RECONSTRUCTION AND RESISTANCE: MASCULINITY, GENDER AND RELATIONSHIPS AMONG MEN IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

By

Stephen Leyden  BA (Honours)

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Abstract

Social researchers have long been divided in their interpretations of gender relations in the context of the family. From the 1940s onwards, researchers began to observe patterns of change in gender relations that they claimed amounted to a reordering of such relations. According to these researchers, family life was increasingly characterised by gender equality and companionship. From the 1970s, many researchers - often influenced by feminism - critiqued this interpretation and suggested that there was much greater continuity than change in family life. This study locates itself in this debate.

The study draws upon R.W. Connell’s analysis of gender as a social practice. Connell observed on the basis of his research that men active in the environmental movement were practising their masculinity in a different way to other groups of men. The men active in the environmental movement were attempting to construct progressive rather than hegemonic gender projects. This study investigates Connell’s observations about gender reform among this group. It does so by examining the gender practices of these men in the context of their personal relationships. The study is based upon 24 qualitative interviews with men active in the environmental and another 24 interviews with their female partners.

The study supports Connell’s claim about gender reform among the men active in the environmental movement, but also highlights the continuing influence of established gender roles and hegemonic masculinity. All of the men in this study described progressive views about gender relations, but there was much diversity in the men’s gender practices. The men fell into one of two groups. The first group of 10 men had apparently achieved substantial reform in their relationships. The relationships were relatively egalitarian according to both the men and the partners. In turn, the relationships were relatively harmonious. The other 14 men were struggling with gender reform. According to both the men and their partners, the relationships were characterised by enduring hegemonic practices. In turn, they were beset by ongoing tension and conflict.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Stephen Lawrence Leyden

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Part I

Background

Part one of the thesis provides the background to the study. It outlines the debate in which the study is located and provides a theoretical framework for thinking about the topic. Next, it discusses the relevant literature, and finally, the method used in the study.
Chapter I

Introduction

In the last thirty years gender relations have come to take a central place in sociological enquiry. Central to that enquiry is the issue of change and resistance in men’s ideas and practices around gender relations. A large part of the research about gender has taken place within the context of the family. This thesis contributes to that body of work and examines the construction of masculinity, and the issue of change and resistance in gender relations among men in the environmental movement, within the context of their personal relationships.

There is an ongoing debate about gender relations among sociologists. Researchers and theorists are divided in their interpretations of the current patterns of gender relations, particularly in the family. One interpretation, advanced by those I will refer to as the progress school, argues that there has been large-scale change in the arena and gender relations have largely been transformed.

One writer forcefully arguing a progress point of view is Manuel Castells. Castells argues that we are witnessing ‘the end of patriarchalism’. He observes that patriarchalism was the founding structure of all contemporary societies. It had permeated the entire organisation of all contemporary societies, from production and consumption, to politics, law, and culture. Interpersonal relationships, and thus personality, were marked as well by domination and violence originating from the culture and institutions of patriarchalism. However, in the last quarter of a century, the patriarchal family, the cornerstone of patriarchy, had been challenged by ‘the inseparably related processes of the transformation of women’s work and the transformation of women’s consciousness’ (1997: 134). The massive incorporation of women into the paid workforce increased women’s bargaining power and undermined men’s domination as providers of the family:
Feminism has an old history, yet I think it is fair to say that only in the last quarter of this century have we witnessed what amounts to a mass insurrection of women against their oppression throughout the world. The impact of such movements has been deeply felt in the institutions of our society, and more fundamentally, in the consciousness of women (1997: 135).

In contrast, other writers, whom I will refer to as the critical school, see more continuity than change. These theorists see little of the transformation celebrated by the progress school. Feminists and some male social scientists argued that the progress school was overly optimistic and tended to ignore the pervasive influence of the historical patterns of gender relations. These writers adopted a far more critical account of gender relations (Safilios-Rothschild, 1969; Edgell, 1980; Bryson, 1984, Hochschild, 1989; Dempsey: 1992, 1997; McMahon, 1999). For example, Kenneth Dempsey sees little of the change of which Castells writes. He argues that men are keenly aware of their advantages within existing gender relations and do all they can to resist change. Social structures assist men in maintaining existing gender relations. Accordingly, men do not have to work particularly hard to resist change as historical patterns work in their favour and largely provide the basis for the resistance they need:

The rules of the game are always biased in favour of one actor or set of actors than another. In the case of marriage, they are biased in the man’s favour. The bias itself and the willingness of men to manipulate this bias to protect their privileges, reduces the likelihood of women pressing for change (Dempsey, 1997: 190).

According to R W Connell, the battle over change and resistance in gender relations can be understood in terms of the legitimacy of patriarchy. Connell explains that patriarchy has lost its legitimacy but not its power. In spite of the shifting ideological ground towards gender equality, men continue to dominate the key institutions in most areas around the world. Moreover, women’s attempts to gain a share of men’s power have met a formidable resistance:

Women’s attempts to gain a share of power have revealed a defence in depth operated by men behind the barricades: from legal exclusion, through formal recruitment rules that require experience, qualifications or ‘merit’ that are harder for women to gain, to a rich variety of informal biases and assumptions that work
in favour of men. Behind these barriers to entry, at the upper reaches of power and only dimly visible from outside, are the self-reproducing strategies of power-holding elites (1995: 204).

Connell provides a valuable and widely-used framework for thinking about gender relations. In the past, Connell explains, theorists understood gender relations as categorical. A categorical view means that writers tend to view one group (men) as oppressing another (women). Connell argues against this view, stressing that the situation is more complex than categorical theories allow. Instead, he proposes that gender is relational. In Connell’s relational approach, gender is seen as a structure of social practice. The social practice approach focuses attention on how social structures are constructed and maintained. According to Connell gender relations are either reproduced or transformed by social actors through social practice (1995: 71).

Connell explains that when we consider gender through the social practice approach it needs to be understood as a project. Gender is a project that is constructed over the life course and worked upon in an ongoing way. It may follow a linear path or be open to revision and reform. Thinking of gender in this way we can see the possibility of a diversity of gender projects. Rather than two distinct categories with a clear-cut relation of inequality and hierarchy between them, there are many masculinities and femininities. Masculinity does not automatically produce social advantage and power. Some styles of masculinities produce marginalisation and subordination.

The idea of gender projects becomes clearer when we consider the impact of social movements on the legitimacy of patriarchy. Connell argues that, due to the challenge by the women’s movement and gay liberation, patriarchy is in crisis. Men respond to the crisis in different ways. For some men the crisis has meant constructing largely reactionary gender projects. It has led to a defence of hegemonic practice and a cult of masculinity, while for other it has led to the defence and support of feminist reform (1995: 85).
Connell coined the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ to describe a particular ‘configuration of practice’ (1987). The aim of social practices that draw upon a hegemonic style of masculinity is to retain men’s privileged and hierarchical position in the gender order. Hegemonic practices are characterised by resistance to change in gender relations and the goal of retaining masculine social advantage (1987; 1995). Connell describes ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as a:

configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (1995: 77).

In contrast to hegemonic masculinity, Connell identifies the environmental movement as one field of social practice conducive to the pursuit of social justice and support for feminist reform. In his influential book *Masculinities* (1995), Connell observed that men in the environment movement during the 1990s were actively attempting to reconstruct their masculinity in a non-hegemonic style, that is, in a progressive way.

Connell explains the progressive view of gender relations among the environmentalists in terms of the impact of the women’s movement. According to Connell, by the early 1980s eco-feminism had a strong impact on the environmental movement. Eco-feminists joined the Green critiques of destructive development, highlighting a similar exploitation of women and nature. Connell argued that the impact of feminism was such that ‘men engaged with environmental politics cannot avoid gender politics as defined by feminism, whatever their personal histories’ (1995: 121). As a result, he argued that the environment movement itself ‘posed a challenge to hegemonic masculinity through its ethos and organisational practices’ (1995: 121). Theoretically, the environmental movement was run democratically, involving a sharp critique of hierarchy and authoritarianism. Further, there was a practice and ideology of personal growth. The emphasis on personal growth tended to undermine the defensive style of hegemonic masculinity and ‘the tight control over emotions’. In particular, Connell noted that the men expressed a desire to become more emotionally literate:
the men were in agreement about qualities that they admired most and wished to develop … The first is the capacity to be expressive, to tell the truth, especially about feelings … The other quality most admired is the capacity to have feelings worth expressing, to be sensitive, to have depth in emotion, to care for people and for nature (1995: 132).

Connell’s argument about the relationship between gender relations and environmental issues is supported by other sources. For example, data from Australian Electoral Study 2001 shows a correlation between environmental concerns and a progressive attitude to gender equality. For example, 82 percent of the people who voted for the Australian Greens at the 2000 election thought that gender reforms in society had not gone far enough. In contrast, the figure among Liberal voters was 30 percent (Gibson 2001).

This study draws heavily on Connell’s insights about gender relations and social practice. Although much research has been conducted around Connell’s concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Schacht, 1996; Bird, 1996; Goodey, 1997), there is little or no research around the construction of non-hegemonic masculinity. If one is interested in prospects for social change in gender relations it seems logical to investigate gender relations among the men in the environment movement. This is the point of departure for this study. This study investigates gender relations and the social practices of men active in the environment movement, that is, men who are said to be in the vanguard of social change.

Accordingly, a vehicle is required to explore gender relations among this sample. This study uses relationships – marriage and de facto - as such a vehicle. There are a number of reasons for this. Marriage is a key institution whereby gender is socially organised and contested. On this account there is a substantial sociological literature that addresses the articulation between gender relations on the one hand, and marriage and informal cohabitation on the other. Further, Connell observes that the qualities of equality and personal development among environmental men ‘were supposed to be put to work in a new model of personal relationships’ (1995: 133).
Therefore this study examines the relationship between gender projects and personal relationships. It looks for evidence of reform and reconstruction of a non-hegemonic style of masculinity among men active in the environment movement. It does so by examining the relationships of the men – marriage and de facto - as evidence of their social practice around gender relations. The study is based upon 24 qualitative interviews with men in the environmental movement, and another 24 interviews with their female partners. The research question is this. To what degree is Connell correct in his argument that men active in the environment movement are also active in the construction of non-hegemonic masculinity?

Chapter outline

Part One forms the background to this study. It consists of three chapters. The first of these chapters, Chapter Two, provides a theoretical framework for thinking about gender. It draws heavily upon Connell’s theoretical framework of gender, and discusses the various ways writers have attempted to explain gender relations and the problems and advantages associated with these approaches. In light of the problems with existing theories of gender, Connell concluded that an adequate theory must focus on social practice. He developed a three-dimensional model of gender – distinguishing between power, labour and cathexis (or attachment) - to understand how social structure is transformed or reconstituted. The chapter finishes with a discussion of studies that have employed Connell’s social practice theory and his concept of ‘hegemonic’ masculinity.

Chapter Three surveys the literature for the study. Having developed a model for investigating gender relations, this chapter puts the model to work. It examines the research around marriage and relationships though Connell’s three-dimensional model. In doing so it explores in more detail the debate about change and resistance in gender relations. First, the chapter examines the issue of women’s increased power in relationships. It does this by discussing the claims and counter claims about the rising tide of gender equality in the arena of decision-making in the marriage. Second, it
examines the changing patterns of labour and how these effect the organisation of domestic labour. Third, it investigates the area of cathexis. It discusses the research around cathexis, outlining the main issues and problems described by previous researchers.

Chapter Four discusses the current study. First, it discusses its rationale, point of departure and research questions. Next it discusses and evaluates the method used in the study and ethical issues for the study. Then, it provides a detailed discussion of the sample, outlining its general demographics. Next, it discusses the data collection process, outlining a number of important methodological issues that need to be observed around the study of marriage and relationships, as well as discussing the structure of the interview schedule. Finally, it outlines the process of data analysis.

Part Two examines the respondents’ experiences and ideas. Chapter Five examines the family backgrounds of the men; that is, the way in which gender relations were organised in the men’s families of origin, and what sense the men made of these relations. Further, it discusses the men’s thoughts about their fathers’ masculinity as a gender project.

Chapter Six examines the men’s lives beyond the family of origin. It focuses upon the choices the men made in their lives as adults that influenced their gender projects. It discusses the experiences that the men described which influenced their attitudes to gender relations and discusses how they dealt with such experiences.

Chapter Seven discusses the respondents’ ideas about family life. Having discussed the men’s experiences in their families of origin and beyond, this chapter examines their ideas, attitudes and expectations about gender relations and family life. It discusses how the men expect to organise family life. In doing so, it addresses ideas about power, labour and cathexis. Further, it examines the respondents’ views about how marriage and children fit with the concept of partnership.
Part Three of the thesis shifts focus from the realm of ideas to practice. It examines the respondents’ stories about their relationships and places these stories in the context of their partners’ accounts. It discusses how each partner perceives what takes place in practice across the dimensions of power, labour, and cathexis. It explores the link between gender practices and the effect such practices have on their relationships.

Chapter Eight discusses those relationships where both men and women agreed that the relationship was characterised by relative gender equality and the men had largely achieved gender reform. The chapter discusses how the respondents organised their relationships and how gender reform translates into everyday practice. It describes how the respondents approached decision-making and allocated domestic tasks and examines gender practice on the dimension of cathexis. It also examines the effect of reform on the relationships.

Chapter Nine discusses those relationships where men and women largely agreed that the relationship was characterised by relative gender inequality and the men were struggling with gender reform. The chapter examines the dynamics and practices in these relationships, and the main areas of reform and resistance. Further, it discusses the effect of hegemonic practices and gender resistance on the relationships.

Chapter Ten discusses how the respondents manage relationships underpinned by hegemonic practices. It discusses how the men explain and justify hegemonic or patriarchal practices in the context of attitudes about partnership and gender equality. It discusses the way women attempt to deal with such situations and describes the various methods and strategies they employ to effect change. Finally it examines how the men resist change and maintain their social advantages.

Chapter Eleven presents the conclusion to the study. This chapter discusses the study’s basic proposition, its main findings and links them back to the theoretical arguments about gender and family. It discusses prospects for change and explanations and justifications for resistance. It compares the findings of this study to other Australian
studies over the past fifty years to address the debate about social change in gender relations. In doing so it demonstrates gender reform is the key to more egalitarian and close-knit relationships.
Chapter 2

Connell’s theoretical framework on gender

The previous chapter outlined the debate among social scientists about gender relations, with particular emphasis on gender in families. It showed that sociologists were divided in their interpretations of existing patterns of family and gender relations. Some argued that substantial progress toward greater equality had been made, while others placed more emphasis upon enduring conflict and resistance. Different arguments are often underpinned by different criteria and benchmarks. This chapter addresses broad frameworks for making judgements about gender relations and gender inequality, based on the work of the Australian sociologist R. W. Connell.

In *Gender and Power* (1987) Connell described the historical development of theories about gender relations. First of all, he described the historical shift from religious to secular theories. As secular thought became more prominent in the late eighteenth century, the focus of gender theorists shifted from ethical questions to empirical ones. Theorists and activists focused their attention on how gender relations were actively constituted rather than how they ought to be. In this context, power relations become central to theories about gender.

Next, Connell set out a framework for analysing gender relations. Connell’s logic was to demonstrate that existing theories of gender failed to explain the complexity of gender relations in a number of basic ways, but nonetheless provided the basis for a more satisfactory theory. His framework distinguished between theories that explained gender in terms of extrinsic causes, as a by-product of outside influences, and intrinsic theories that focused on the direct relations between men and women. Within intrinsic theories, Connell differentiated between theories that focused on custom and those that focused on power. Within theories of power, Connell distinguished between those that identified categories prior to practice, surreptitiously emanating from biology, and those that described categories as emerging from social practice.
2.1 Extrinsic theories

According to Connell, extrinsic social theories fell into three main types: class analysis, social reproduction theory and dual systems theory. Rather than looking at the direct relations between men and women, extrinsic theories looked elsewhere for the main determinant of women’s oppression. In the 1970s theorists made a link between capitalism and women’s oppression. Marxist analysis located women’s oppression in the class system. Marxist feminists argued that women’s oppression ultimately served the interests of the ruling class. Capitalists secured higher profits because they paid women lower wages; sexism divided the working class; and women’s oppression maintained the family, which in turn maintained capitalism. Accordingly, women’s liberation depended upon class struggle because capitalism was the root cause of all social inequalities. This view was too simplistic. Women’s subordination existed long before capitalism. It also existed across all classes and outside the capitalist system (Connell, 1987: 42).

Around the same time, structural Marxists in Britain developed a different argument which focused on the concept of social reproduction. This approach treated the power of men and the subordination of women as effects of imperatives outside the direct relationship between the men and women. The central idea was that the family, sexuality and gender relations at large were the site of reproduction of the relations of production. A particular pattern of relations of production was taken in Marxist theory to define a ‘mode of production’. Those relations of production could not have existed without being reproduced, from day to day, year to year, and generation to generation. This called into existence social processes centring on the family, domestic life, and the raising of children. Those processes were the main determinant of the subordination of women (Connell, 1987: 43).

Social reproduction theory, observed Connell, was a major advance over simple class-interest based theories of patriarchy and offered a synthesis of several important lines of thought (Connell, 1987: 43). On the one hand, ‘reproduction’ could be understood in materialist terms, as bearing children to fill places in the production and
servicing the tired worker at the day’s end. Alternatively, ‘reproduction’ could be understood in a cultural framework as the ideology that inserted people into capitalist industry. Reproduction theory argued that there was a systemic connection between the subordination of women and economic exploitation in capitalism. The link was embedded in the ‘whole structure of social organisation’ (1987: 44).

Reproduction theory allowed for greater complexity than a simple class-interest analysis. However, it suffered from a number of problems. First, social reproduction was taken for granted by reproduction theorists. Connell observed that this was a ‘miscalculation’. Rather than take for granted that social structure would always be produced, these processes needed to be seen as an achievement by social forces. Social reproduction was an outcome, not a necessary condition: ‘Groups that hold power always try to reproduce the structure that gives them their privilege. But it is an open question whether, and how, they will succeed’ (1987: 44).

A second problem with social reproduction theory was that it had trouble explaining the connection between capitalism and gender. If capitalism was to continue, its dominant groups needed some kind of reproduction strategy. It was not clear why capitalism needed sexual hierarchy and oppression. There was some historical evidence, Connell observed, that capitalism had, in some respects, broken down existing patriarchal customs and given women greater personal freedoms in countries like the United States and Australia. Clearly the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy was not simply functional. The fit was looser, the relationship more contradictory, than reproduction theory had supposed (1987: 44).

Some Marxist-feminists looked elsewhere for answers. They sought to explain reproduction theory through principles drawn mainly from cultural theory. A consequence of this was a strong tendency to treat gender relations as a ‘truncated’ structure by comparison to class relations. In some versions, social reproduction and patriarchy were regarded as occurring entirely in the realm of ideology, not part of the sphere of reproduction at all. In other versions ‘reproduction’ was connected with a social
division of labour, but only one kind of labour, namely housework (1987: 44). However, socialist feminist research at the time showed that the idea that capitalism and gender were ‘truncated’ was a mistake. This research demonstrated that capitalism and gender were not cut off from each other, and in fact they were closely linked.

Trying to address this problem, some writers argued that gender was a parallel system interacting with and, in some sense, constitutive of class. As a result a number of theorists developed what became known as ‘dual systems theories’ (Connell, 1987: 45). The idea here was that patriarchy and capitalism were comprehensive systems of social relations which met and interacted. Understanding the contemporary world required the simultaneous analysis of class and gender structures (1987: 45).

Connell emphasised that ‘dual systems’ theory was an improvement on social reproduction theory in that gender appeared ‘in all domains of social practice and pre-dated capitalism and possibly class societies of all kinds’ (1987: 45). However, the approach had two main problems. First, it was unclear in what way ‘patriarchy’ was a system. That is, it was unclear what made the patriarchal ‘system’ systematic, and in what sense capitalism and patriarchy were the same kind of thing. The other problem centred on how to understand the interaction between capitalism and patriarchy. Connell observed:

the link [between capitalism and patriarchy] may be seen as boundary exchange (in the sense of Parsons’ system theories), or as a more-or-less chance intersection of structures. Neither idea gave much grip on explaining oppression and developing a strategy of liberation (1987: 46).

