half an hour and was flexible in relation to the material the interviewee presented).

Q: Do you think the experience of ageing is different for women than men? If so, in what ways? (Again, this was flexible and developed in relation to what the interviewee had to say. The goal of the researcher was to be non-directive, to avoid leading questions, to let the interviewees speak for themselves).

Part One: About half an hour.

Part Two: Between one hour and 1½ hours.

Part Three: Half to ¾ hour.

The complete interview lasted from 2-3 hours, was tape recorded and transcribed. Where possible and by preference, the interview took place in the home of the woman being interviewed. Otherwise, it takes place at the homes of the researcher.

PART TWO: LIFE HISTORY

Name

Address

Year of birth

Place of birth

A TV documentary is going to be made about your life: what are the key events you think it should cover?

How old was your mother when you were born?

What education did she have?

What jobs did she have before she was married?

Did she work after she was married? What? Full or Part time?

Who looked after you/the children while she was at work?

How old was your father when you were born?

What education did he have?

Father's occupations.

How many brothers and sisters did you have? Birth order and spacing.

What was your reaction to their birth?

Were you breast fed? Do you remember it? Do you remember your birth?

Pre-birth experiences?

What is your earliest childhood memory? What have you been told about your birth? What you were like as a baby? A young child?

Describe your childhood: what was good, what was bad?

Who did the domestic work? Who did the childcare?

Do you remember a wedding in the family? More than one? What happened?

What meaning did it have for you? How did you feel about it? Clothes, place, attitudes?

Did you expect to get married at some time in your life? When do you remember first being aware that you might/or might not?

Did your parents expect you to get married? How did you know?

Did your parents attend a place of worship? Denomination. How much did religion mean to you as a child?

Did your parents take an interest in politics? Were your mother's views the same as your father's. Why or why not?

What class/group would you say you belonged to? Do you think your mother thought of herself as a member of a class? Different from your fathers?

Early schooling: what kind? Single sex or mixed sex? Did the teachers emphasise certain things as important in life? Manners? How to treat the opposite sex? Particular behaviour for girls and boys? What kind of person were you during your primary school years? What were your interests? Secondary schooling: what kind of school? Mixed or single sex? Did boys and girls spend time together? What subjects did you take? Did you like school? Why or why not? What were the biggest changes for you as a young woman between primary and secondary school? Who were your friends? What were your interests? Did you have any idea what you wanted to be when you grew up?

What information did you get about sex? At what age? From whom?

What were your parents attitudes towards sex? What were your attitudes/feelings about sex?, What was your first sexual experience? When and how/did you/have you lost your virginity. How did you feel about this? What information did you have about contraception/abortion?

Did you go out with boys? From what age? Where? What did you do?

What information did you have about sexuality? Heterosexuality? Homosexuality? Did you identify yourself as heterosexual? Lesbian? At what age?

What kind of clothes did you wear? Shoes? Make-up? What image did you have of yourself as a teenager? What were the greatest pressures on you at this time? Did your parents approve of friends/activities? Time to be home?

How old were you when you left school? Would you have stayed longer if you'd had the opportunity? Did you attend any part-time or further education?

University: subjects, new friends, new attitudes, influences? Sex life, clothes? How were women regarded?

Did you have a goal for your life when you left school? What was it? How did you get it?

What kind of relationship did you have with your mother? Father? What kind of person did you think your parents hoped you would grow up to be? Did your parents bring you up to consider certain things important in life? What expectations did they have for you? Different from brothers?

Did you have any part-time jobs at school? What? What was your first (full-time) job? Details. Plus all other jobs? Would you have preferred another type of occupation? Where, how, with whom have you lived since leaving home?

Did religion and politics take on different meanings for you as you grew up? Explain?

At the time that you 'were going out into the world', what image did you have of yourself? What expectations? How did you feel about your mother's life? Did you attempt to model your own after hers? What kind of young woman did your mother want you to be? As a teenager, what were your expectations for yourself?

If you have not married, explain why not?

If you do not plan to marry, explain why not?

What age were you when you married? How long had you known your husband? How did you meet? Where did he come from, what kind of family? Were you engaged? How long? Did you save up money to get married? Where did you live? Could you describe the wedding? Honeymoon? Why did you decide to marry? Did you expect to get married? Was marriage what you expected it to be? How did it differ from what you expected?