Connell concluded that the analysis of gender required in principle an intrinsic theory logically independent of the theory of class. Accordingly, the rest of this chapter considers the main versions of intrinsic gender theories.
2.2 Sex role theory

Sex role theory has long been employed to explain inequality in gender relations and marriage. Connell described sex role theory as an intrinsic theory which explained social behaviour in terms of customs. Although the sex role literature was very large it was also very confused. There was, nevertheless, a definite body of social theory organised around the concept of ‘role’:

While formulations of the concept of role differed in detail, most had five points in common which formed the logical core of role theory. The first two stated the essential metaphor, the actor and the script, that is, the analytic distinction between the person and the social position and a set of actions or role behaviours, while the other three stated the means by which the social drama was set in motion and held to its script; by role expectations, people in counter positions, who enforce the sanctions. (1987: 47)

The concepts of role theory were the tools by which it attempted a general analysis of social interaction. Broadly role theory was the approach to social structure which located its basic constraints in stereotyped interpersonal expectations. Most applications of role theory to gender meant that being a man or a woman involved enactment of a general role definitive of one’s sex – the sex role. There were, accordingly, two sex roles in any context, the male role and the female role (1987: 47).

Sex role theory was attractive for a number of reasons. It ‘allowed a move away from biological assumptions about sex differences’, and ‘connected social structure to the formation of personality’ (1987: 47). More to the point, it offered a simple framework for describing the insertion of the individual into social relations. The basic idea was that this occurs by ‘role learning’ or socialisation. Sex role theory also offered a politics of reform. If the subordination of women was largely the result of role expectations that define them as helpmates or subordinates, then the obvious path forward was to change expectations.

Although it had a good deal to offer, role theory had three main limitations. First, it did not have an adequate theory of social structure. Sex role theory attempted to explain
social structure in terms of the concept of ‘expectations’. An individual’s role performance was sanctioned by the expectations of second parties. Little boys were praised for being assertive and ridiculed for being girlish. But, as Connell queried, ‘where did the expectations come from’? They could not be explained by role expectations:

If so, role theory reduces to an infinite regress. It quickly comes down to a question of individual will and agency, revolving around choices to apply sanctions. The social dimension of role theory thus ironically dissolves into voluntarism, into a general assumption that people choose to maintain existing customs (1987: 50).

In this context socialisation theory was not a social theory at all because it did not adequately explain the relationship between personal agency and social structure. The theory ultimately relied on biology to provide social structure. The result was an abstract view of differences between the sexes rather than the relations between them. Socialisation theory only came right up to the problem where social theory logically began (1987: 50).

Second, sex role theory failed to theorise power in gender relations. With biology as the underlying basis of role behaviour, theorists tended to see roles as reciprocal rather than related by power. Most sex role theory was constructed around the normative case. Role theory substituted norms for an account of power. Questions of power relations were obscured by powerful ideas about what was appropriate and the proper way to live. The emphasis on the normative case was misleading because it failed to approximate social reality. Moreover, sex role theory simplified the complexities of gender, reducing all masculinities and femininities into one dualism. The dominance of the normative case created the impression that the conventional sex role was the majority case and departures were socially marginal. Therefore sex role theory ignored issues of power, conflict of interests and social struggle (1987:51).

Third, sex role theory had no means of conceiving collective interests within gender relations. The lack of a theory of movement and social struggle reflected the lack of a way of grasping social contradiction and formulating a social dynamic. Sex role
theory failed to grasp social change as ‘transformation generated in the interplay of social practice and social structure’ (1987: 53).

2.3 Categorical theories

Categorical theories were a second type of intrinsic theory. In contrast to sex role theory, categorical theories gave a major place to power and conflict of interest. These theories cut across various schools of feminist thought from socialist feminism to cultural feminism. They had three main features. First, there was a close identification of opposed interests in sexual politics with specific categories of people. Second, the argument was on the category as a unit, rather than the processes by which the category was constituted. Third, the social order as a whole was understood in terms of a few major categories, related to each other by power and conflict of interests (Connell, 1987: 54).

Connell emphasised that feminist theories treated men and women as distinct categories in their analysis. Early feminists borrowed ideas from other paradigms to explain their case. They used terms like caste and sexual stratification to formalise their theory. For example, radical feminists like Shulamith Firestone spoke of ‘sex class’. Similarly Susan Brownmiller’s argument that ‘all men are potential rapists’ arose from a categorical framework. Janet Chafetz underlined this framework when she stated that women and men can be treated as ‘internally differentiated general categories’ (Connell, 1987: 55).

While taking the categories for granted, the analysis attempted to outline the relationship between the categories. The relationship was largely one of inequality and domination. In one line of thought it was essentially a relation of direct domination. Dunbar and Firestone were among the pioneers of this approach. Newer versions such as Mary Daly’s picture of global patriarchy focused on men’s violence towards women as its essence. The academic literature on ‘sexual stratification’ generally took a more abstract and open-ended approach, assuming that the relationship between categories was unequal. Chafetz for instance conducted a cross-cultural survey to see what general
conditions were linked to high or low levels of inequality in the overall status of men and women (Connell, 1987: 56).

Categoricalism provided the model of gender for most of the extrinsic theories. Analyses of the sexual division of labour usually set up gender categories as a simple line of demarcation of economic life. Only a minority concerned themselves with ‘making the process of constructing categories a central issue’ (1987: 56), which led away from categoricalism. Similarly, much of the discussion of ‘relations of production’ had little to say about practice at the point of production. Notionally about social relations, it actually used such concepts mainly to demarcate categories. In other cases the social basis of categoricalism was a simplified normative family. This was true of most of the Marxist-feminist literature on domestic labour. It was also true of Christine Delphy’s analysis of patriarchy as an economic system. Delphy’s categories were constructed by the social institution of marriage, and the core of the relation between them was the husbands’ appropriation of a surplus of the wives’ unpaid labour (Connell, 1987: 56).

According to Connell, for all the sophistication these authors showed in developing social frameworks, the overall map of gender they produced was not too different than the one based on a simple biological dichotomy. Categorical thinking about gender was most obvious when the categories were presumed to be biological and the relationship between them a collective or standardised one. Connell criticised such feminist accounts of gender relations for a number of reasons. First, categorical theories failed to comprehend the complexity of gender relations:

The first approximation became the end of the analysis; when the categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’ are taken as absolutes, in no need of further examination or finer differentiation (1987: 57).

Categoricalism focused on what Connell called the ‘representative individual’. In this line of argument a ‘power hungry and emotionally blunted masculinity’ was part of the machine that was wrecking the environment. This argument missed an important point. It ignored the social machinery that made a particular form of masculinity
environmentally destructive. It missed the social arrangements that gave a particular kind of masculinity a hegemonic position in sexual politics and that marginalised others. According to Connell, theory framed in this way had a strong tendency to lump together different periods of history and different parts of the world. In such theories the worldwide dimension of gender became ‘a universal common structure of patriarchy’ (1987: 58).

Categorical theories were an advance over role theory in their ability to deal with questions of power and inequality. They often stressed conflict of interest, but had difficulty with the way ‘interests were constituted’ and the way people contested the structures that defined their interests. Over a range of issues categorical theories of gender relations underplayed the turbulence and contradictions within the social processes of gender (Connell, 1987: 60). The political aims of conflict theory did not achieve very much more than role theory. According to Connell, categorical theory led to a politics of access, trying to raise the number of women in political leadership positions. It did not generate any particular reasons to question the social arrangements that created these positions. To this extent the practical consequences were little different from the strategy of role reform in liberal feminism (1987: 60).

2.4 Social practice theory

Theories employed to explain gender relations failed because of a number of limitations, as described above. Connell argued that to get a better understanding of the dynamics of gender relations, and thus the problems of inequality in marriage, required a form of social theory that could overcome these limitations. An adequate theory of gender required a theory of social structure, one which pushed beyond the implicit voluntarism of role theory, but provided some grip on the historical dynamic of gender overlooked by categoricalism. Connell reasoned that the problem of categoricalism could be resolved by a theory of practice (agency), focusing on what people did by way of constituting social relations in which they lived. Voluntarism could be overcome by attention to the structure of social relations ‘as a condition of all practice’ (1987: 62).
To begin to develop a theory of social practice, an understanding of social structure was required. Connell explained that social structure referred to the intractability of the social world. It reflected the experience:

of being up against something, of the limits of freedom; and also the experience of being able to operate by proxy, to produce results that one’s own capacities would not allow. To specify structure is to specify what it is in the structure that constrains the play of practice. Structure specifies the way practice over time constrains practice (1987: 92).

The key issue for a theory of social practice is the relationship between structure and agency. The idea of an active presence of structure had been developed by Bourdieu and Giddens in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Connell was critical of the models developed by these theorists because of their failure to accurately correspond to gender relations. The main problem in both cases, according to Connell, was their lack of a sense of the impact of history:

Dualist models (of structure and agency), then, need an opening towards history. The crucial point is that practice, while presupposing structure in much the sense Bourdieu and Giddens explain, is always responding to a situation. To describe structure is to specify what it is in the situation that constrains the play of practice. Since the consequence of practice is a transformed situation which is the object of new practice, ‘structure’ specifies the way practice (over time) constrains practice (1987: 95).

Connell explained that practice is always obliged to reckon with the constraints that are ‘the precipitate of history’. Human action could be turned against what constrains it; so structure could be deliberately the object of practice. But practice could not escape structure, floating free from its circumstances.

In outlining a more sophisticated theory of gender relations, Connell emphasised that gender was a way in which social practice was ordered. Social practice was generated within definite structures of social relations and responded to particular situations. Practice that related to this structure, generated as people and groups grappled
with their historical situations, did not consist of isolated acts. Actions were configured in larger units:

When we speak of masculinity and femininity we are naming configurations of gender practice. Taking a dynamic view of the organisation of practice, we arrive at an understanding of masculinity and femininity as gender projects. These are processes of configuring practice through time, which transform their starting point in gender structures (Connell, 1995: 72).

Such projects are likely to be fractured and shifting, rather than coherent as the concepts ‘character’ or ‘personality’ indicate.

To understand the complexity of gender practice Connell outlined a three-dimensional model of gender relations, grounded in the elements of power, labour and cathexis. Connell observed that power could be understood as a balance of advantage or an inequality of resources in a workplace, a household, or a larger institution. Power was an object of practice. Imposing an order in and through culture was a large part of this effort. If authority was defined by legitimate power, ‘then we can say that the main axis of the power structure of gender is the general connection of authority with masculinity’. But this was complicated by and partly contradicted by the denial of authority to some groups of men. Connell argued that:

Although the people who ran corporations, the government departments and the universities were largely men, who arranged things in a way that made it extremely difficult for women to get access to top positions, power was not open to all men, nor was it spread evenly among men. There was gender hierarchy among men with at least three elements: hegemonic masculinity, conservative masculinity (complicit in the collective project of hegemonic masculinity, but not its shock tactics) and subordinated masculinity (1987: 109).

The second dimension of gender relations, the sexual division of labour, was at its simplest an allocation of particular types of work to particular types of people. It was a social structure to the extent that the allocation became a constraint on practice. This happened in several integrated ways. First, the prior division of labour among people became a social rule allocating people to work. An employee entering a firm was given job X if a woman and job Y if a man. Connell noted that the working of such rules was
found in almost every study of paid employment that has ever considered the issue of gender. A segregation rule in operation became the basis of new forms of constraint on practice, such as differential skilling. Skilling and training was one of the mechanisms by which the sexual division of labour was made a powerful system of social constraint. Just how powerful was revealed when a conscious attempt was made to change it (1987: 100).

In relation to the third dimension of gender relations, that of cathexis, Connell argued that to recognise a social structure in sexuality it was necessary first to see sexuality as social. Sexuality did not exist before, or outside, the social practices in which relationships between people were formed and carried on. Sexuality was conducted or enacted, it was not expressed. There was an emotional dimension to all social relationships. Connell explained that Freud used the term ‘cathexis’ to refer to a psychic charge or instinctual energy attached to a mental object. The social patterning of desire was most obvious as a set of prohibitions. Two principles of organisation were very obvious in our culture. Objects of desire were generally defined by the dichotomy and opposition of feminine and masculine; and sexual practice was mainly organised in couple relationships (1987: 111-2). Importantly, Connell noted that the socially hegemonic pattern of desire was not only characterised by sexual difference, but also by differentiated social power. The members of a heterosexual couple were not just different, but unequal. A heterosexual woman was sexualised in a way that a man was not. Broadly speaking, ‘the erotic reciprocity in hegemonic heterosexuality is based on unequal exchange’ (1987: 113).

To recognise that there was more than one masculinity was only the first step. Beyond the diversity were the relations between different styles of masculinities. Connell identified four main patterns of masculinities in the Western gender order: hegemonic, complicit (conservative), subordinated and marginalised. Connell coined the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as referring to the configuration of gender practice which embodied the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, guaranteeing the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Connell emphasised that perhaps only a few men were practising the hegemonic pattern. Many
men had a complicit relationship to hegemonic masculinity (where they were not active in hegemonic practice but willing to accept its rewards), while others were either marginalised or subordinated by the hegemonic pattern.

2.5 **Social practice theory applied**

Connell’s work has informed a large body of research around gender and masculinity. In particular many researchers have underpinned their work with social practice theory and the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Accordingly, we now have a body of work describing the construction of hegemonic masculinity in a range of social milieu (Schatt, 1994; Bird, 1996; Pyke, 1996; Nayak and Kahiely, 1996; Goodey, 1998)). What this research demonstrates is that hegemonic masculinity offers men power and control but at a very high price. Hegemonic masculinity is configured by social practices of competition, misogyny, homophobia and sexual objectification. Men are under intense pressure to prove themselves as men and to practise their masculinity on the basis of these values.

For example, Stephen Schacht’s ethnographic study in the US (1996) explored the world of male rugby players in terms of how they socially and relationally constructed a hegemonic masculinity. Schacht described three main themes that emerged around the construction of hegemonic masculinity. First, there was survival of the fittest, that is, the battle for social power. Schacht observed a continuous battle for social power. This battle was largely played out on the field against other teams, but also within the clubs he studied. He cited a number of instances at training sessions where players and playing coaches engaged in this struggle, the playing coaches trying to protect their authority while some of the players were attempting to question it. Violence was often involved in the challenge:

Although coach-player hierarchies in rugby typically do not involve actual violence, the threat of violence is ever present. Such normative order highlights the centrality of violence in rugby. More important, it reinforces what being a ‘man’ is all about in this setting. That is, experienced coaches instruct new
initiates about the ritual and appropriate values and behaviours associated with rugby. Here, the key understanding is the ‘survival of the fittest’. Those who are the biggest, the strongest, the most experienced, and willing to threaten to use physical violence – the most masculine – are the leaders (Schacht, 1996: 550).

The second theme was ‘no pain, no gain’. Schacht emphasised that pain was central to the world of rugby playing. In this highly masculine world there was no space for men to admit vulnerability. Injuries were, in a sense, medals that attested to men’s masculinity. When the players were injured with broken fingers they were expected to return to the game. Schacht observed that injured players who tried to conceal any pain and did not complain were held in high regard and respected. Players were not supposed to make a big deal about injury when it occurred; this was to be done after the game by other players, if done at all. Schacht provided an example of one player who played on after breaking collarbone. The player explained his decision in terms of not letting the other team know that you were hurt:

It takes balls to play. Can’t be a fucking pussy. If you want to kick some ass, you’re going to get your fucking ass kicked sometimes. [gesturing, to the other team] Just don’t let them fucking bastards know they hurt ya (Schacht, 1996: 552).

The third theme was the relational rejection of the feminine. Players used numerous techniques to relationally distance themselves from the feminine; ultimately, these practices were often misogynist. The players used sexual objectification and harassment of women to ensure that women would not feel at ease in their company and that they would remember their role as sexual beings available to men, and not consider themselves equal citizens participating in public life.

While most of these practices were applied to women, they were also used in a homophobic fashion towards males who did not measure up to rugby players’ images of being a ‘man’. Such actions enabled the players to relationally define what masculinity was and, perhaps more importantly, what it was not. The terms ‘women’, ‘ladies’ and ‘faggots’ were used interchangeably by more experienced players towards the mistakes of less experienced players. Subordination of women and non-hegemonic masculinities
was crucial to the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Schacht observed that this explained the great lengths that the players went to hide their injuries:

Perhaps this explains why so many of the players were hesitant to admit being injured and why they are often rewarded for appearing not to be, even when they are. For to admit one is hurt gives indications of being something that one is supposed to always guard against, being vulnerable, potentially weak and feminine (Schacht, 1996: 560).

Schacht concluded that rugby players’ social reproduction of gender, ultimately grounded in misogyny, allowed these men to sometimes physically dominate women. At the societal level, rugby, like many sporting practices, both reflected and supported a hierarchical ideology of masculinity and the subordination of women. The values traditionally associated with most sports were nearly synonymous with those of being a man. Competitiveness, strength, aggression, instrumentality and often violence were not only values central to sport, but were qualities strongly associated with contemporary notions of hegemonic masculinity (1996: 550).

Sharon Bird's study of male academics in the UK (1996) also explored the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Bird was interested in how meanings that corresponded to hegemonic masculinity were maintained and how those that did not were suppressed. The themes described by Bird as configuring the social practice of male academics were similar to those described by Schacht, notwithstanding the different social contexts.

Bird identified three themes that underpinned hegemonic masculinity in this setting. First, there was competition. Like Schacht, Bird described ‘competition’ as a fundamental value. Competition with other men provided a stage for establishing oneself both as an individual and as appropriately masculine. Competition also contributed to the perpetuation of male dominance. To establish oneself as not female, young men sought out other men with whom to display ‘non-femaleness’. Homosocial groups provided feedback and supported the respondents’ self-conceptualisation of masculinity. Some of the men described competition as a critical part of their self-conceptualisation and
stressed that the competitions they preferred were those with men. Men, they believed, ‘could understand the intensity and importance of competition, whereas women seemed less accepting and less understanding’ (1996: 127).

Second, there was emotional detachment. Being masculine meant not being feminine. The ideal of masculinity meant detachment and independence. The men interviewed indicated that emotions and behaviours typically associated with women were inappropriate within the male homosocial group. Among the emotions and behaviours most inappropriate, and most highly stigmatised, were those associated with expressions of intimacy. The suppression of feminine emotions was more than a means of establishing individual masculinity. Emotional detachment was one way in which gender hierarchies were maintained. Expressing emotion signified weakness and was devalued, whereas emotional detachment signified strength and was valued (Bird, 1996: 125). Emotional detachment was viewed as not only desirable but imperative. The repercussion for violating the hegemonic ideal was to be ostracised from one’s group.

The third theme was sexual objectification. The competitions that supported hegemonic masculinity continued throughout life in a variety of forms. Among the forms of competition in which men engaged were those that involved the objectification of women. Men often competed with one another in efforts to gain the attention and affections of women and in boasting about their sexual exploits. The men explained the competition for women in terms of a pecking order. One man explained that ‘if you do not peck, you get pecked. And so, one of the things over which there is a great deal of pecking is women’. These competitions illustrated the interconnectedness of the meanings of emotional detachment, competition and objectification (1996: 126).

Bird concluded that such groups do masculinity in such a way as to reproduce a hegemonic masculinity. She explained that within the existing gender order, meanings associated with behaviours that challenged hegemonic masculinity were denied legitimisation as masculine; such meanings were marginalised, if not suppressed entirely. Contradictions to hegemonic masculinity posed by male homosexuality, for example,
were suppressed when homosexual masculinity was consistently rendered ‘effeminate’. Through male homosocial heterosexual interactions, hegemonic masculinity was maintained as the norm to which men were held accountable, despite individual conceptualisations of masculinity that departed from that norm. When it was understood among heterosexual men’s homosocial circles that masculinity meant being emotionally detached, competitive and viewing women as sexual objects, their daily interactions helped perpetuate a system that subordinated femininity and non-hegemonic masculinities (1996: 128).

Jo Goodey also explored the concept of hegemonic masculinity in her study of a northern British, white working-class school (1997). Goodey was interested in the relationship between fearlessness, emotional expression and crime. According to Goodey there was intense pressure to adopt a fearless persona and to present an image of strength and control among the boys she studied. Even so, many of the boys in the study actually admitted to having experienced fear. However, once they recognised that admitting fear was inappropriate they then rapidly covered it up, or else it was submerged by a collective group ethos of exaggerated masculinity. Goodey observed:

It would appear that the individual’s ‘hegemonic masculine biography’ is only briefly glimpsed in the course of group discussions. The collective group biography and the exaggerated masculine biography of the white, working class masculinity tend to subsume individual difference in the setting of these discussion groups (1997: 408).

Goodey concluded that hegemonic masculinity taught boys to be careful about expressing feelings or vulnerability. The development of the fearless persona was closely connected to rejecting the development of emotional literacy. Further, the failure of the boys to develop the ability to articulate their emotions contributed to the reactive development of exaggerated masculinities that could take the form of criminal or anti-social behaviour. Hegemonic ideals triggered a form of masculine bravado or fearlessness which displayed itself as reactive aggression against the self (the denial of one’s own vulnerability) and others in a display of verbally and physically aggressive acts (1997: 401).
A number of other researchers have also explored the construction of hegemonic masculinity among boys in the school setting. For example, Martin Mac an Ghaill in a study entitled *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling* (1994) demonstrated institutionalisation of misogyny and homophobia in the school context. These processes minimised the opportunity for boys to develop their emotional capacities. This had the effect of severing the link between the way they felt and their ability to express it:

Two themes ran through this research; one, that there was no safe space in which boys could express either their fears or vulnerability and second, that they suffered from an absence of a language for expressing them (1994: 57).

Similarly, Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kehily examined the link between homophobia and masculinity in the school setting. The researchers were interested to know why homophobia was so prevalent in the school context. Homophobia was seen to be a ‘natural’ and routine part of activities in the developing lives of young men. Homophobic displays were enacted to produce a ‘natural’ masculinity. The researchers emphasised the link between homophobia and misogyny. Homophobia and misogyny overlapped where one was expressed through the other. Homophobia was a means of consolidating sexuality and gender through the slandering of femininity, and its connection with homosexuality. Such behaviour can be seen as a form of ‘category maintenance work’ used to display a particular masculinity and reinforce the ‘heterosexual matrix’. The researchers observed that many of the young men worried about being gay and being labelled gay, partly due to the intense hostility expressed towards women and femininity. In turn, young men used a variety of desperate, evasive measures to avoid being labelled gay. In the researchers’ words:

Boys have to protect a masculine façade of toughness, hardness and superiority. To call a boy a poof, a buttyman … is derogatory, but this term in denoting a lack of guts suggests femininity – weakness, softness and inferiority. Boys are under pressure to disassociate themselves from anything female to ‘prove’ their masculinity (1996: 215).
The researchers observed that heterosexuality was treated as biologically natural and that other forms of sexual behaviour were regarded as unnatural, perverse and deviant. It seemed that this heterosexist model of sexuality had particular resonance within the male peer groups they studied. The researchers noted that any reference to homosexuality could result in homophobic abuse, which meant that the boys felt a need to protect themselves by being careful about what they talked about (1996: 223).

Summary

This chapter was devoted to a review of Connell’s analysis of theorising about gender relations. It was structured around Connell’s framework for theorising gender. The framework divided theories into extrinsic and intrinsic theories to map out social thinking about gender.

Extrinsic theories generally focused upon the class system as a means of explaining gender inequality. Women’s oppression was connected to the capitalist system and its inherent exploitation. This position was easily criticised on historical and cultural grounds. Intrinsic theories also encompassed a social reproduction position. Social structure was maintained by social processes such as ideology. Although this position offered a complexity beyond a simple class analysis, it assumed an invariant social structure and failed to explain the connection between capitalism and sexual hierarchy. Accordingly, theorists proposed that the system of gender and economic stratification needed to be studied separately, leading to intrinsic theories.

Intrinsic theories addressed the internal dynamics of gender rather than the external ‘forces’. Early accounts of gender relations were framed in terms of sex roles. Sex roles were used to describe a system of custom and the associated expectations of male and female roles. Sex roles were held in place by a system of reward and punishment. Sex role theory failed to account for the relations of power. It also failed to provide an account of social structure other than through the voluntarism of individuals. Social structure was covertly supplied by the biological category of sex that created an
abstract view of the differences between the sexes rather than the concrete relations between them.

A second set of theories that attempted to explain women’s subordinated position in society was what Connell termed categorical theories. These theories generally articulated the unequal nature of gender relations and the subordinated position of women in society, and more specifically the family. Their accounts focused on the power relations between women and men. Feminists, both socialist and cultural, used a categorical framework to describe gender relations between men and women. For all the sophistication of these theories, the overall map of gender they produced was not much different from one based on a simple biological dichotomy. The focus on the categories exaggerated the dichotomy and failed to recognise the diversity within the categories. The over generalised argument that masculinity was responsible for much of the wrong on the planet failed to address the social relations that gave a particular form of masculinity a hegemonic position.

Accordingly, Connell argued that we need a more sophisticated theory of gender that could theorise the complexity of gender relations and the struggles and resistance in that arena. Such a theory needed to provide a relationship between structure and agency. To this end Connell advanced a three dimensional structure of gender relations, that of power, labour and cathexis. Moreover, such a theory needed to take account of the relations within categories of gender and recognise that there were many ways of constructing gender. On this basis masculinities and femininities are best understood as projects that are worked and reworked in time. An example of such a project is ‘hegemonic masculinity’

The chapter ended with a review of the research underpinned by Connell’s ideas about gender relations and the concept of hegemonic masculinity. A growing body of research has taken Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity and applied it to specific contexts. This research highlighted the many contexts where masculinity is produced and maintained. The overwhelming theme in all these studies was that masculinity is
fundamentally underpinned by competition and hierarchy, constructed in opposition to femininity, and underpinned by misogyny and homophobia.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

The previous chapter provided a model for thinking about gender. It demonstrated that gender relations could be broken down into three dimensions of power, labour and cathexis. As personal relationships – marriage and de facto - are the vehicle that this study uses to investigate gender practices, this chapter puts the model to work and examines the literature around marriage and relationships. It discusses the key patterns observed by researchers within the dynamics of relationships and discusses the main ways in which researchers have explained the dynamics.

3.1 Power

In the post-war decades, there was a flurry of studies across the Western world that identified a shift in the organisation of marriage. Researchers described a shift from patriarchal power to greater symmetry in gender relations. In particular, these writers – whom I have referred to as the progress school - described a context of greater partnership. The ideology of partnership implied that marriage is a coming together of two individuals each with distinctive things to offer who engage in joint activities as a team (Finch, 1983: 146-7). The emphasis of this new arrangement focused on cooperation (Bell and Newbury, 1976: 157) and companionship and intimacy in family relations (Burgess and Locke 1945).

In a 1945 landmark study, the US sociologists Edward Burgess and Harvey J. Locke announced that the family had changed its form from one ideal type to another, from ‘institution to companionship’. The institutional family was one where:

its unity would be determined entirely by social pressure impinging upon family members. The powerful sanctions of mores, religion, law and practicality required complete subordination of individual members to the authority of the patriarch.
By comparison the modern American family which was emerging in 1945 was characterised by companionship, ‘where the unity of the family developed out of mutual affection and intimate association of husband and wife and parents and children’. According to Burgess and Locke increasing companionship undermined patriarchal domination, replacing it with a more democratic process (1945:27).

In Australia during the 1950s the sociologist Harold Fallding described similar evidence of a shift away from patriarchal family relations. Fallding conducted in-depth interviews with Sydney couples about their marriages. He found that the majority of couples accepted the division of breadwinner and housewife as natural, in turn justifying the authority of men:

This was a context where male authority was accepted as natural and there was no forced domination. These marriages were characterised by gendered roles where the wife was left to organise the household activities and supervise the children’s activities. Financial considerations and decision-making was the reserve right of the father. This context was underpinned by a belief that authority was a right that went with the acceptance of responsibility for earning the income (1957: 64).

In contrast Fallding described a small minority of the couples who rejected the patriarchal structure of marriage, viewing gender hierarchy as ‘repugnant’. These couples held a different view about how decision-making and domestic labour should be allocated, structured around the idea of negotiation. Fallding called these marriages ‘partnership’ marriages. Yet the majority of the partnership marriages were only partnerships at an ideological level. The majority of the couples reverted to a traditional structure in practice, which meant that there was little effective difference between the ‘patriarchal’ marriages and the couples who reverted to patriarchy. The couples who attempted to put partnership into practice found themselves in conflict, with habitual quarrelling between husband and wife. Fallding labelled these marriages as unstable because the couples were in chronic disagreement:

This group lacked both the precise consensus and the clearly marked areas of separate control for mother and father found in the first group. The core
responsibilities that fell to each parent were not, in fact, dissimilar from the arrangement in patriarchy. Partnership posed a problem for this group because negotiation brought conflict rather than equality and harmony (1957: 70).

In another US study (1960), Robert Blood and Donald Wolfe interviewed 900 married women in Buffalo, New York, about decision-making in their marriages. The women in their study described a high level of participation in decision-making. As a result the researchers declared that ‘patriarchy was dead’ (1960: 23). They claimed that the American family had changed its authority pattern from one of patriarchal male dominance to a new form they called ‘equalitarian’. Unlike the patriarchal past, wives expected to participate in the family decision making, although the researchers admitted that the balance of power fell slightly in the husbands’ direction (1960: 23).

In the 1960s, the US sociologist Dan Adler applied Blood and Wolfe’s framework to the Australian context. Following a functionalist framework, Adler interviewed 1525 Australian children in five states about the operation of their parent’s marriage. Adler compared his results with data from Mexico and the United States, and found that Australian mothers made more decisions and carried out more activities. He coined the term ‘matriduxy’ to denote women’s ‘powerful leadership functions’ and concluded that the notion of male dominance in the Australian family was a myth (1965:133).

The high watermark of the progress account came in the early 1970s when the British sociologists Michael Young and Peter Wilmot announced that the family had become more ‘symmetrical’. The researchers had observed these changes over a quarter of a century in various social contexts. They argued that the old patriarchal organisation of family life was giving way to more symmetrical relations. In conjunction with the redefinition of roles in marriage, power relations and decision-making had become more shared (1973: 32).

Over subsequent decades, a variety of surveys demonstrated a general shift in attitudes concerning marital roles. In the Australian context, for example, Helen Glezer observed that between 1971 and 1991 there had been a substantial shift in women’s
attitude to decision-making in the home. In her 1971 study, Helen Glezer found that 44 per cent of women largely agreed that decision-making was the prerogative of men. By 1991, Edgar and Glezer found that this percentage has fallen to only eight percent. In contrast to Fallding’s study of the late 1950s where the majority of couples accepted male authority as natural, marriages framed in terms of partnership were now mainstream (Gilding, 1997: 174).

From the 1970s, some sociologists adopted a conflict perspective, developing a more critical and pessimistic account of power relations in Australian marriages. These writers generally failed to see the changes described by those arguing for progress in gender relations. On the contrary, they described more continuity and resistance among men. The critical school emphasised four main points in their critique of the progress perspective.

First, the critical school critiqued the methodologies used in the studies of the 1950s and 1960s. This point is important and warrants close attention. The feminist Constantina Safilios-Rothschild argued that the findings of the studies of the 1950s and 1960s were questionable due to their simplistic measurement of power. In fact, Safilios-Rothschild argued that the measurement of marital power by Blood and Wolfe was ‘biased in the favour of egalitarianism’. This was achieved by not weighing decisions in terms of importance and ‘discounting certain decisions quite arbitrarily’ (1969: 294). Safilios-Rothschild argued that to improve the validity and comprehensiveness of the study of power in marriage, researchers needed to attend to three important issues. First, they needed to draw a distinction between different types of decisions on the basis of perceived importance; second, they needed to know who made the important decisions; and third, they needed to know how often the important decisions were made (1969: 295). She argued that husbands most likely made less of the decisions, but they were the important ones. She concluded that on this basis men exercised ‘orchestration power’, while women largely exercised ‘implementation power’.
Orchestration power referred to a family member’s ability to make important but usually infrequent decisions, that did not take much of the decision-maker’s time but which determined the lifestyle of the couple and children. It included the ability to delegate to the spouse decisions that were of minor importance but frequently time consuming. Implementation power was exercised by putting into action the decisions of the partner with the orchestration power (1976: 359).

Similarly, in the mid 1970s Lois Bryson criticised Adler’s study for its methodology. She observed that Adler’s claim of ‘matriduxy’ was inaccurate in that it carried the connotation of women having significant power and playing a key role in family decisions. Bryson emphasised that this conclusion was simplistic as it took no account of the context within which families operated, taking her cue from Safilios-Rothschild (1985: 87). Moreover, she criticised Adler’s study for using the responses of twelve-year olds about decision-making to assess power in the family. Such information, Bryson observed, was likely to reflect the children’s interaction with parents over issues of concern to the children that would not have been issues of central concern to the parents.

The second criticism advanced by the critical school centred on attitudes and beliefs. In spite of the surveys that showed attitudes about gender relations had changed, researchers found that in particular social contexts men had not changed their views about gender relations. Many men continued to believe in the legitimacy of patriarchal relations. Claire Williams, for example, gathered data on working class couples in a northern Queensland mining town in the mid 1970s and found little evidence of partnership and equality among the couples she studied. She observed that men and women had different views about the place of decision-making in their marriages. More wives than husbands believed that the couple should decide together the nature of the arrangements of who should earn the family income: ‘The women, much more than men, had expectations of egalitarian decision-making in their relationships’ (1981: 149). Williams stressed that the husbands were more likely to hold patriarchal views. Almost half the men in her study believed that it was their prerogative to decide whether or not the wife should enter the paid workforce (1981: 149). Williams concluded:
While the bulk of women were moving towards a more egalitarian view of sex roles, the bulk of the men linger in the privileged patriarchal sector of male rights in the home with an economically dependent wife. Companionship norms in marriage mislead women into regarding marriage as an egalitarian institution when, in real terms, this is illusory (Williams, 1981: 133).

Third, in spite of shifting attitudes towards egalitarianism, practice remained largely patriarchal. In the UK, Stephen Edgell (1980) examined decision-making and the division of housework and child-care in the marriages of 38 men engaged in professional or managerial work. Edgell noted Safilios-Rothschild’s criticisms of studies of domestic power and differentiated between the perceived importance of decisions, the frequency of decisions and who made the decisions. Edgell remarked that there was a striking degree of consensus about what were important decisions, what were not, and what constituted importance. He reported that exactly half the decisions he inquired about were taken jointly. However, he explained that husbands tended to dominate the more important decisions. In 70 percent of cases, the husbands had overall control of finances: ‘in all families wives usually made decisions that the couple perceived as minor which were also those that involved the least expenditure of money’. Edgell concluded:

In contrast to certain optimistic social theorists who claim that the nineteenth century patriarchal family has been superseded by a more ‘democratic’ type, the present study provides abundant evidence of the survival of patriarchalism (1980: 68).

Similarly, Ken Dempsey described similar findings among men and women in both rural and urban studies in Australia in the 1980s (1997). He explained that 87 percent of the men in the rural study described egalitarian beliefs about decision-making. Among the Melbourne sample, which was largely middle class, Dempsey reported that 93 percent of men expressed views couched in terms of partnership. Generally couples expressed the idea that decision-making should be a ‘joint venture’ between husbands and wives or that both men and women should have an ‘equal say in decision-making’ (1997: 98). The majority of couples claimed that joint decision-making occurred in practice. Yet Dempsey warned that terms such as ‘joint’ and ‘an equal say in decision-making’ were misleading. The terms often meant that a partner’s point of view was
canvassed but the partner’s approval was not required. Joint decision-making meant gaining the partner’s approval for a decision that had already been made. Joint was also interpreted to mean that each partner took decisions within their own sphere. Respondents who took this view usually went on to say that wives should make decisions about housework and childcare, and husbands should make decisions about their work or business (1997:98).

Dempsey argued that the proportion of couples claiming that major decisions were jointly made was inflated. He stressed that ‘the long-standing practice of men mainly exercising orchestration power and their wives implementation power persisted’; and further, ‘research about patterns of decision-making both in Australia and overseas shows that not much has changed in recent years’ (1997: 97). Dempsey emphasised that probably the greatest change in relations between husbands and wives over the past thirty to forty years was in attitude toward patriarchal control (1997: 111).

A fourth criticism advanced by the critical school of the symmetrical family paradigm was that the account ignored the important issues of coercion and violence in the family. Jocelyn Scutt, for example, argued that beneath the apparent contentment in marriage there was an ugly side that was increasingly apparent:

Today, wife beating cannot be ignored. It takes its place on the agenda of the socially concerned, along with child abuse, rape in marriage, marital murder and incest. At last, crimes occurring within the hallowed grounds of the family are being talked about by governments, by church groups and, most importantly, by the victims themselves (1983: 2).

There is plenty of evidence that physical coercion does play a part in a significant minority of marriages. In the US Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz estimated that domestic violence occurred in one in eight marriages. In the UK, Marsden calculated that serious violence occurred in five per cent of marriages (Allen and Crow, 2001: 108). In Australia, a 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics study on women’s safety in Australia, reported that eight percent of women with partners experienced physical violence (Dempsey, 1997; 223). Jocelyn Scutt suggested that the figure maybe higher:
A random sample in Canberra estimated that about 15 percent of married women – 6674 of 44,523 - living in the Australian Capital Territory at that time had suffered physical abuse from their husbands (1990: 79).

Many studies of domestic violence concluded that domestic violence was frequently a means by which particular husbands exercised a high degree of control over their wives. Such violence was neither isolated nor haphazard, but used systematically by husbands as a means of enforcing their will (Allen and Crow: 2001: 109).

Researchers of power relations in marriage theorised the inequality in those marriages in a number of ways. For example, Claire Williams explained the inequality among the men and women she studied in terms of historically developed sex roles. Williams contended that inequality had become institutionalised for women as society changed from feudal to industrial and gendered roles were established. This historical development provided men with economic resources not available to women and largely guaranteed women’s subordination and subservience:

The historically determined essence of patriarchy turns upon the biological differences which were culturally and politically interpreted in numerous ways in various societies, but with the universal outcome that the female sex roles were accorded less power than those of the male (1981: 26).

Similarly, Stephen Edgell, explained the enduring inequality in terms of social roles supported by a corresponding ideology, hegemonic in character and difficult to challenge. In Edgell’s words:

to a large extent the power to control one’s own life, and the lives of others, even against their will, accrues ‘automatically’ to the husband breadwinner. The tendency to regard the husband’s power in certain areas of family life as legitimate merely transforms it into authority. Further, the combination of the relatively permanent, full-time presence of the husband/father in the economic division of labour outside the home, plus the tendency for the wife/mother to be mainly responsible for the home and children, irrespective of whether or not she participates in the paid work-force, seems to be the origin of the process that led to husband domination. Once this pattern of sex-role differentiation has been
established and is widely supported ideologically, the socio-economic dependence of married women on their husbands is virtually assured (1980: 70).

Dempsey explained women’s subordination in his rural study on the basis of men’s economic advantage and ideological hegemony. Dempsey argued that men gained much of their power to delegate domestic labour and childcare to women from their dominance of paid work and from economic resources that resulted from this dominance: In ‘Smalltown’ there were two job markets, one male and one female. Men were well represented in the higher status and higher paying ‘male’ jobs, while women were well represented in semiskilled or unskilled ‘female’ work. Men’s considerable ability to usurp the domestic and social skills of women to facilitate their leisure and status seeking activities also flowed in large measure from their superior access to better-paid jobs. Economic advantage was supported by the ability of the men to convince the women that their views about the organisation of the family were right and appropriate (1992: 23).

Feminist research resulted in a much more pessimistic view of power relations in the family. By the same token it suggested some kind of crisis around domestic power, opening up new opportunities for change and transformation. This point was highlighted by Arlie Hochschild’s in her study of domestic arrangements in American families (1989). She observed that where working-class men’s hours of paid work were reduced to part-time or they became unemployed, the family often became reliant on the wife’s wage for survival. The upshot was that traditional beliefs and patterns of authority were re-evaluated and reorganised (1989: 73).