What important changes have there been in the course of your marriage? (covering other relationships, responsibilities, decision-making).

How old was your husband when you married? What was his job? All jobs.

Did you work after you were married? All jobs? What did your husband think about you working.

Repeat all marriages.

What do you expect from the men in your life? What do you expect from the women in your life? Are these the same expectations you had X years ago? How would you describe the place of sex in your marriage/relationship?

How are relationships between men and women changing? How do you feel about these changes?

How many children? Names and years of birth. How old were you when they were born? How were decisions made about having children? About the births. Where did you get information/support?

Where did you get ideas about bringing up children? Did you work when your children were young? What? Who looked after them? How did you

feel about it? Did you think girls should be treated the same as boys? Explain?

What were/are your expectations for your daughter/s. How did you feel about sex? What information have you given? Do you have different expectations for your sons?

Single women/sexuality/children.

NOTE: All the questions and areas of this interview are covered in the space of one to one and a half hours, but not necessarily in the above order. This interview schedule is used as a checklist.

PART THREE: ATTITUDESRetrospective Re-evaluation

1. In what ways are things different for you as a woman than they were for your mother? (Than they are for your daughter?) In what ways are things different now for you than they were 20 (or X) years ago? Are there things you have changed your mind about since you were a child? Your daughter was a child? (e.g. marriage, divorce, living alone, careers for women, abortion, contraceptions, family size, sex?)
2. Has the Women's Movement affected your views about life or yourself? Explain.
3. What are the areas of satisfaction in your life today? What are the disappointments? What is it like to be a woman aged?
4. Are there some things you have always wanted to do, but never had the opportunity? Have you done what you wanted or what you had to do? What choices have you had?
5. What keeps you awake at night? How do you feel about your future? What would you like to see happen in the next ten years?
6. If you could re-do your life, what changes would you make? If you were 20 again
7. What do you fear most about growing older?

Appearance

1. Do you like your body? What do you/don't you like about it?
2. Do you wear make-up? What? Why? When did you start? Has this changed over time? In response to what?
3. Do you (have you, will you) dye your hair? Why? (About grey hair)
4. Do you exercise? Why? When? What?

5. Do you diet? What, when, why?
6. Do you wear high heels? Have you ever? When did you start? Why?
7. Describe the clothes you wear? Why? Do you follow the fashions? Which ones? Why?
8. Have you had cosmetic surgery? Why? Would you? Why or why not? Do you know anyone who has? What is your reaction? Do you think about wrinkles and lines on your face? Parts of your body sagging? What response?
9. Do you make any distinction between how you look and how you feel? Between health and beauty? Do you ever find these in contradiction?
10. Have you ever lied about your age? When? Why? Would you? In what circumstances?
11. When do you think middle age starts? What does middle age mean? What makes women young? What keeps women young? What does youth mean? Is it different for women than men? What does being old mean? Is it different for men than women? Discuss.

Sexuality

1. Do you regard yourself as sexually attractive? Why not? Have you ever? When? Why? When did you start/stop being sexually attractive? Why? (Go through life history, relate to age, role, health)
2. Do you think of yourself as sexy? What does that mean to you? Have you ever? Why? Why not?
3. Are you sexually active? Why not? When did you begin to be sexually active? When did you stop? Why? Have you always been sexually active over the years, or were there changes? (Relate to age, role, health)
4. What information do you/did you have about the menopause? What did you, do you expect it to involve? How do you, did you feel about it? Was it different than expected?

Media

1. What newspapers do you read?
2. What magazines do you read?
3. What books do you read?
4. What are your three favourite TV programmes?
5. What are your three favourite radio programmes?
6. Have you ever thought about the images of women presented in the media? In the media that you see/read? What images are you aware of? Have they influenced your attitudes about yourself or other women in any ways you are aware of? Age factor?

Discrimination

1. Have you ever been treated badly or unfairly or discriminated against because of your age? Either in your personal life or in your work? Explain.
2. Do you anticipate or worry about any discrimination because of your age?
3. Any other comments? Anything you want to add?

Depression

1. Have you ever suffered from 'depression'?
2. What form did this take?
3. When did it occur?
4. Have you ever been treated for depression?
5. What kind of treatment?

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