In more general terms, Connell emphasised that changing social and economic conditions could open up new possibilities for equality in domestic gender relations. Connell argued that traditional patterns of authority could be challenged when men failed to develop sufficient economic resources. In a chapter describing what he referred to as ‘protest masculinity’, concerning the lives of men on the margins of the labour market, Connell found prospects for change in the men’s life histories. These were ‘the economic logic that underpins egalitarian households, the personal experience of women’s strength, and the interest that several of the men have in children’ (1995: 118).
3.2 Labour

Married women’s paid labour patterns have changed dramatically over the past forty years. In Australia between 1960 and 1998 the percentage of married women in the paid workforce increased from 17 per cent to 65 percent (Dempsey, 1997: 51; Wilson, Pech and Bates, 1999: 3). Those holding a progressive view about family relations contended that women’s increased paid-work participation would mean that domestic labour arrangements would become more equitable (Young and Wilmot, 1973; Hood 1983: Ferre, 1991).

Young and Wilmot, for example, observed that the female serviced family was being replaced by a more symmetrical arrangement. In the past families were characterised by role segregation. The researchers argued, ‘All that has changed now’. Wives were working outside the home in much less of a man’s world than used to be the case. Traditional roles were breaking down, promoting greater sharing in the domestic division of labour. Marital symmetry would be enhanced by women’s increased participation in part-time work:

If women go out to work, and if in that way their roles are not different from those of men, so much more difficult is it to preserve segregation in their roles at home. If they also earn money, so much more difficult is it for men to maintain a rigid division of labour between financial responsibilities and pleasures of the sexes (Young and Wilmot, 1973: 121).

Scholars from the progress school contended that the working wife’s financial contribution to the household budget would give her additional leverage or bargaining power to ensure that her husband would increase his share of the household labour and childcare. In close connection, husbands’ involvement would increase because it was unfair for wives to shoulder the burden of paid and unpaid work (Bronson and Lamb, cited in Dempsey 1997: 51).

These arguments were backed up by evidence from surveys of people’s attitudes to domestic labour. A number of surveys confirmed shifting beliefs about the sharing of
domestic labour. For example, in 1984 Helen Glezer reported that 77 percent of wives and 81 per cent of husbands agreed with the statement, ‘husbands should regularly help with the housework’ (Glezer, 1984: 242). In the early 1990s Michael Bittman and Frances Lovejoy found that only two of the 65 men participating in their study disagreed strongly with the statement, ‘men should do an equal amount of work in the home’ and more than four out of five men expressed agreement with this statement (1993: 307). When such findings are compared with those from studies conducted in the 1950s and 1960s it appears that there has been a marked shift from traditional to egalitarian attitudes among Australian men and women.

Notwithstanding the large scale change reported by the general surveys, there is now a body of research which shows that few men are really sharing the traditional domestic load. These findings are widespread across the Western world (Oakley, 1974; Edgell, 1980; Hochschild, 1989; Baxter, Lynch, Gibson and Blosse, 1990; Bittman, 1991; Bittman and Lovejoy, 1993; Dempsey, 1997: 25). In contrast to the progress school, conflict researchers contended that the picture of growing equality in domestic labour was far from the broad reality. Both Australian and overseas research showed that often the help provided by husbands only marginally reduced their wives’ overall workload. Men mainly helped with more attractive jobs. Their assistance probably did not reduce at all the number of unattractive jobs the wives performed (Dempsey, 1997: 32).

Anne Oakley’s (1974a) pioneering study of domestic labour, The Sociology of Housework described how women carried a large burden in their responsibility for domestic labour. Oakley observed that men largely involved themselves in the more pleasant aspects of domestic labour rather than the more tedious and menial tasks. Stephen Edgell, another British researcher, confirmed Oakley’s findings, concluding that ‘the overwhelming evidence of conjugal role segregation could be said to reflect the profound influence of the sexual division of labour in which men are typically responsible for the bread-winning role and women for homemaking’ (1980: 36).
In the US (1989), the feminist Arlie Hochschild studied the division of labour in the lives of American families as a participant observer. Hochschild called her study *The Second Shift*. The title described women’s movement into the paid workforce while still retaining the responsibility for the domestic division of labour. Despite the new responsibilities that many women had taken on outside the home, their new workload outside the home was not being balanced by an increased contribution by their husbands inside the home. The key issue in the rising inequality was the gendered division between ‘female responsibility’ and ‘male help’. Hochschild emphasised that in spite of changing patterns of paid labour women continued to find themselves responsible for domestic labour and their partners largely played the ‘helper’ role. Men generally helped with a task rather than taking full or shared responsibility for it.

Local researchers identified a similar pattern in Australia (Baxter, Gibson and Lynch-Blosse, 1990; Bittman 1991, Bittman and Lovejoy, 1997: Dempsey 1992, 1997). For example, Baxter, Gibson and Lynch-Blosse conducted a quantitative study using a random sample of 2000 couples. They concluded from their study that there was very little change in the allocation of tasks between husbands and wives, reflecting a very traditional division of labour:

Regardless of the way in which societal perceptions change, women continue to be engaged for much of their lives in two worlds of work – one is the world of paid labour and the second is of unpaid domestic responsibilities. Married women, in the majority of cases, still bear the brunt, if not the entirety, of domestic and parental responsibilities. It is women’s work, and not men’s, that is fitted around those private sphere responsibilities, and it is women who disproportionately bear the costs in terms of poorer jobs, limited career opportunities and lower incomes (1990: 93).

Similarly, Michael Bittman observed that women continued to remain responsible for domestic labour. Bittman analysed time-use data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). He pointed out that the increase in women’s paid work was not balanced by an increase in their partners’ domestic labour. Moreover, such male contributions to domestic labour as occurred tended to be in ‘masculine’ tasks associated
with home improvements or maintenance. Bittman concluded that women faced a double burden:

These responsibilities have a significant impact on the extent to which women are able to participate in the paid labour force. While the majority of women are spending a larger proportion of their lives in the paid labour force, many still take breaks in order to look after children; many are in part-time work; and many deal daily with a double burden of paid and unpaid work (Bittman, 1991: 1).

Ken Dempsey found little evidence of men sharing the domestic load with their partners in both of his studies in rural Victoria in the 1980s and early 1990s. In the 1992 rural study Dempsey described widespread role segregation, where domestic labour was largely the responsibility of women. In his study in the mid-1990s of Melbourne couples, mostly middle class, Dempsey reached similar findings. Dempsey described how in the majority of cases women mainly carried out domestic tasks, such as doing the laundry (85 percent), cleaning the bathroom (83 percent), and vacuuming the house (60 percent). Women were receiving more help with food associated tasks, but still assumed the greater responsibility. Men performed 40 percent of the cooking, shopping and doing the dishes (1997: 29). Dempsey noted that among the urban sample, which was largely middle class, the long-standing belief by researchers that men in the middle classes were participating in a greater share of domestic labour was not supported.

Ken Dempsey agreed with Hochschild, emphasising the distinction between helping with a task and taking responsibility for a task. Having full responsibility for the household routine was very different from doing work only when one was asked to help:

The person who takes responsibility knows the task has to be performed and that it is her job to ensure that it is performed. She must carry it out if no one else will. By contrast, the person who helps does not own the task, he has to be made aware that the task needs to be carried out, and it will probably be necessary to ask him to perform the task. Ultimately, it is someone else’s responsibility to see that the task is carried out if he is unavailable to assist or withdraws his assistance (1997: 27).
According to Dempsey, the key issue around domestic labour concerned the issue of agency, that is, the degree to which women were prepared to push for change in domestic labour in conjunction with the extent to which their partners were resistant to such change. Dempsey argued that the women in his study were only looking for help rather than sharing responsibility. In Dempsey’s words:

Seeking help does not constitute a serious challenge to the way things have been traditionally done whereas pressuring husbands to share responsibility is tantamount to asking for a change in the ground rules for behaviour (1997: 172).

Dempsey proposed that most of the wives in his study were cautious or ambivalent about pressing for change. The women were cautious about pressing for change because they wanted to preserve their marriages and ideally the harmony of those marriages. Dempsey observed that the women knew that if the marriages broke down their standard of living and that of their children would be jeopardised. While the majority of women espoused egalitarian ideals, radical change would not have been compatible with the emphasis they placed on homemaking and mothering (1997: 185).

Closely connected to women’s attempts for change in the division of labour was their partner’s resistance to such change. Researchers consistently noted the great resistance among men to greater participation in domestic labour (Dempsey, 1992, 1997; Bittman and Lovejoy, 1997). For example, Dempsey described how many of the women in his study gave up pressing for change because of their repeated failure to make headway in dealing with their husbands. They had essentially resigned themselves to not achieving any significant change in the future. In attempting to explain why the women desisted from pressing for change in marriage, Dempsey proposed that the men used a range of strategies to defer, stall or excuse themselves from greater participation in the division of labour. The men waited to be asked to participate or help. They ignored their wives’ requests. They provided sympathetic concern but failed to provide practical assistance. They promised help but failed to deliver. Finally, many of the men ‘mucked up’ the job so as not to be asked to do it again. These tactics were largely successful.
Researchers of domestic labour have attempted to explain the inequality and resistance to change in a number of ways. The feminist researcher Arlie Hochschild explained that men and women could simultaneously hold both progressive and egalitarian beliefs. Accordingly the personal beliefs of men and women about family life were not internally consistent. Rather than their behaviour being a manifestation of a coherent belief system, their behaviour often oscillated back and forth between an egalitarian and traditional position (1989: 190-1). So for example, while a wife consciously embraced egalitarian ideals, her relationship with her husband could also be influenced by traditional ideals that she had assimilated early in life. Similarly, although men often espoused egalitarian beliefs these were often contradicted by deeply held feelings about the roles of men and women, learned earlier in life.

Hochschild applied the concept ‘emotion work’ to explain what women do when their expectations are not met in their relationships. She explained that couples (and especially women) come to live a ‘family myth’, a mild delusional system which obscures women’s real resentment at men’s failure to assume their fair share of housework and childcare. Hochschild argued that if women try to fight their husbands openly, women face the alternatives of perpetual conflict, the upheaval of divorce or retreat into depression. In the face of husbands’ manifestly selfish behaviour, living the family myth by performing emotion work permits women to hold onto contradictory views on feminism, egalitarian relationships and respect for their husbands (1989: 205).

Kenneth Dempsey emphasised the pervasive and enduring influence of ‘tradition’. Tradition referred to the traditional beliefs about the roles and capacities of men and women. Dempsey explained that many men and women believed that it was more natural for women to take of care of children, especially in the first months of life, and that the ‘good mother’ was the fulltime mother. Many women believed that men lacked the temperament and natural nurturing skills to carry out effectively much of the caring and routine work women perform at home. Wives, like their husbands, often had a strong attachment to traditional values and a traditional femininity even though their thoughts and feelings were influenced by egalitarian ideals. The resulting ambivalence reduced the
chance of change (1997: 215). Traditional ideologies communicated messages and images that encouraged women, whatever their relationship to the paid workforce, to give a high priority to caring goals. Such ideologies equally encouraged men to compete with other men in recreational and work activities, providing the basis for self esteem (1997: 217).

### 3.3 Cathexis

Cathexis concerns attachment, that is, the emotional or intimate aspects of relationships. Although sociologists have given great attention to the study of emotional life (Hochschild, 1983, Denzin, 1984, Harre, 1986, Kemptor 1990, Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault and Benton, 1992, Wierzbicka, 1994), its application to relationships – marriage and defacto – has long been neglected and left to social psychologists. In the words of the sociologists Jean Duncombe and Dennis Marsden:

Research on the private sphere of the family has recently focused on quantifying instrumental aspects of relationships, such as financial management, the domestic division of labour and informal care. However, although fruitful, these approaches neglect the expressive or emotional; particularly the experiences of love and intimacy, which people say they regard as the key element in their personal relationships (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993: 221).

Following this logic some researchers have highlighted the importance of the dimension of attachment in relationships. They emphasised that although conflict and disagreements over housework, childcare and leisure were important, they did not rival in perceived significance such expressive factors as loss of companionship or loss of sense of closeness, lack of sufficient common interests, or over-commitment to work (Eells and O’Flaherty, 1996: Dempsey, 1997).

There is little Australian survey evidence concerning the dimension of attachment in marriage although there is some research from the US and the UK. The progress account of family change suggested that marriage had shifted from an economic basis to one based on expressive qualities. In Burgess and Locke’s terms, it had altered from ‘an
in institutional form to one of companionship’ (1945; 27). Similarly, Young and Wilmot claimed that married life had become more home centred and focused on the couple’s common interests. More recently, Anthony Giddens described how the ‘pure relationship’ was emerging in Western societies. Key amongst the characteristics of the pure relationship was the eradication of the internal division of labour. Giddens emphasised that the pure relationship must be seen as a ‘transactional negotiation of personal ties by equals’. Further, a bond of intimacy becomes a defining characteristic of such relationships. In turn, relationships become increasingly reliant on the emotional rewards and satisfactions that they provided (1992: 87).

In contrast to these arguments, most researchers described widespread conflict in the majority of relationships on the dimension of cathexis. A consistent finding in the British and US studies was that while men reported being relatively content with the level of attachment that they had with their partners, women were not. The American social psychologist, Lillian Rubin, conducted a groundbreaking study of emotional attachment in 1983 in which she described widespread dissatisfaction among women in relation to attachment. Rubin called her study *Intimate Strangers*, a term she coined to describe the contradiction between living closely with someone and feeling emotionally distant from them. Similarly, another social psychologist, Shere Hite, conducted non-random interviews with 4500 women about the state of their relationships in 1987. She emphasised that most women were unhappy about the dimension of cathexis in their relationships. Of respondents, 64 percent reported that the love they received from their partners was not satisfying (1987: 86), and 95 percent wanted to make changes to their relationships. In Hite words ‘this study shows that there is widespread dissatisfaction among women about their love relationships’ (1987:133).

Researchers in this area consistently emphasised the high degree of incompatibility between men and women in their relationships. The incompatibility revolved around a number of issues. First, there was the place of the relationship in men and women’s lives. The researchers described how women believed that they prioritised their relationship while their partners prioritised their work lives. Women consistently
described how men’s investment in their careers undermined or compromised the bond they had with their partners. (Hite 1987; Duncombe and Marsden 1993, 1995; Kingma 1993). Seventy-four percent of women in Hite’s study emphasised that men did not put their relationship first in their lives. They believed that men put their careers first. Careers were more important to them and where they gained most admiration (1987: 60).

Similarly, sociologists Duncombe and Marsden - in a British study entitled *Whinging Women and Workaholics* – described how women felt deserted by their male partners who gave top priority to work, working long hours or bringing work home with them (1993: 225).

In close connection, Duncombe and Marsden contended that men failed to assume their fair share of emotional responsibility in the private sphere. The women in their study reported that their partners seemed to deny their physical or emotional responsibilities, treating their children as belonging to their wives alone (1993: 226).

Similarly, in an Australian study of 168 men in counselling after separation, Peter Jordan observed that many of the husbands had handed over responsibility for making the marriage work to their wives. The men had assumed little responsibility for making the relationship work and were accordingly unaware of the factors holding the marriage together (Jordan, 1988; 82).

Incompatibility was closely connected to what men and women expected their relationships to provide for them. Researchers observed that men and women had very different expectations about attachment and different ideas about togetherness. For example, British sociologists Penny Mansfield and Jean Collard’s study of 60 newly-wed working-class couples in Britain found that men were looking for a life in common with their wives, a home life, a physical and psychological base; somewhere from which to set out and return. In contrast, the wives wanted ‘a life in common with an empathetic partner … a close exchange of intimacy which would make them feel valued as a person, not just a wife’ (1988:87). Similarly, Catherine Kolher-Reissman - in an American qualitative study of men’s and women’s stories of their divorces (1990) - observed that a common explanation for divorce in the accounts of both the women and men she studied
was that they had ‘nothing in common’ with their spouses. Women thought that companionship in marriage meant ‘to do things together’. Women’s ideas of what these joint activities ought to be differed markedly from men’s ideas. The women tended to find that male leisure pursuits got in the way of doing things together. Reissman observed that it was ‘the male orientated nature of men’s interests that exclude women’. Women in professional occupations complained less than did poorer women about the lack of shared leisure ‘but even here some women recall two worlds of sex-typed leisure’ (1990: 28).

In Australia, Claire Williams’ study of working-class marriages found that the women had greater desire for companionship than did their husbands. The women found themselves competing with the loyalty of their husbands to their male friendship cliques. Many of the wives spent considerable effort trying to lure or coerce their husband away from the attractions of the male clique: ‘these men were clearly fighting the wife’s expectations of mixed sex companionship’ (1981: 138).

Incompatibility was closely related to the fact that men and women inhabited gendered, psychological worlds. Kolher-Reissman reported that men and women often had different meanings for similar words. For example, she reported that both men and women used the phrase ‘lack of communication’ to explain why they divorced. For women this meant a high level of personal disclosure and expression of feelings:

In doing so women are referring to a special kind of emotional intimacy: ‘feeling really in touch’, ‘communicating deeply and closely’, ‘inner connectedness’, ‘warmth and sharing’, ‘getting down to gut feelings’ (1990: 36).

In contrast, men’s definitions involved less talk and more action. Men wanted a variety of physical and other concrete demonstrations of intimacy, for example ‘to be greeted at the door by a wife with open arms’. These themes recurred with remarkable regularity, particularly in the accounts of working-class men. Often men’s expectations were unidirectional. In exchange for emotional support, men expected to support their wives financially. This was reciprocity as many men understood it (1990: 36).
Similarly, Deborah Tannen studied men’s and women’s interaction patterns. As a result of her analysis she argued that their styles of interactions were so different that they represented a cultural divide. She observed that men largely operated from a world of ‘status and independence’, while women operated in a framework of ‘communication’ (1990: 143). Francesca Cancian stressed that women saw love in terms of verbal expressions of affection and feelings, along with tender caresses. Men put a premium on not expressing emotions and tended to be more isolated. Men’s ways of showing love meant spending time together, giving practical help, doing things together and sex. Thus each partner often failed to appreciate the type of love provided (Cancian, 1987: 78).

Researchers consistently observed that women claimed that they provided emotional support for their partners which was not reciprocated. Hite, for example, observed that women often described feeling that they were the ones who were expressive, empathetic, understanding and tender to their husbands, but their partners failed to reciprocate by being equally intimate, particularly by expressing thoughts and feelings (Hite, 1987: 87).

Catherine Kolher-Reissman observed that two-thirds of the women in her study complained that they did not get the kind of ‘emotional intimacy’ they expected from their husbands. ‘Women expected reciprocity in verbal exchanges, and as they look back on their marriages, too often they saw one-way love’ (1990: 24). Similarly Mansfield and Collard described how the wives in their study felt that they were the ones who reassured and were understanding and tender to their husbands, but their husbands failed to reciprocate by being equally intimate and open in disclosing (1988: 178-9).

Incompatibility arose partly from different skill levels on this dimension (Rubin, 1983; Hite: 1987; Cancian, 1987; Kolher-Reissman, 1990). Francesca Cancian contended that women were better able to talk about and express their feelings. Many of the researchers observed that a fundamental part of male interaction involved non-disclosure on a personal level. In a British study the sociologists Brannen and Collard (1982) studied couples seeking help for marital problems. The researchers found that major
disagreements arose from women feeling that they had not got a ‘companionate marriage’ because of their husbands’ unwillingness or incapacity to disclose. Of the 22 men in the study, 18 were categorised as having a negative attitude towards disclosure, whereas only 7 of the 26 women had this attitude. Overall, the men’s accounts of their attitudes and feelings about revealing private areas of the self to others suggested that:

for many of the men, non-disclosure was a central, unchanging, and even fervent part of their identities. In many cases men’s comments were tempered by references to deep-seated feelings of being unable, unwilling, or not needing to communicate personal troubles to other people. Frequently, these attitudes to self-disclosure seemed to be sanctioned and sustained by a sense of inner precariousness or insecurity about the possible consequences of their weaknesses and failings becoming known to others. Some men seemed to fear they might become stigmatised persons, that they would risk serious loss of status, dignity or self-esteem. (1982: 33-4).

The researchers emphasised that men had a different view of the place of disclosure. Mansfield and Collard highlighted that for men, problem solving was the main reason, if not the sole purpose of disclosing to another person: ‘The point of any conversation or talking about feelings is in order to gain advice or information’ (1988: 172). When Duncombe and Marsden questioned the men in their study about their feelings, the respondents tended to argue that ‘they did have feelings, but their feelings were theirs and not to be discussed’. Some of the men felt confused about the contradictory demands of work and coupledom. A few of the men even admitted that their partners’ views were justified, but they didn’t know how to respond to their wives’ demands or complaints. Most of the men saw themselves as working for the family and felt women’s emotional demands (as the men thought of them) to be unreasonable, undermining, disloyal and even threatening (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993:228).

Duncombe and Marsden observed that these different ideas, attitudes and approaches had serious consequences. On the whole, men failed to understand what it was that women wanted out of the process of disclosure. This context of misunderstanding often produced frustration with the result ‘that women would weep and men would be reduced to that baffled question, “What do you want me to say?”’ (1993:
Lillian Rubin reported that a number of men in her study resented having to try and communicate with women in a way that was satisfactory to their partners. One man said:

> The whole goddam business of what they are calling intimacy bugs the hell out of me. I never know what you women mean when you talk about it. Karen complains that I don’t talk to her, but it’s not talk that she wants, it’s some other damn thing, only I don’t know what the hell it is. Feelings, she keeps asking for. So what am I supposed to do if I don’t have any to give her or [anything] to talk about, just because she decides it’s time to talk about feelings? Tell me, will you: maybe we can get some peace around here (Rubin, 1983: 66).

Researchers in this area have attempted to explain the asymmetry and incompatibility in a range of ways. Shere Hite explained these problems in terms of a historical ideology of gender. Historical ideologies encouraged men and women to construct identities that were incompatible with one another. In particular Hite observed in her study *The Hite Report on Male Sexuality* (1981) that many men described being brought up to avoid discussing their emotional lives, and experienced surprise and emotional confusion when they did fall in love. In her words: ‘many men pictured a really “masculine” man as being in control of his emotions, rational and objective above all else, to the extent that they actually felt uncomfortable being in love’ (1981; 75). Moreover, men wanted love but were also ambivalent about it. Hite suggested that real closeness is a ‘threatening state that most men can’t afford’. Men learnt that a ‘real man’

> never completely lets down his guard or loses control of a situation; a man must continually assert his independence or dominance. Real closeness is forbidden for men because it can make men vulnerable (1987: 139).

Catherine Kolher-Reissman explained the asymmetry she described in her study largely as a result of culture and socialisation. On account of socialisation, men were unequipped for the emotional dimension of their relationships:

> At the same time the culture provides for men’s material advantage, it does not provide for their emotional development in certain key respects. The result for individual men is that they are deprived of a language for their feelings. Talking about emotions is the domain of women (Kolher-Reissman, 1990:160).
Duncombe and Marsden argued that gender asymmetry in the realm of cathexis needed to be linked to other dimensions of relationships. They argued that women played an important role in the continuation of gender inequality and asymmetry in all areas of their relationships. The researchers claimed that women colluded with male power. Women actively participated in the reproduction of a ‘false consciousness’ that obscured their exploitation. The researchers drew upon Hochschild’s notion of ‘emotion work’ to explain how the false consciousness was produced. Women performed ‘emotion work’ upon themselves when their marriages failed to meet their expectations; that is, women largely lied to themselves that their situations were better than they were. Duncombe and Marsden explained women’s preparedness to undertake such emotion work in terms of: ‘a complex balance of perceived financial dependency, emotional needs and sexual attraction’ (1995: 162). Further, the ‘emotional power’ which sustains the relationship may operate through a range of ideologies of feeling, such as familism and co-parenting and domesticity (the family myth); it is maintained notwithstanding powerful evidence to the contrary (1995: 162).

Summary

Connell’s model of gender relations allows us to view research around marriage and relationships in a complete rather than fragmented way. The discussion showed that although the great majority of men and women say that they desire partnership and equality in their relationships, they often struggle to achieve it. Men often voiced a belief in the concept of partnership, but did not generally back up their beliefs with corresponding behaviour. Moreover, researchers of marriage and relationships describe resistance more often than change among men around gender relations.

On the dimension of power, the review demonstrated that in the 1950s and 60s researchers studying power relations in marriage described a trend away from patriarchal domination of marriage. They claimed that marriages were becoming more equitable and democratic. This, as we have seen is the progress position. This interpretation was questioned in later decades by researchers influenced by feminism. These later
researchers emphasised four main points in their critique of the progress argument. First, the critical school questioned the methodologies of these studies. Second, they stressed that many men, especially prior to the late 1980s, continued to believe in the legitimacy of patriarchy. Third, these scholars argued that in spite of general widespread change in attitudes by the 1980s, behaviour had not changed, and men continued to have greater input into decision-making. Fourth, the earlier studies were criticised because they ignored the issue of coercion and violence in marriage.

The literature review also showed that in spite of changing attitudes about the organisation of relationships, domestic labour was characterised by inequality and largely organised around gender roles. Although more married women were participating in the paid workforce, their husbands were not compensating by increasing their share of domestic labour. Women were left with responsibility for domestic labour while their partners generally ‘helped’ out. Most couples seemed to have different standards of labour, where women’s standards were invariably higher than their partners’ standards. Women were cautious about pressing for change, not wanting to compromise the harmony of the marriages. Meantime, men generally resisted their partners’ requests to increase their participation in domestic.

On the dimension of cathexis, researchers observed that men and women were largely living asymmetrical lives. They described a high degree of incompatibility among the couples they studied. The incompatibility was generally the product of different and gendered expectations, ideas, knowledge and skills. Men and women prioritised the relationships differently. Women felt their partners gave insufficient time to the relationship, instead prioritising careers and individual interests. Men are generally seeking companionship while their partners often described a desire of intimacy in their relationships that men did not want or understand. Women often described partners who were unable to communicate on an emotional level. Intimacy requires a level of personal disclosure with which men were unaccustomed or uncomfortable. The asymmetry and gender differences led to conflict and tension in these relationships.
Researchers adopting a critical position not only describe the dynamics within the relationships they studied but they also try to explain the enduring inequality in them. They employed a variety of theoretical frameworks and concepts to do so. Some drew upon sex-role theory; for example, writers such as Williams, Edgell and Reissman argued that historically constructed gender roles, turning upon biological difference, underpinned men’s behaviour and provided then with social advantages that men were unwilling to give up.

Other writers, such as Dempsey and Hite, viewed the continuity in gender inequality as occurring largely in the realm of gendered ideologies. Men’s and women’s behaviour seemed to be powerfully influenced by widely accepted beliefs about the appropriateness of gender as a way of ordering social life. Other writers such as Hochschild, Duncombe and Marsden argued that family was ‘a mild delusional system’ in which women largely lied themselves about the level of inequality in their marriages and relationships in order to be able to sustain and maintain them.

The research around marriage and relationships appears to have described the dynamics of relationships where men are largely doing hegemonic masculinity. If we are interested in prospects for change we need to find a context where men are distancing themselves from hegemonic masculinity. Accordingly, this study focuses upon a sample of men who are attempting to reform their masculinity and construct counter- hegemonic projects. The following chapter outlines the focus of this study.
Chapter 4

The Current Study

This chapter outlines the study’s point of departure, the research questions and the method employed in this study, including its advantages and disadvantages. Next, it discusses issues to do with sampling and data collection and the ethical considerations for this study. Finally, it describes how data analysis proceeded.

4.1 The point of departure and the research question

This study employs social practice theory as the basis of its investigation. Most research underpinned by social practice theory has focused on ‘hegemonic masculinity’. In contrast, this study investigates the gender practices of men active in the environmental movement, which Connell described as a ‘non-hegemonic’ setting. This study uses the personal relationships of the men to examine gender projects and social practice. The evidence for this study is drawn from the stories provided by the respondents about the men’s social practices across the three dimensions of gender relations.

The key questions of the study are as follows. Is the masculinity of the men active in the environment movement as progressive as Connell described? Are the men practising their masculinity in a way that is non-hegemonic rather hegemonic? Accordingly, are the relationships of these men characterised by equality and intimacy? If so, what are the main influences underpinning gender reconstruction?

4.2 The qualitative method

The research was based on 24 semi-structured interviews that were conducted with men who worked in paid positions for environmental organisations, and another 24 interviews with their female partners. This method had a number of positive aspects. First and
foremost, it allowed the space for respondents to tell their own stories in their own words. It allowed respondents to provide their own accounts of what their relationships involved, and identify issues and concerns that were important to them. Second, the qualitative methodology was advantageous in that it allowed flexibility. It allowed the interviewer to respond to new themes and concepts raised by the respondents. Finally, the method allowed for a complex comparison of stories and issues, in particular the examination of consistencies and inconsistencies between the men and their partners.

The qualitative method does have a number of limitations. First, it is only possible to interview small numbers, making it impossible to generalise. Second, qualitative interviews can often be challenging and invasive, creating difficulties in securing volunteers. Third, interviews can be demanding on people’s time, again creating recruitment problems. Finally, qualitative research often focuses upon very specific samples. As such researchers often need to be cautious in relation to the issue of anonymity.

4.3 The sample

The men interviewed for the study were men who had made a long-term commitment to working for environmental organisations, rather than men who had a shorter-term interest in the movement. This rationale was made on the basis that such men were more likely to highlight R.W. Connell’s arguments in relation to environmental men.

The problem with this approach is that men in paid work for environmental organisations amount to a relatively small pool of potential participants. The combined staff of the Wilderness Society, Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth, World Wide Fund for Nature and Greenpeace amounts to little more than 200 individuals in Australia (Marsh, 2002: 351). Before I completed my research the pool was exhausted in Melbourne. The result was that I had to travel interstate to collect sufficient data. The data were collected between November 1999 and February 2002 in three Australian states, Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales. All the men
lived in urban areas. Sixteen of the men in the sample were from Melbourne, five were from Adelaide, and three were from Sydney.

The majority of the men in this sample, that is 19 of the 24 (82 per cent), worked full-time in various national and state environmental groups. Another two of the men (8 per cent) worked part-time in the environment movement. There was one man who had headed an environmental management committee for ten years and three other men (12 percent) who had represented the environmental movement at a political level for several years.

There were a number of demographic variables that characterised the sample beyond that fact that it was an environmental sample. The majority of the men (22 out of 24, or 92 percent) were between the ages of 25 and 45 (Table 1). The remaining two men were in the 45-55 age range. The women in this study ranged in age from 23 to 47, although the majority were in their 30s and 40s. There was one woman over the age of 45 and three women under the age of 25 years. The men were generally older than their partners. The men’s median age was 36 and the women’s median age was 33.

Table 1: Respondents by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample was predominantly Anglo-Celtic in ethnicity (Table 2). Of the 48 respondents, 40 (83 percent) were of an Anglo-Celtic background. Only three of the men were of European non-English speaking background (NESB). Of the 24 women in the study, 18 (75 percent) were of Anglo-Celtic background. Five of the women were of
European NESB. There was only one participant, a woman, who was of non-European
descent.

Table 2. Respondents by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European NESB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-European NESB</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample was highly educated (Table 3). More men (22 out of 24) than women
(20 out of 24) had a tertiary qualification. However, more of the women (9) than men (3)
had a postgraduate qualification. Given that most men usually marry women with less
education than themselves, the education level of the women is notable.

Table 3: Respondents by Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-graduate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 21 men for whom I was able to gather socio-economic status, 14 (66
percent) described their fathers as professionals, managers, or small business owners. The
other seven men described fathers who worked as shop assistants, tradesmen or labourers.
Of the 24 couples, nine were married and 15 were living together. These relationships ranged in length from two to 23 years. Nine of the couples had been together for between two and five years. Eleven of the couples had been together for between six and ten years. Three of the couples had been together for more than 10 years and two couples had been together for more than 20 years. The median length of the relationships was 7.5 years, but nearly all of the couples had known each for long periods before they began their relationship.

All but four (83 percent) of the men were in full-time employment. Of the 24 women, 15 (62 percent) of the women worked full-time. Six of the women (25 percent) worked part-time, juggling it with motherhood. There were three women (12 percent) who were full-time mothers and homemakers.

There were 10 couples in the study who had children and 14 couples who did not. Of the 14 couples who did not have children, three had decided not to have children. Two of these three women had a child from previous relationship, but the child was not living with the couple. Therefore, of the 24 women in the study there was only one woman who was definite that motherhood would not be part of her life course.

The environmental world is small and close knit. In this context, I have provided only minimal personal information about the respondents in the empirical chapters so as to minimise the chance of respondent identification. Accordingly, here I provide a little more detail about the respondents.

A large percentage of the men, almost two-thirds, described themselves as coming from families who were on the left of the political spectrum. They used terms such as the ‘labour intelligentsia’ or ‘strong Labour supporters’. In contrast, no man described a conservative political background. The point is that Labour-left background went hand in hand with social justice values. In close connection, about half of the men cited their families as influencing their interests in environmental issues. Although none of the
men’s parents themselves were active in the environment movement, they had influenced their children’s thoughts through their interest in nature, camping and the environment.

The majority of the respondents met through shared activities in politics, environmental action or at university. The majority of the respondents knew each other for a while – often more than a year, in some cases more than five years - before beginning their relationships. It was not common for respondents to begin a relationship as result of meeting each other out of the blue. The long period of time from meeting to beginning the relationship allowed the partners to get to know each other. As a consequence, the majority of the respondents cited friendship with their partner as the essence of their relationships.

More than 90 percent of the Melbourne couples lived in the inner northern suburbs such as Fitzroy, Carlton, Collingwood, Northcote, Brunswick and Thornbury. This is not surprising considering that this is also where Melbourne’s alternative culture is largely based and more importantly where the environmental groups are based. The inner northern suburbs are also where the young and educated live. Fitzroy, Fitzroy North and Carlton North are among the Melbourne suburbs with the highest levels of tertiary education in the city. The numbers of respondents from Sydney and Adelaide were too small to make meaningful generalisations in relation to their residential location.

### 4.4 Data collection

Collecting data for research, particularly when it involves stories about the dynamics of relationships, is a social process. The researcher needs to be cautious not to assume that the stories describe the reality of the interviewees’ lives. This point was highlighted by the British sociologists Firth and Kitzinger (1998). They observed that researchers tend to treat the stories and views they receive from their participants as offering a transparent window into people’s lives. The researchers emphasised that, rather than reflecting some concrete reality, such data should be considered as talk-in-interaction:
People involved in the social research process were not faithfully reporting on their own experience: they were attending to the expectations of the research interviewer, managing their identities and justifying, excusing, and otherwise accounting for their behaviour in socially plausible ways (1998: 319).

Rather than treat self-reporting data as reality, we need to see it for what it is, people’s reconstructed accounts of their ideas and decisions that are culturally located. This point was addressed by Bill Jordan, Marcus Redley and Simon James in the context of family relationships. In *Putting the Family First* (1994), a study of identities and decision-making, the researchers showed how people reconstructed morally adequate accounts of themselves and their life choices. The researchers emphasised that these accounts had common cultural elements and were closely linked to the wider context of social and political relations:

The selves must be able to anchor themselves into particular situations, producing actions that are intelligible and identities that are meaningful within the local context and the circumstances of the moment – the temporary, locally produced order of everyday contingency. (Jordan, Redley and James 1994: 32)

This point has been explored by a number of researchers in the context of relationship research. For example, Ken Dempsey observed that the investigation of decision-making in marriage is complicated by the desire of a growing number of married people to ‘present themselves as egalitarian couples and for wives in particular to believe that they are equal partners in decision-making’ (1997: 110). Similarly, Michael Bittman and Francis Lovejoy emphasised that in spite of the problems and conflicts people experienced in their relationships, couples being interviewed for research purposes had the tendency to present their relationships in the best possible light because they had a ‘desire for a seamless family life’ (1993: 232). The researchers argued that people do so because the accounts and stories of what takes place in relationships reflected what people believe should happen rather than what actually did happen. Couples drew upon the ideology of partnership to describe how they perceived their relationships ought to operate in spite of the inequality that characterised the majority of the relationships studied. Bittman and Lovejoy coined the term ‘pseudomutuality’ to describe this phenomenon. ‘Pseudomutuality’ described the gap between the desire for
partnership and the inequality that actually occurred. In the light of these warnings this study acknowledges that the data collected was based upon the respondents’ perceptions of what took place in their relationships rather than what actually did take place, and further that their stories may have reflected desired social standards.

The data collection stage began when I identified environmental groups in Melbourne and sent them letters of introduction outlining the aims of the research and the requirements of the participants. I then made contact with a woman in one of the groups who worked in human resources. She was particularly interested in the project and very willing to help me. She sent my introduction letter to all the men in the organisation and within a week I had half a dozen interviews scheduled. Altogether I approached 50 men about the project. Of the men I approached about participation in the project, 26 declined to be involved. The most common reason given for declining the invitation was lack of time, while a few commented that it was ‘too involved’. Some men tried to avoid the interview by postponing it until a much later date, or suggesting that their partners would not agree to be involved in the project.

The interviews in this study followed the same overall pattern, albeit with a great deal of flexibility in each interview. About half of the interviews were conducted in the respondents’ homes, and the other half were conducted in workplaces or nearby cafés. Interviews were audiotaped and usually took about one and half hours, with a few exceptions where they were considerably shorter or considerably longer. The respondents were interviewed separately to provide them with the opportunity to describe their own views in confidence and to avoid the problem of couples presenting a united front to the interviewer. The stories were then compared with each other for evidence of symmetry and asymmetry on the dimensions of power, labour or cathexis. In general, the respondents were a pleasure to interview. They welcomed the opportunity to tell someone about their relationships regardless of whether it was harmonious or conflictual.

The interview schedule was divided into five main parts. First, the respondents were asked for demographic information. In the second section the respondents were
asked to provide biographical information, including information about their families of origin, and experiences beyond the family of origin. The histories were an attempt to build an understanding of the respondent and the effects of past experiences upon current practices.

The third part of the interview schedule examined the dimension of power. Here the respondents were asked to explain how decision-making operated in their relationships. More specifically, they were asked to provide examples of decisions made, and if there were any issues and problems in relation to these processes.

The fourth part examined the dimension of labour. The respondents were asked to provide a description of how the relationship was organised, that is, who did paid and unpaid work. In particular, they were asked to explain how domestic labour was allocated, how it actually operated, and any issues or problems.

The fifth part of the interview schedule examined cathexis. The respondents were asked a range of questions about their attachment to their partners. Primarily, they were asked whether they were content about this dimension in the relationship. They were asked more specific questions about time spent together and communication. The focus of the questions here was to ascertain the degree to which the relationship was characterised by symmetry or conflict on this dimension. The respondents were asked to describe any problems inhibiting their sense of attachment to their partners. Those who described conflict rather than harmony were asked to describe the issues that inhibited their sense of satisfaction.

4.5 Ethics

At the time of the interviews the respondents were informed of the nature of the research and their right to participate and withdraw from the research at any point of the process. Written consent was obtained from all respondents. Every effort was made to ensure the
respondents’ confidentiality. Only my supervisor and I had access to and discussed the
details of the material collected.

Anonymity went hand in hand with confidentiality. Every effort was made so that
responses were not linked to identities. The study faced a major problem on account of
the fact that the environmental movement is a small and close-knit community. This
meant that the people I interviewed were likely to know one another and in a number of
cases worked together. The respondents provided me with information that was of a
highly personal nature. I offered the respondents confidentiality and anonymity and have
done my best to ensure that these promises were kept. All the names of the respondents
used in this study are pseudonyms. Crucial personal details about the respondents were
mostly omitted in order to minimise the chance that they could be identified.

4.6 Data Analysis

The analysis stage of the study essentially involved the search for trends, patterns and
relationships. The processes of data collection and analysis were overlapping. Data
analysis continued over a number of years and went in a circular pattern. The description
provided below is to demonstrate the systematic nature of the analysis.

In the first stage of the analysis I listened to and transcribed the tapes. I read
through the transcripts to get a feel for the main theme of each story. I wrote up each
interview as a case study. Writing up the case study was intended to create a general
overview of the narrative and to get a sense of the sequence of events. At the end of this
stage I had 48 stories about life courses and the relationships.

In the second stage of the analysis I organised the data into a more manageable
form. Each case study was examined around the main themes of the study, that is, first,
life experiences, and then power, labour and cathexis. In this second stage the goal was to
explore the similarities and differences in the stories of the respondents in order to
identify key variables and perhaps types. In this stage I examined the data for the
articulation between the stories of the relationship partners. I noted where the couples’ stories were consistent and where they differed. Having established the main themes of the story I re-examined the data for further evidence to support the story I was building or find evidence to the contrary.

The third stage of the analysis centred on interpretation. Having identified the main relationship types, I examined the types more closely to be able to understand and describe their dynamics. Interpreting the data involved drawing out and describing the respondents’ meanings that underpinned the relationship types. It meant giving depth and clarity to the themes described by the respondents and describing in detail how relationship processes worked.
Part II

Experiences and Expectations

Part One of the thesis provided the background to the current study. First, it outlined the debate about gender relations in the context of the family. Next it discussed a framework and theory for thinking about gender relations and discussed the relevant literature for the study. Finally, it provided the rationale for the study and discussed the method for the data collection. The remainder of the thesis discusses the empirical data collected for the study.

Part Two will discuss the respondents’ ideas and beliefs about gender relations and gender equity. It examines the men’s experiences that underpinned their ideas about relationships, gender and masculinity. It also examines the women’s experiences of their families of origin and their relationship histories insofar as they cast light onto the men’s accounts.

Chapter 5 examines the men’s families of origin. It describes and discusses the way the families of origin were organised. It discusses what the men made of gender relations in their parents’ marriages. It describes and discusses the relationships that the men had with their fathers and what they made of these relationships. The chapter also briefly examines the way that the women thought about their families of origin in order to compare them with the men’s accounts.

Chapter 6 discusses the men’s experiences beyond their families of origin. It examines the various experiences and influences described by the men beyond their families of origin that influenced their ideas about gender and masculinity. This chapter examines the men’s experiences in the environmental movement, including their account of gender dynamics within the movement. It explores other factors that influenced their own gender projects including the education system, personal relationship histories and
current relationships. In a similar manner to Chapter 5, the chapter compares the men and women’s experiences where it makes for an interesting comparison.

Chapter 7 is primarily concerned about the men’s attitudes to the legitimacy of patriarchal relations. This chapter examines the men’s ideas and beliefs about the organisation of family life. The chapter also discusses the men’s attitudes to the institution of marriage and having children.
Chapter 5
Families of origin

Chapter 5 traces the family histories of the respondents. It primarily focuses upon the men’s stories but compares them with the women’s stories where relevant. It examines the way gender relations were organised in the respondents’ families, including how the men viewed their fathers’ masculinity as a gender project. The aim of this chapter is to explore the articulation between life history and social practice.

5.1 ‘Traditional’ families

The men described the families in which they grew up in two main ways; as ‘traditional’ families, and as ‘non’ or ‘less-traditional’ families. Of the 24 men, 16 (66 percent) described growing up in ‘traditional’ families. These men used words like ‘traditional’, ‘conservative’ and ‘conventional’ to describe their families. They used these terms to describe family relationships organised around gender roles where men were breadwinners and women were homemakers. For example, Will reflected of his upbringing:

A pretty standard, conservative family. I grew up in Glenelg. Dad was with the social security department virtually all his life. Forty odd years with the one organisation. Mum was just a housewife, she didn’t have any other sort of work. So it was a classical thing again there.

The traditional pattern of family organisation generally meant that men were the heads of the household. For example, Matthew emphasised that his father’s position was clear to everyone in the family: ‘he was traditional in the sense that there was no doubt that he was head of the house’. The majority of the men described decision-making in their families of origin as a male prerogative in which women had little or no input. Many of the husbands did not consult their wives, who were kept in the dark about finances and other important issues. For example, Ralph related a story where his father, an academic,
came home from university one day and announced to his mother that they were moving to England so that he could do his PhD at Oxford. He elaborated:

He earned the money, he made the major decisions about expenditure etc. I think there was probably some discussion, but it was very much that he made a decision to do or buy something and then he would tell her what was happening. She didn’t need to know the finer details.

The men’s authority over wives extended to the children. More than half of the men emphasised that their fathers largely defined themselves in terms of their authority. For example, Matthew described his father as the decision-maker in the house. Similarly, Stephen emphasised that authority was a fundamental characteristic of his father’s masculinity. He emphasised that his father had ‘an obsessive need to be right’. He told a story about a disagreement that he had with his father:

He emphatically insisted that he was correct. So I said let’s check it in the encyclopaedia. As it turned out, when I looked it up, I was right and he was wrong. He just stormed off and said the encyclopaedia doesn’t know what it is talking about, it was a verifiable fact.

In contrast, four of the men emphasised that patriarchy did not mean that fathers dominated family relations. For example, Dean stressed that power and decision-making in his family of origin were not straightforward. He described how his mother was ‘dominant’ in different spheres of family life:

He was the head of the house when we were out of the house, but at home he did the disciplining, but mum was sort of the boss. It is a little bit hard to answer that question because it isn’t as simple as that. You could see one of them making the call in the different areas that they were dominant in.

Although social relations invested fathers with family authority, some of the mothers found ways of contributing to decision-making processes. Two of the men described mothers who used covert means to influence the family decision-making. For example, David described how his father was clearly the head of the house, but also how his mother was a ‘very intelligent woman with an astute mind’. He explained how his mother surreptitiously influenced decision-making in the home by offering ideas that
were generally rejected by her husband, who within a matter of weeks presented the idea as his own:

My mother would suggest an idea, and dad would say no that is rubbish, and three weeks later it would be his idea, and he would be putting it forward. And that was OK, she would go along with that. But, at the same time, if my mother didn’t like something, then it was fairly obvious that she didn’t like it. So if there was a difference between them, dad would wander out the back and cut some wood or something. As far as my mother being meek and mild, no, my mother was not meek and mild. Listening, yes she did, but my mother did a lot of things of her own accord.

The word ‘traditional’ was also used to describe attachment. In general the men described the dimension of cathexis between their parents in functional terms. Marriage was focused on the bearing and raising of children rather than the relationships between the parents. The men said that in ‘traditional’ families affection was not a salient aspect of their family relations. Relations between parents and other family members were described as largely non-demonstrative. For example, Matthew used the term ‘traditional’ to convey two meanings: first that his father was the head of the house, and second that affection was not usually expressed:

I think I would have to use the word traditional … I could see it was a little too traditional, and I could see signs of our family breaking away from that tradition. I can see a big difference from my dad and his immediate family and our family … but affection and that kind of thing, like giving someone a hug or a kiss in a really traditional family, in our experience was just not done.

Men from ‘traditional’ families did not perceive their parents’ marriages as close. Of the 16 men who described their parents’ marriages in traditional terms, 12 described marriages that were characterised by discontent or remoteness. For example, Will emphasised that his parents’ relationships was characterised by a lack of contact:

There was a fair bit of aridity and dryness in their relationship. Mum used to call dad a good old stick, which I find quite a dry, [laughing to himself] lifeless kind of expression.
The men identified a lack of communication as a problem area of their parents’ marriages. Andrew described a situation where his parents did not go out together often, largely because his father went out with his male friends. Of their communication he observed:

I don’t think that they really talked much. I don’t think that they had a really good communication, it was more a functional relationship.

A few of the men remarked that their parents lived almost separate lives. The relationship between the parents had deteriorated to the point where the couple were largely co-existing. For example, Jason described his parents’ relationship as largely non-existent. He said that his parents mostly stayed together to rear the children. His father had little interaction with family members, instead spending his time with his friends involved in a range of activities:

Their relationship was not that close, yeah, dad was not intimate. I think that they lived separate lives to a large degree. It was about 20 years ago that it became apparent to me that mum and dad weren’t very close and yet they stuck at it for 15 years.

Only four of the 16 men from traditional backgrounds described their parents’ marriages as close or content. These marriages were characterised by companionship and were viewed by the respondents as close and loving. For example, Dean described his parents’ marriage as ‘strong and loving’. He said that his parents got along well and had little conflict. Interestingly, Dean said that this was not the norm as he referred to his parent’s affection as unusual:

They are still alive and still together, so it is a long marriage. From my perspective, and it is biased, but for most of my life it has been and still is a strong and loving relationship. They are a little bit unusual from people that I know. They will still hold hands walking down the beach and I have never heard them have a serious argument, which may or may not be a good thing.

The majority of the men were critical of the ‘traditional’ gender relations in their families of origin, which some described in terms of patriarchy. For example, Matthew
described his father as ‘a patriarch stuck in another’s shadow’, meaning that his father carried on with traditional practices which he had witnessed in own family of origin. Jason described his father as ‘quite patriarchal’, a man who was ‘always very forthright and I suppose that he always thought that he was head of the household’.

Although the men were critical of the gender relations in their families of origin the criticisms were implied, not overt. Most of the men did not articulate an alternative view of how their own relationships would differ from the way that their parents organised their marriages. The majority of the men seemed to stop short of connecting the criticisms to their own lives. For example, Ralph was incredulous about the way his mother was not involved in decision-making and kept in the dark as far as finances were concerned, but did not elaborate on an alternative:

My mother had no idea of the money he earned. I find it extraordinary. You think that people living in the same house had some idea of the money that he earned. And making decisions, she would be included in the decisions after they were made. You would think that people living in the same house would have some idea about what the other earned.

Similarly, on the dimension of cathexis the men described unsatisfactory relations between their parents but largely stopped short of articulating an alternative. For example, Will described his parents’ marriage as ‘not a good model of a loving relationship’, but said little about how he would do things differently:

Yeah, there was not much demonstrable contact. I don’t think any emotional issues were dealt with, which I didn’t want to emulate.

In contrast, one of the men articulated a very clear and non-hegemonic view about his own relationships in the light of his family crisis. Ben grew up in a family where his parents divorced. He described how his mother was left with virtually nothing at the end of a twenty-year marriage. As a result he reflected about what he wanted in his future. He realised that he did not want a ‘traditional’ relationship:
Times have changed I guess, and I wanted a relationship that was more fair and equal. I guess I didn’t want the traditional family. I had no desire to be the sole breadwinner or to have a traditional division of labour. No roles, none at all. To me relationships should be more about a close friendship, about things that you did together. Relationships should be defined by the things that you do together rather than the things that separate you or the things that are different in your role.

As the men described the families that they had grown up in, it was clear that hegemonic masculinity generally went hand in hand with the traditional family organisation. The majority of the men described their fathers in largely hegemonic terms. For example, Leyton described his father as ‘fairly stereotypical’, which meant he was:

Tough in the sense that he doesn’t cry, keeps it together, and maintains composure. No expression of feelings, a bit of a protector, I’m the rock you can lean on image. A back slapping good guy, shy, but rowdy despite it.

Similarly, Shawn described his father as a ‘classic bloke’ by which he meant that his father performed his role as a provider, and taught his son how to play football. All the men emphasised that their father’s masculinity centred on their provider role. Many of the fathers were focused on their careers and were often away from the home for long periods. Two of the men, for example, came from homes where their fathers were academics. Both these men stressed that their fathers gave large amounts of time to their careers. Ben said that he spent many weekends with his mother and grandparents because his father was busy preparing work for university.

Many of the men described having little sense of a relationship with their fathers. For example, David stressed that his father was not close to any of the children because his focus was on the functional business of providing and raising children:

Well we had nine kids so my father didn’t get close to any of us. He was busy making a living for nine kids. He was in charge and there was a defined authority, and you knew what defined authority was.

The majority of the men emphasised that their relationships with their fathers were often remote and difficult. Many found communicating with their fathers difficult, a
characteristic that continued on into adult life. Gary, for example, described his father as ‘very quiet and doesn’t talk very much’. He described long trips in the car ‘trying to drum up conversations’ with his father, but ‘I would have to try so hard that in the end I would just give up’. He described how his mother acted as the go-between in his relationship with his father, and that in the twenty years since he had left his parent’s home his father has never rung him:

He has never phoned, never ever, never phoned me by himself. It is always mum. I find that distressing. I have said this to him a few times, why don’t you phone and just say hello and he just can’t answer it. It is very sad. So he has let mum do all the socialising.

In a few cases the men described contradictory relationships with their fathers. On the one hand they felt that they respected and admired their fathers, but on the other hand, the fathers were remote. For example, Will said:

I admire him [my father] very deeply. And I guess I developed my sense of civic responsibility from him. He was very much involved in the Scouts, Rotary, school and encouraged us to be involved as well. My brothers were all school captains and prefects, so there was that sort of level of school citizenship. I was the one who strayed the most from the desired model of corporate lawyer. There wasn’t much intimacy and all that. There wasn’t much touching and hugging.

The men distanced themselves from aspects of their father’s masculinity. Matthew observed that he not did like the patriarchal way his father treated his mother and his siblings. Further, he was critical of his father for encouraging financial dependence. Stephen was critical of the basis of his father’s authority that appeared to him to rest on little more than his father’s opinions and whims. Leyton criticised his father’s approach to life as ‘being a mate and a good guy, and put on a happy face when you are not happy’, because it meant that he could not be himself. Gary wanted a closer relationship with his own children, particularly better communication:

I just find it sad that blokes can’t do it. I don’t think that all blokes can’t do it: that is something that I am trying to address with my kids. Not just because I want to be different to dad, because in lots of ways I am quite similar to my father.
It is interesting to compare the men’s stories about their families of origin with those of their partners. All but two of the men’s partners described growing up in a ‘traditional’ type family. Perhaps the women simply came from more conservative families. Alternatively, perhaps they were more attuned to inequality in their families, making them more likely to describe them as traditional. It is certainly the case that the women were much more articulate about how their family futures would differ from those of their parents.

For example, Louise described a context where her parents had a conventional marriage. Her father was clearly the household head. She observed that her father did not treat her mother and the other females in the family with much respect. In light of these dynamics Louise concluded that she wanted a very different type of relationship:

My parents’ situation reflected that time which meant a very divided gendered world and one in which my father didn’t have a lot of respect for women and didn’t think they were particularly intelligent. I wanted a more equal, more equally caring, more open, more emotionally honest, less fraught relationship.

Similarly, Laura described her parents’ relationship as close, but her father did not question his right to be the decision-maker. She described how her father made many decisions without consulting her mother. In one particular instance her father redecorated the kitchen and expected that his wife would be pleased with the result. Laura explained that the outcome did not please either of them. Her mother felt disappointed that she was not consulted and her father was disappointed that his wife did not appreciate what he had done for her. Laura realised that she wanted a different set of dynamics in her own relationship:

So I knew that I wanted to be in a relationship where I was consulted and with more equality.

The women identified gender roles as a key problem separating their parents and alienating them from each other. For example, Chelsea told a story about how her parents
had distinct and separate roles and neither of them ventured into the other’s domain. Chelsea decided that this was exactly what she hoped to avoid in her own relationship:

> What I don’t want to see in my relationship with Leyton is what I saw happen in my parents’ relationship. They started off here [separated by gender roles] and they pushed each other miles and miles apart. What would happen is that the more she became involved and the more engaged she became [in family life], she pushed him out, and he didn’t have a place. And the more he became disinterested and the less involved and the more he went overseas, the more she would warn him to get involved and the more he disappeared. When he was really absent she just filled his role entirely and became mother and father.

The women, like the men, observed that their parents’ marriages lacked intimacy and were often unhappy. The women emphasised that this was not something they wanted in their own relationships. For example, Elizabeth told a story of how her parents lived separate lives and her mother was unhappy ‘all her life’. Elizabeth realised that she wanted something very different for herself:

> I didn’t want to be unhappy like she was. I didn’t want to be trapped like she was. I didn’t want to do that. And I don’t want to have any expectation or pressure on me. I wanted my partner to be my friend. So I don’t want to get married because that dumps a whole lot of expectations on you. I wanted to be friends with men. I wanted to have equal relationships. I wanted all the freedoms and to go to work.

### 5.2 ‘Non-traditional’ families

In contrast to the traditional families described above, eight of the 24 men (33 percent) described their parents’ marriages as ‘non-traditional’. These respondents used the ‘traditional marriage’ as a benchmark to describe their parents’ marriages. They described their parents’ marriages as ‘less-traditional’ ‘non-traditional’ or ‘progressive’. These terms were used to describe an organisation of family life that was characterised by ‘partnership’ rather than patriarchy. In three of these families the women had full-time jobs. In another three, family life was reorganised so the women could return to university or return to their former careers. In the other two families the women were
described as playing a partnership role alongside their husbands, involved in decision-making and with a shared domestic division of labour.

In general, the men observed that their parents were responding to shifting ideas and values about gender relations, family organisation and other relevant social issues. For example, Martin said that his parents were different to other families in that they were ‘cutting edge’ and able to respond to social change:

A product of that shifting generation. They were not living that kind of forties kind of model. They were cutting edge of that time. People from their generation were able to adapt, whereas the generation before that, like my grandmother, were the same until they died.

Similarly, Jarrod described how his parents responded to the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s. He stated that his parents had a ‘renaissance’ in their marriage in the 1970s and became ‘socially progressive parents’. By socially progressive he meant that they addressed gender, economic inequality and environmental issues:

They started saying it would be better if we did an equal amount of housework. Dad still did all the repairs and mum did the cooking and … it was still very much divided but there was the value that men … We actually put it on the table, even in the family, men and women are equal and they’re … In theory they should be equal but it seems that dad is better at doing those things and mum is better at doing those things. But there was always a lot of talk about those issues, always. It was very, very good.

These families discussed issues that linked gender equity with environmental degradation. For example, Terry explained that he recognised the connections across a range of social problems. He said that his family had set in motion his thinking about social justice issues:

From when I was about seventeen or eighteen I realised that there was something seriously wrong [with society] which … came from my family’s ideology. The divide between the rich and poor was just one [issue] and that sort of grew into a bit of a perspective on environmental justice as well. The family saw the environment as a third person who was getting the shitty end of the stick.
In three instances the men described their mothers as feminists. All three of these men emphasised that their mothers’ ideas and values had a profound and lasting influence upon them. For example, Dermot observed: ‘My mother and my three sisters were feminists, so I was well trained in these issues’. Similarly, Dom explained that his mother fundamentally shaped his ideas about gender relations and family organisation:

My mother was a very strong feminist and I have got to say that a lot of my ideas about feminism and equity were instilled in me by her. And I don’t think that was a bad thing. I reckon more power to women; imagine what sort of world we would live in if all of our politicians and senior managers were women. I am all for that, I kid you not. Bringing that back to our relationship, I am more than happy, and one of our goals is to get Imogen set up on a good career path where she can have a high earning capacity, and if we have children then I will stay home and look after them.

One of the men described himself as a ‘feminist’, which he explained was a result of his socialisation. Terry’s parents vigorously discussed a range of social issues while he was growing up. Of these gender was a primary concern: ‘Patriarchy has always been an issue in our family. My folks were of a generation that were considering the role of patriarchy’. Terry said that it was his mother who drove the discussion about gender relations and change in her marriage: ‘it always seemed to me mum wasn’t happy with the way things were set up around her and where it raised its head in our home, she did what she could to change things around’. Terry explained that these dynamics and values had a profound influence on his ideas and values. He reflected: ‘I would hope that I was well schooled by that model to become some kind of feminist man in the new millennium’.

As a result, these men described how gender practices in their parents’ marriages were significantly different to those in the ‘traditional’ families. Women’s expectations were addressed and action was taken to meet their concerns. For example, Dennis described how his mother returned to work after the children became teenagers:

When I was young, probably up until I was 12 or 13, they were in very traditional roles, but from about that age and onwards things did change a bit. Mum went back to work and kept working. She had worked from that time until she retired.
last year. So it was an evolution from a fairly traditional division of duties to them reverting to what it would have been like before the children arrived. My parents are both in their sixties. When mum was working, dad and my brothers would take turns at cooking for each other.

Both Jarrod’s and Terry’s mothers decided that they wanted to return to study. Both men emphasised the part that their fathers played in creating the conditions for their mothers to return to their former careers. For example, Jarrod described how his father was supportive of his wife’s ambition and did what was necessary to help her:

He was always supportive of my mother going back to renew her qualifications to get a career, never doubted her or put anything in her way to do that. He had these values, ‘This woman who I have been with, it is her right to express herself in the world’. And he could see that the only ways that she was going to be able to do that was to go back to uni part-time for seven years or whatever, and he was going to have to come home early and basically change his life so that she could do that, and he would do that and it wasn’t a dramatic thing. He did what was necessary, whether it be to pay for someone to look after the kids

In one of the families, new family practices meant decision-making processes included all family members. Dom described how his family operated like a democracy:

We had a lot of family consultations. We would sit around the kitchen and talk about a lot of issues, especially when we were teenagers and stuff. They would always talk together and you could always tell when something wasn’t right, but most of the time there was consensus decision-making.

Moreover, Dom emphasised that the reorganisation of the family meant that both his parents had interchangeable roles and all the members of the family worked together as a team:

My father was working during the day, my mother was working during the night at the hospital. We had to fend for ourselves a lot, like doing the dishes, doing the washing, so by necessity we had to co-operate and get on and work as a team, and most of the time when decisions were made they were made in consultation with each other.
All of the respondents who described their parents’ marriages as ‘non-traditional’ acknowledged some degree of sharing of the division of domestic labour. For example, Malcolm described how his father shared the domestic labour:

My parents are still together. Very loving family, very supportive family, not demanding. Grew up in a nice suburban setting on quite a big block of land for a suburban block. Yeah, mum and dad were sharing in all of their work. Dad was unusual as he cooked and did the dishes as well as the usual dad things such as working on the car and mowing the lawns…

Similarly, Martin described a shared division of domestic labour between his parents:

In a lot of ways it was pretty conventional, but it wasn’t like he was the unreconstructed male, the women are in the kitchen sort of thing. They had shared the domestic work. He would do the washing up and she would do the shopping.

The partnership couples were apparently more successful in creating close or happy marriages. Where only four of the 16 ‘traditional’ marriages were described as happy or content, four of the seven non-traditional marriages were described in these terms. For example, Martin described how his father was attuned to the companionate aspect of the relationship and that his parents had good communication:

They clearly had a good relationship. My dad worked in the city and every night when he got home they would just sit down and have a vermouth and a yak for a few hours so it was a really good, communicative relationship.

Although gender relations were reorganised in these families, the men described similar problems with attachment issues as described by the men in the traditional families. In particular, they recognised that their mothers complained that husbands were not able to communicate. For example, Malcolm described how his father was ‘unusual as he cooked and did the dishes’ and how his parents were partners who ‘shared all the housework’. In spite of this, his mother was unhappy about the couple’s emotional relationship. Malcolm described how his mother complained about his father’s ability to express himself and create the conditions for intimacy:
They have always been pretty close, but within its limits. Mum’s frustrated about dad about being open, but when he has to be he is. For a period there they were actively trying to improve their relationship through some sort of marriage counselling.

The respondents identified unsatisfactory communication as a problem area for their parents. Matt felt that he had learned this trait himself in his family of origin:

They had a reasonably good relationship but they did tend to have times where they did fight a lot. My parents probably weren’t great communicators and I have probably inherited that as well.

In other cases neither of the parents were seen to have developed a degree of emotional literacy. Jarrod described a lack of demonstrable affection between his parents:

They are both, they are not particularly demonstrative of how they feel physically or … dad doesn’t say, dad doesn’t really talk about his emotions so.

Although the fathers of these men had adopted a more progressive approach to family organisation, the men consistently described relationships with their fathers in similar terms to the men from the traditional type families. Like the fathers from the ‘traditional’ families, their fathers were often difficult to know and communication with them was arduous. The men emphasised that they had to work very hard to make interaction work. For example, Martin remarked that he ‘spent a lot of time with him [his father] and had a good relationship with him, but when I became a teenager I realised that I didn’t communicate with him very much’. Jerry also described a relationship with his father that was often tense. His father was someone who ‘wasn’t easy to talk to’. He ‘liked to talk’ rather than ‘have dialogue’, which undermined the quality of their interaction.

In one case the father’s remoteness from the other family members led to outright conflict. Dom related a story where his father asked him to move out of the family home because he was invading his space, which left him feeling confused and upset:
I used to go to my father’s house and use one of the rooms for study purposes and he was really strange. He was really strange about the whole scene and then one day he said, ‘I want you out of here. This is my house and I feel like you are invading my space’. And he just got really super aggressive about it and he was gonna punch me and it was full on. I just couldn’t understand it. And I was really upset about that for years after, just coping with that and I felt like I didn’t want to have any relationship with him any more. I have reconciled myself to the fact that I will never have a close relationship with my father, right. I can accept that. I feel a bit sad about it

In contrast to most respondents, one of the men described how his relationship with his father had transformed as a result of a crisis in his father’s life. Jarrod described how his father became a ‘closet alcoholic’. None of the family members ever suspected that their father was drinking because his behaviour and emotions were always under control:

He was never drunk because he was an emotionally controlled person. He kept all his emotions under control. They were all inside and all we saw were what was communicated through his intellectual layers.

The drinking eventually took its toll, and his father had an emotional breakdown and was hospitalised. The breakdown led to a re-evaluation of his life and his relationships with other people:

He was really sick and he was crying and it was a complete collapse. Amazing, he was crying and I had never seen him cry before. He was aware of his own mortality. The doctors told us that a large percent of people who get to that stage end up committing suicide so it was really serious. He was saying, ‘Wow this is my life, so do I get it back or do I continue blanking it out?’ He did get it back and had an emotional renewal. Since then he always talked about how he was feeling and he got a bit spiritual. So now I can have a heart-to-heart talk to him. When I broke up with my girlfriend I was really upset and I cried on the phone to him, and I would have never done that before.
Summary

This chapter examined the men’s and their partners’ families of origin. The majority of the men described growing up in ‘traditional’ families where family life was organised around a conventional division of labour. The fathers and mothers largely took for granted that men would make family decisions and the majority of the women acquiesced to patriarchal organisation. Women generally played a subordinate and supportive role to their husbands in these marriages. The majority of these marriages were stable but many of the men described their parents as remote from each other. A minority of these men described their parents’ marriages in more companionate terms. Hegemonic masculinity generally went hand in hand with a traditional family organisation. Practising a hegemonic style of masculinity largely meant three things. Men thought of themselves as providers; they defined themselves in terms of their authority; and they were emotionally restrained and controlled.

The men who grew up in the ‘traditional’ families described an awareness of changed gender relations and were often critical of their parents’ marriages. They were critical of the power their fathers had over other family members and particularly their mothers. Interestingly, little mention was made of domestic labour. Power rather than labour seemed to be the important issue. The men were also aware of and critical of the relationship between their parents but largely failed to produce an alternative picture of their own future. The men’s partners described similar family dynamics in their own families of origin, but were different insofar as they described alternative futures that involved overcoming the problem issues in their parents’ marriages.

In contrast to the ‘traditional’ families, a third of the men, eight of the 24, described their families of origin in more progressive terms. The men described marriages where their parents had responded to changing ideas about family organisation and gender relations. The new ideas generally corresponded with new practices. These marriages were different to the ‘traditional’ marriages in that the women participated in decision-making and the paid workforce. The partnership marriages were more
successful in producing symmetry in attachment; these marriages were more companionate than functional; and more of them were described as happy than the traditional style marriages. In spite of the reorganisation of family life and reconstruction of masculinity, most of the men described relationships between parents and between fathers and sons in similar terms to the men from the traditional families.
Chapter 6
Experiences beyond the family of origin

The previous chapter discussed the respondents’ families of origin. This chapter discusses the men’s experiences beyond the family of origin that influenced their ideas about gender relations and the construction of their masculinity. It examines the choices the men made which shaped their own lives, in particular, choices that provided opportunities for gender reform. The men described three main influences or experiences that generated reflection about gender projects: the education system, the environment movement and personal relationships. This chapter also discusses the women’s accounts of their past relationship experiences as they differ in striking ways to those of their partners.

6.1 Education

The majority of the men were tertiary educated. Of the 22 men who were tertiary educated, a little over a third were educated in technical courses (such as engineering), another third attended social science or law courses, and the others studied fine art and teaching. Participants often described how tertiary education influenced their involvement in the environment movement. More specifically, a third of the men emphasised that educational experiences influenced their views about gender relations and hegemonic practices. Of the 24 men, eight described encountering a feminist perspective of gender relations at university. In particular, they described encountering gender relations as a social equity issue in social science and law courses. For example, Will described his university course as central to his thoughts about gender relations:

Flinders was quite good in the critical studies in picking up those sorts of things. And I have done a fair bit of reading of institutional structures and ideas of authority. One of my favourite books is written by Star Hawke, Magic, Sex and
Politics. It wasn’t a strict political text but it was … So I have come across a fair bit of it [feminism].

Of the eight men who described the education system as influential on their ideas about gender relations, five came from families that were described as ‘traditional’, while three came from ‘non-traditional’ families. For some men the education system was described as a primary influence on their thoughts about gender relations. For example, Andrew came from a home where his parents had a ‘traditional’ division of labour. He had recognised that this arrangement provided his father with more power than his mother but had not seen gender as a serious social issue. His thoughts about gender relations were recast through taking a ‘social theory subject’ as part of his law degree.

For some of the men the education system reinforced their existing view of gender relations. For example, Phillip grew up in a family where his mother and father had traditional roles. In spite of this Phillip emphasised that he had known he would not replicate his family pattern because he was aware that ‘times had changed’. When he went to university his progressive ideas were reinforced in the course of study. Phillip studied sociology where he became keenly aware of ‘the principles of equity’.

The men described how the encounter with feminism at university influenced or reshaped their thoughts about relationships. For example, Shawn explained that his ideas about gender roles changed as a result of studying gender issues at university. He described how he had grown up in a ‘traditional’ home where he thought gender roles had worked well. But as a result of encountering a feminist perspective on gender relations at university, he observed how he needed to incorporate feminism into his private life:

During my degree I studied feminist theory and feminist methodology in social science and read feminist fiction. And so I thought I had some academic idea what it was about and had integrated it a lot more into my private life and what it actually meant on a daily level …which is something that is important. And it is the everyday things, ensuring that I am sharing what has been conventionally considered to be women’s domain in terms of domestic duties and what women have been socialised to do …
6.2 The environment movement

About a third of the men (8 of the 24) described the social milieu of the environment movement as influencing gender projects by highlighting gender issues and providing some support for equity in gender relations. The majority appeared to take egalitarian gender relations in the movement for granted. Those who did speak of the movement’s influence on them described it as a meeting point for like-minded people who were socially ‘progressive’ in their thinking. Progressive thinking generally meant a belief in social justice in a range of areas including the economy, the environment and gender. For example, Jarrod described himself as a ‘progressive’ person. He described how his involvement with the environment movement introduced and connected him to a community of people who shared his ideas and values:

I lived in Glebe [in a shared household] and it was a really lovely household. It was just really nice place. There were a whole lot of progressive thinkers, social activists and things like that. I met my male friend, Paul, through Latin American stuff and we did things on 2JJJ, radio programs together. My Swedish girlfriend was an anarchist, lefty, feminist. We all rode our bikes everywhere. There were ten bikes in that house and it was just a wonderful, wonderful place.

Similarly, Dom recalled how he became involved in the environment movement at university, bringing him into contact with a wider circle of like-minded people:

My more radical, my deeper commitment to the environmental movement occurred when I started here as a student. I thought it was important that we had an environmental club. So I was the founding member of the environmental club which was called RIPPED which was an acronym for ‘Reasonably informed people promoting environmental debate’, and we would have ‘get ripped’ on our banners and that was a really successful group. And then Bob Brown came and after he came and I heard him speak, I signed up and joined the Greens instead of the Labour Party, because I saw the Labour Party moving away from the environment towards the Right.

Three of the men exemplified Connell’s analysis of the environmental movement. These men articulated a view about social issues that connected environmental
degradation with gender relations. For example, Will described the link in terms of ‘artificial power structures’:

I see feminism as related to the work that we are doing about tackling artificial power structures and domination which is mostly men’s creation, but not only of men’s creation. That is related to what we were just talking about, strong women rather than the compliant, giggling little bimbos who are just not interested. I see the political language of feminism as a very important one and one which is related to the political language of the environmental challenge anyway.

Similarly, Robert described how he felt that environmentalists were supposed to act as ‘role models’, educating people about the connections between the environment and gender relations:

Our job is to act as role models for people who come into the Wilderness Society and volunteer for six weeks, one day a week. And what they come out with is a view that I have worked with people that I didn’t know existed, and live a lifestyle that I really respect. That could be from eating organic vegetables and treating other people with respect. Feminism is part of that idea of respect. Whether it is called feminism or environmentalism or a particular branch of politics, it is about respect and that is what feminism is about and there are some amazing women.

Further, Robert used the radical feminist language to describe the impact of feminism had on the movement:

Women are central and powerful in the environmental movement, so you can’t escape the women inside the environment movement and that is at all levels. You have got women who get involved at all levels. There are women at the level of direct action and who live an idealistic lifestyle and who are not afraid to make it clear to you that lifestyle includes feminist values. And you have got the eco-feminist movement that is really strong and almost unwritten, unspoken, it is part of the whole activist movement, and the environment movement. It is part of that concept of the feminine side of nature being of equal importance and something that we have to idealise and move towards.

Although the respondents generally described gender equity as an important social issue, they also made it clear that it was an issue that could easily get overlooked in the day-to-day workings of the movement. As Robert pointed out above, it was almost ‘unspoken’. Some respondents described how they had witnessed patriarchal practices
among some of the men in the movement. For example, Martin explained that some of
the women in the movement had complained that gender equity was just a ‘veneer’ or ‘a
bit of window dressing’. Similarly, Will observed that for some men in the movement
feminism was a marginal value and practice:

Not all environmentalists think of it that way. There are some very conservative
environmentalists who could happily live with eco-tyranny.

Moreover, one man described how some of the men in the environment
movement seemed quite similar to men in corporate workplaces in their work practices.
Ben had worked for a number of environmental groups over a period of twenty years, and
described a certain degree of competitiveness in the movement as in other workplaces:

One of the great things about the movement is that there is a great deal of co-
operation. It is a bit of a sheltered workshop. You are working with people who
are roughly thinking the same sort of way as you and want the world to be the
same. But in any workplace there is still tension, there is the need to put your
stamp on the job. I guess that is being competitive, not just about wanting to do
the best for the environment, having achieved something. It is a large part of the
motivation but it is also about putting a mark on something, having achieved
something.

Although these men described practices that were more patriarchal than reformed,
the comments were offered as a critique of patriarchal practices. This critique of gender
inequity and patriarchal practices is in itself significant.

The failure of some of the men in the movement to see the relationship between
gender and the environment had effects on relationships. For example, Martin described
how he had witnessed traditional patterns of family organisation resurface among
environmentalists upon having children:

It is quite remarkable that traditional patterns reassert themselves when women
have children. I think with the environmental men there is an attempt to think
things through. Often it is forced on men because a lot of the women are very
together and know what they want and are not going to put up with shit. I think
there is a bit of window dressing that, yes, I am post patriarchal but often it is only
skin deep. When you hit crisis or you go out of your comfort zone you become
who you really are and it is remarkable how in those situations the men take charge and order people around. I am thinking about blockade type situations. And women say that these men are just wearing the feminist veneer and that it is just the same as it ever was, even though they are genuinely trying to change.

### 6.3 Current relationships

A small number of men, five of the 24, described their current relationship partners as influential in focusing attention on hegemonic practices and gender projects. The men identified their partners as primary influences on their ideas about gender relations and their masculinity. The partners of these men influenced their behaviour and masculinity in three main ways.

First, the women influenced their partners in their choice of career. Two men described how they passed up opportunities to have lucrative careers in private law practice to devote their time and energy to the environmental movement, largely on account of their partners. For example, Matthew described how his partner ‘inspired’ him to do something different. Matthew’s family expected him to practise law in a private firm. Matthew described how his partner encouraged him to go against the grain:

> She brought out the best in me, and she made me dream and go beyond the traditional moulds. For instance she inspired me to make the decision to defer from university and from law school, which was inspired by my parents. She inspired me to leave or to go against [my parents’ wishes] and make the decision for myself. She inspired me to follow dreams, to go outside the normal mould of what family members had traditionally done.

Similarly, Philip described how his partner was the primary influence in his shift from private practice in law to a career in conservation that meant a large reduction in income. He described how after practising in a commercial law firm for four years he gave it up because he was determined to work in conservation. When I asked him how he came to be involved in the movement, he stated ‘that was Laura actually’:

> We met at university at the time of the Franklin River dam issue. Laura had been arrested down in Tassie for her activism. As I was getting to know her I was also
getting exposed to these issues. I had always had sympathy [for the cause] but I had never been a card-carrying member type of thing. Soon after that I joined ACF [Australian Conservation Foundation], but I wasn’t an active member. My formal involvement in the conservation movement was largely a result of having abandoned the law after four years of private practice, and Laura and I rode our bicycles around Europe. It was during that trip that I came to see the problems with the environment.

The second way partners influenced the men was in their attitude to gender equity. Andrew had already encountered gender equity issues at university, but explained that his partner was crucial in maintaining these attitudes: ‘It was Bronwyn who influenced my ideas about gender equality’. In turn, Bronwyn’s ideas about gender equity were fundamentally shaped by her family background. She described growing up in a ‘non-traditional family’, where both her parents were professionals and held progressive views about gender relations. Bronwyn’s mother highlighted to her the importance of gender equity, in particular that ‘marriage was not the only option for women’. As a result Bronwyn expected that her relationship would be characterised by gender equity.

The third way in which relationship partners influenced or affected the men’s lives and their masculinity was related to their emotional literacy. Two of the men described how their partners had played a role in their emotional development. For example, Ben described how he had developed a degree of emotional literacy in his current relationships. He observed that he had some skills in this area, but that his partner had greater skills that she tried to pass on to him:

Some of those things I have directly learnt from Anna I think. She has a great capacity to think how other people might be thinking, much more than I do. Sometimes it surprises me, but it also gives me a jolt into realising that that is something I should trying to be doing in my life.
6.4 Past relationships

Past relationships were described as another experience that focused attention on gender issues and often acted as a catalyst for change. The women’s experiences are also described in this section because they make an interesting comparison to the men’s experiences. One of the striking differences between the men and women in the study was the way the women almost routinely reflected upon and processed their past relationship experiences. Eighteen of the 24 women provided detailed accounts of how their lives had been reordered in the light of their relationship experiences. The women overwhelmingly discussed their relationships in terms of ‘personal development’. Their stories were about developing a better understanding of their own needs through their relationships, and then acting on the basis of this understanding. The women provided long and subtle stories differentiating between different aspects of earlier relationships and why they failed. In their stories, female respondents elaborated on five main themes in particular: trust, commitment, compatibility, equality, and intimacy. These are all characteristics of ‘the pure relationship’ as defined by Anthony Giddens. I will use Katrina as a case study to demonstrate the issues described above. The women’s stories essentially described developing a set of criteria of what they expected from a relationship.

Katrina was in her mid thirties at the time of the interview. She had been in a relationship with her partner for six years. She came from a family which she described as ‘traditional’ but where her parents had a long and happy marriage. Katrina explained that the happiness that she witnessed compensated for its traditionalism. Accordingly, she was not critical of her parent’s marriage. Prior to her current relationship she described having ‘a series of relationships’ over a ten-year period in which she developed ideas and expectations of what she wanted out of a relationship.

At eighteen Katrina entered into her first long-term relationship with a young man she described as a ‘traditional Italian man’ who thought that ‘we were going to have traditional Italian relationship’. Katrina described how she knew within the first week of
going out with this man that this was not the sort of relationship she wanted. In spite of this knowledge she stayed in the relationship for more than two years: ‘It took two and a half years to get out of it’. One of the key issues that made Katrina wary of the relationship was her partner’s attitude to gender relations. She described how he had very conservative ideas about a woman’s role. He expected Katrina’s life to revolve around his own. He did not want her to work, or have any friends that he had not introduced. Katrina wanted to go to university, but her partner attempted to prevent this from occurring. She described the young man as possessive: ‘He was insanely jealous and always thought that everyone was looking at me and I was going to run off’. Katrina described how she felt that she was his ‘slave’:

He just wanted me to run his business and cook and clean for him. That’s what he really wanted and he didn’t care about me. It was like I was put on earth for him.

Katrina reflected back on this situation and concluded that having a ‘traditional relationship was never going to be the case for me’, and that ‘I knew what I wanted to get away from’. She realised that she wanted to have a relationship with someone who was ‘from a totally different background’, in particular a man who was ‘much freer’. She soon met another man with whom she had a three-year relationship. Katrina described this relationship to illustrate the issue of compatibility. Katrina observed that in the second relationship her new partner ‘wasn’t very social’. This was the first sign of trouble in the relationship, as Katrina described herself as ‘very social’. As a result she ‘really struggled with that’. As the couple got to know each other Katrina began to realise that she had very different ideas and beliefs to her partner who was very dogmatic about his view of the world. Eventually she decided that she could not continue in a relationship where she was submissively accepting someone’s life philosophy:

We had a very different outlook, and I always let him do his thing and not say much. Then one day we had a really big, significant fight where I said I don’t believe any of that, I think that is all a crock. And that was basically the end of it. I didn’t know that that was going to end the way it did. That is a pretty major thing, my spiritual freedom to believe what I want to believe. And that was a very good outcome in spite of how upsetting it was at the time.
Not long after Katrina entered her third long-term relationship she told this story to demonstrate the importance of the twin issues of trust and commitment. After the two previous experiences Katrina felt that she knew what she wanted from a relationship: ‘That relationship was very strange because I was absolutely clear of all the things that I didn’t want in a man. I had a list’. She described her new partner as very unusual. He was different in that he did not want to control the relationship: ‘He gave me lots of freedom; basically he put me in control’. The freedom that Katrina spoke of turned out to mean that there were few or no boundaries and that the relationship was essentially an open relationship. Although Katrina felt that this was a step forward from her past experiences, she quickly realised that this was not what she wanted either:

He was very flirtatious and I couldn’t cope and I would get jealous, and I knew that I couldn’t spend the rest of my life with a person like that, someone I didn’t trust. And that was central. It could have never been, trust is like love, it is or it isn’t, there is no in between.

Like Katrina, the other women in this study described similar experiences and lessons. The women’s stories captured the changing organisation of relationships. They illustrated the dynamics underpinning the volatility of relationships. They demonstrated women’s increasing agency in the changing patterns of relationship initiations and terminations. Their stories demonstrated that women would no longer passively accept marriage and relationship partners.

In contrast to the women, the majority of the men, 20 of the 24, did not seem to process their previous relationship experiences. These men only mentioned their previous relationships in passing, writing them off as bad experiences and wishing to move on in their lives. For example, Stephen described a number of previous relationships that had not worked out. Rather than explain these in a narrative form he largely wrote them off as a bad experience:

I have had a reasonable number of relationships that haven’t worked out. But it was funny about one particular relationship that didn’t work out. It was funny about that
relationship because it was the least committed relationship that I have ever had mainly because I had misjudged the person a little bit and it didn’t really work.

In other cases the men just avoided the question all together. For example, Eric answered the question about past relationships by focusing attention on his current relationship:

It is a sense of familiarity and common sense of sharing and ideals. With this one I never got to the stage that I felt, ‘I am out of here, I really want to back off’. With this one it was more of a case of definitely wanting the relationship to go on, and adjusting to that fact of spending so much time together and the space factor.

In contrast, four of the 24 men described past relationships in similar terms to the women. They emphasised that their experiences had an important impact on their ideas and attitudes about relationships. These men described how they actively reflected on their own relationship histories and how their previous experiences had been a process of learning. They described personal experiences that led to a process of personal development. The process followed a similar pattern for all four men. Their relationships broke down which led to an emotional crisis. The crisis led to reflection about what caused the breakdown, which resulted in a process of re-evaluation and reflexivity. Like the women’s stories, these stories were about developing and acquiring knowledge and skills about how relationships worked.

Two men described personal development in terms of re-organising their priorities and practices in regard to relationships. The men described how they had prioritised their commitment to the environmental movement and their individual interests over their personal relationships. The effect of doing so had alienated their partners. The men explained that this alienation had led their partners to end their relationships. Dean’s relationship, for example, broke down after six years. He explained that this was his first long-term relationship and that it had coincided with his developing interest and activism in the environmental movement. The work he was doing took up large amounts of his time, which left little time to give to his relationship and his partner. The relationship continued in this way for six years, by which time his partner had become tired of playing second fiddle to the environment and ended the relationship. Dean explained how he
realised that he had lost the relationship due to the priority he gave to environmental concerns:

> Well, when I think back to my early twenties and perhaps the first long-term relationship that I was involved in for about six years … it was at a time when my conservation involvement was really intense. We had a very loving relationship and enjoyed doing things together. But I know that I put first what I knew had to be done at Lake Pedder.

Similarly, Jarrod related a story of a relationship that was ended by his partner because she felt that he did not share a similar investment in the relationship. Jarrod said that the termination of the relationship eventuated from his desire to go overseas for six months to pursue his environmental interests. His partner did not want him to go. Jarrod went overseas against his partner’s wishes, but on his return he found that she had ‘moved on in her life’ and no longer wanted a relationship with him.

An important element in both of these stories was that the men failed to recognise how their actions were impacting upon their partner and relationship. Both said that they valued their relationship and did not intend to cause its breakdown. For example, Dean described how he thought he could commit himself to the movement and continue to have a relationship:

> That was a really hard juggling act and I don’t think that I was always aware of the actual juggling act that was going on. Not that I didn’t care about or greatly value that relationship and it may or may not have been meant to last anyway. But at the end of the day if I had really wanted that to work long term, what I was doing was probably unsustainable.

On a different tack, the other two men, Andrew and Will, described terminating their relationship in terms of personal development. Will described how his partner got involved with drug abuse to such a level that he had to end the relationship. He explained that after ‘numerous attempts to work to rehabilitate her’, which he described as ‘very traumatic’, he finally left the relationship. This experience meant that Will entered a period of soul searching and reflection about his life:
A full-on questioning of my ability to love and have a relationship and trust. Seeing someone that you love self-destruct before your eyes is not a pleasant thing.

Andrew also left his relationship. He said that he was particularly unhappy in his relationship because he felt that it lacked compatibility and equality. He said that this situation had developed through his lack of experience in relationships:

I had been with this girl for a long time. She was older than me, a lot more mature than me at the time that we met and that was quite significant. I was quite immature emotionally at that time.

Andrew described leaving the relationship because it became more burdensome than rewarding. He said that his partner had been ‘very controlling’, mainly due to the six-year age difference which gave her an advantage. According to Andrew, they had very little in common and very different ideas and expectations: ‘She wanted to have children and I didn’t. She wanted to live in the country and I didn’t’. Throughout this episode Andrew described feeling incapable of expressing what was wrong with the dynamics of the relationship: ‘At that time I didn’t really speak about anything like this, feelings and emotions; I didn’t know what was going on’. Eventually he realised that the relationship was not working and that he needed to leave.

In all four cases the men described experiencing an emotional crisis as a result of the end of the relationship and finding themselves alone. They emphasised that they were unprepared for how they would feel as a result of the relationship ending. Dean described how he went through ‘a very painful process’ and ‘a pretty tough learning experience’. Jarrod recalled that he was in mourning for nearly two years and that ‘it was really painful, it was a really big blow to me’. Andrew described feeling ‘lost and disorientated’.

Reflection and re-evaluation were a crucial part of the process of personal development. All four of the men described reflecting upon their experiences and recognising that they had to change their approach to relationships. Both Jarrod and Dean
described new practices. They observed that they needed to re-think how they had prioritised their lives. For example, Dean realised that he needed to have a more realistic balance between his work life and his relationship. He began a new relationship and said to himself: ‘This is very important to me, OK I will put a lot of more time into my relationship’. Similarly, Jarrod’s experience was a turning point in his life. He said, ‘I was not going to let this happen again’. He began to recognise that, in spite of the fact that he had surrounded himself with progressive people, he had not really given much thought to what would underpin a good relationship:

Even though I was in an alternative group I hadn’t gone through that myself. I hadn’t realised that I needed to put a priority onto the relationship itself. I put priority onto all the other things that we lived for but not the relationship itself. I hadn’t said that this relationship needs to be nurtured. It just came like a ton of bricks. Fuck, I just did not look after that relationship! And that was the message.

The men emphasised the importance of developing a level of emotional literacy. Jarrod described this in terms of ‘getting some more resources’. He started reading about relationships, talking to others about their relationships, and listening to radio shows about relationships which provided him with some new insights: ‘I started to get some more skills’. From then on Jarrod gave more thought and attention to his emotional state and his bond with his partner. He redefined the word ‘progressive’ to include emotional literacy:

But along with that came the emotional thing. I suppose it is just around us. I guess you read the newspaper and you read that emotions are important so you look at your emotions. I have identified myself as a progressive person and part of the package of the modern progressive person is that you look at your emotions.

Similarly, Dean’s re-evaluation of his approach to relationships focused attention on his emotional life. He observed that he had been unable to express himself about problem areas in his relationship:

I did a lot of thinking and I realised that I had all these frustrations and I didn’t really express them clearly as well as I should have. I realised that I was a bit shy in expressing some concerns and issues and just assumed that things would work out OK.
Andrew came to a similar conclusion about his experience. He realised that the lack of equality and compatibility were only part of the problem. He also realised that he needed to develop his ability to express his emotional needs. He went to counselling and felt that he had re-invented himself:

It was a relief to me to discover this side of me, my emotional self. I wouldn’t have ever talked about how I think or how I feel, my emotions, apart from anger, the only one that you are allowed to have as a man. Now I look back and I can’t believe, when you finally open your eyes, you think to yourself how did I miss this for so long? It was a real revelation. So now I have got better relationships with everyone and I can express myself and communicate and not hope that people will guess what I am feeling and want to say.

Summary

This chapter discussed the lives of the men beyond the family of origin. The men described a number of experiences that offered the opportunity for gender reform. These experiences tended to reshape the men’s thoughts and practices around gender relations. There were four main influences in the lives of the men beyond the family and which acted as a catalyst for the reform of their masculinity: the educational system, the environmental movement, current relations partners and past relationship experiences.

A third of the men, eight of the 24, described encountering a feminist perspective on gender relations at university. Feminist orientated gender courses at university provided another way of thinking about gender relations. For some of the men these courses were fundamental in reshaping their ideas about gender relations. For others it confirmed existing views. Moreover, the men described recognising that the feminist perspective needed to be incorporated into their everyday lives and particularly their relationships.
The environment movement was also described as having an influence on the men’s attitude to gender relations. The movement provided a social environment for people who shared ideas and values about a range of social equity issues to come together. The men described how they belonged to and were supported in this milieu. Some of the men described feminism impacting the movement in a powerful way that could not be ignored. Moreover, a small number of the men described recognising the relationship between gender inequity and environmental degradation. However, some of the men described how male environmentalists sometimes failed to understand this connection and that principle of gender equity was only superficial. Although these men described patriarchal practices in the movement, these comments were offered as a critique of such practices.

A small number of the men described how their current partners influenced their behaviour. The women influenced the men to adopt non-hegemonic practices. First, the women encouraged their partners’ involvement in the environment movement. For some of the men this meant giving up lucrative jobs and settling for a reduced salary and social power. Partners influenced the men’s attitudes about gender equity. The women also influenced the men in their relationship skills. The men described how their partners played a crucial role in the development of their emotional literacy.

Past relationship experiences had an impact on a small number of men only. This stood in stark contrast to the men’s partners who provided long and detailed accounts of how past experiences had influenced their thinking in the present. Generally the men failed to process their past relationships and tended to write them off as bad experiences, apparently drawing no lesson from them. In contrast, four of the 24 men described experiences in similar terms to the women. These men told of personal crises in their lives resulting in a re-evaluation of ideas about relationships. A change in ideas led to new practices. In particular, the men realised that they needed to find a balance between career orientation and their relationships. Moreover, they realised that they needed to become more emotionally literate.
Chapter 7

Expectations about family life

The previous two chapters described the men’s experiences in their families of origin and beyond. The chapters provided some insight into how the men’s experiences shaped their thoughts about family life, gender relations and masculinity. This chapter discusses the men’s attitudes and expectations about family life. First, it discusses their expectations about the organisation of their own relationships. It then discusses their attitudes to marriage and having children.

7.1 Family organisation and gender relations

The patriarchal organisation of family life held no legitimacy among the men in this study. The men consistently rejected the idea of domestic organisation based on the ideology of patriarchy. The initial phase of the data collection stage included a question about ‘the head of the household’. It became clear very quickly that this was an inappropriate question in the sense that it alienated the respondents. The first man told me, ‘It is a stupid question’. The second man sighed and said, ‘I think that would have been part of our parents’ generation not mine’. When asked if he knew of people who structured their relationships in a patriarchal way the man responded, ‘Yes, but they are not part of our social circle’. The third man told me that ‘people don’t ask questions like that anymore, so I am not sure if it is still a live issue’. These men made it very clear that the notion of men as the head of the household had lost its legitimacy. No man in this study offered any support for patriarchal relations. After these three experiences I withdrew this question from the interview schedule.

In line with Australian survey research about beliefs and values of family life, the men said that they held egalitarian values in regard to the organisation of domestic life (Edgar and Glezer, 1992: 37; Bittman and Lovejoy, 1993: 307). ‘Partnership’ had replaced patriarchy as the dominant ideal about the way a relationship should be
organised. The men consistently used the concept of partnership to explain their expectations about how their relationships were organised. For example, Nathan described his expectations about domestic organisation in terms of partnership. He said that a partnership was about ‘collaboration and co-operation’, and explained that this evolved from witnessing the conflict in his parents’ marriage. His parents had fought with each other everyday, and ‘hated each other’s guts’:

So what I have worked out is that it should be a partnership thing. My parents never worked together, they always worked against each other. So to me it was not so important about who did what but the fact that you did it together. So less of the emphasis on who is the boss, much more on collaboration and co-operation.

The men invariably saw the ideology of patriarchy as a feature of ‘traditional’ families as lived by their parents’ generation. Their own ideas about relationships and gender relations were forged in opposition to the ideology of patriarchy. For example, Phillip said that he always knew things would be different to the way his parents had organised their marriage:

My dad always worked full-time and mum stayed at home with the kids. We always knew that those models were going to be different with us. Yeah, it was always going to be different to the way my parents did things.

The men emphasised that gender was an evolving issue. Some of the men from the ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds said that what their parents considered to be modern in the 1960s and the 1970s was no longer modern, as gender relations had evolved. Accordingly, their own relationships needed to change with shifting values. For example, Martin described his parents’ marriage as on the ‘cutting edge’ for the time in which they married. But he also described how his own relationship would be different to his parents’ marriage: ‘I guess I automatically assumed that it would be different because we are living in a different era’.

The men consistently emphasised that their relationships were based around the idea of equality rather than subordination. They underlined the point that they expected
that their partners would play an equal role in the relationship. For example, Dean explained:

I like to think of a partner as an equal. You are two human beings who are choosing to be together and you are two human beings making those choices. And that does involve listening, respect, understanding, discussion and negotiation with the other person or otherwise it is not going to work.

In close connection, when considering qualities that they looked for in a partner, the men stressed that were looking for women who had their own ideas and lives. They were not looking for partners with traditional values and ideas. The men explained that they were looking for women who were ‘confident’, and for whom they had ‘admiration’ and ‘respect’. Will, for example, described the partners of the men in his organisation as ‘good strong women’ who would not ‘truck a lot of shit’. Phillip observed that what he liked about his partner was that she ‘stood out’ and was ‘outspoken and confident’.

Similarly, Ralph emphasised that he had a lot of respect for his partner. He respected her because she was strong and courageous, willing to stand up for what she believed and to act on her beliefs. To illustrate this point he related a story about his partner, who mounted a wages campaign in the industry in which she worked to achieve wage reform for herself and her co-workers. In spite of the difficulties she faced she was able to achieve her goals. Ralph said that this was why he was attracted to her: ‘So that is a big part of my attraction: the respect and admiration for her ability and the love and the passion.’

It is useful to consider what the respondents said about partnership in terms of the dimensions of Connell’s framework of power, labour and cathexis. On the dimension of power, the men described an expectation of negotiation rather than autonomy. They stressed that they expected to negotiate with their partners about decision-making. For example, Dom described his relationship with his partner in terms of teamwork. He stressed that when he and his partner worked together they produced good results:
It is about being able to talk together about different issues and being able to plan things. Imogen is better than I am at planning and doing practical things like buying a house and having savings and all that sort of stuff and I guess we work as a team. When we put our best efforts together as a team we achieve good results. That is an important part of our relationship.

Moreover, the men did not expect that their partner’s lives would revolve around their own. Ralph described a scenario that illustrated this point. As already described, his father had taken the family off to England so that he could do his PhD. This decision was foisted upon his mother and the family without any negotiation. Ralph said that he faced a similar scenario when offered an opportunity to improve his own career by accepting a job in Sydney. He declined the position because he realised that the family’s life did not solely revolve around his own career:

I don’t make demands like my father did. I was offered an opportunity to move to Sydney and work for the Wilderness society. I decided before even mentioning the offer to Rosemary that I was not going to do that because it would mean that she would have to sever her university aspirations, cut short her career that she has just moved two steps up in. It also would have meant the kids being pulled out schools, and so I just went back and said no.

On the dimension of labour, the men had largely abandoned the notion of gendered roles. The men described how they expected that their partners would want to play an equal role in paid and unpaid work. For example, Terry said that his relationship with his partner was based on an assumption that she had an equal right to pursue the career for which she had been trained, which was underpinned by his feminist ideology. Although the couple had young children, Terry did not expect that his partner would stay home and assume responsibility for them:

The assumption was that Katrina would do what she wanted to do as soon as she was able to do it and it was my desire to only work part-time as well. Probably both of us would work, and that those kind of domestic roles would be shared rather than [being] the women’s responsibility. I had a feminist ideology in that regard and building your world with that person was very much at the heart of it.

The men observed that gender roles were largely outdated. For example, Andrew came from a home where the division of labour was divided along gender lines. He said
that he did not think that gender roles were necessarily a good thing. He observed that men and women both needed to ‘develop a broad range of skills’. Similarly, Phillip observed that partnership meant a shared load of paid and unpaid work. In Phillip’s words:

   We always knew that those roles were going to be different with us. We wanted a more even division of domestic labour, child-rearing stuff and professional stuff.

   The men not only described domestic labour in terms of partnership but in terms of fairness. They were concerned about the effect of letting their partners take responsibility for domestic labour. For example, Shawn emphasised that he did not want to let his partner bear the brunt of domestic labour:

   So being conscious of doing that work, because it does affect how things work, and being conscious because otherwise Monica is going to do it. That’s not what we want. We want to share that kind of work jointly. It can’t work if it is left to one person.

   On the dimension of cathexis, most of the men expressed the idea that partnership involved companionship. Some of them – about a third – went further than this, describing the desire for a close and intimate relationship where the emotional side of the relationship was fully developed. Will, for example, drew a comparison between his parents’ relationship and his own expectations. He described his parents’ relationship as ‘standard’ and ‘conservative’, characterised by ‘a fair bit of aridity and dryness’. This was not something that he wanted to replicate in his own relationship:

   There was not much demonstrable contact. I don’t think any emotional issues were dealt with, which I didn’t want to emulate. I wanted something more open and expressive.

   In this context, partnership meant providing support for self-development. For example, Dom stressed that partnership involved playing an active part in aiding his partner to become independent, which would make the relationship stronger:
One has to recognise that both those individuals need to develop and need to grow and need to be able to share with each other. The more important thing from a personal perspective for both of us is … Imogen not being dependent upon me for advice or security when it comes to making decisions. It is about her developing her own strengths, building up her own strengths, and that is going to aid her as a person and an individual and that is going to strengthen our relationship and that is the way we sort of see it.

Similarly, Dean observed the importance of nurturing his partner in her personal development. Equality was an important element in this process:

I have a high expectation about relationships. As I said before, a relationship is about making a contribution to your partner’s spiritual growth and you can’t do that if it is unequal or unjust.

Again it is interesting to compare the men’s ideas and expectations about family life with those of their partners. The key difference was that the women’s views about family life were much more explicitly informed by the discourse of feminism. Although some of the men used feminist language to underpin their ideas about gender relations, women were more likely to do so. At least eight of the women described themselves as feminists, and used feminist ideas or language to describe their view about family and gender relations. Consider, for example, Ashlyn who described herself in these terms: ‘We have both always worked and I would call myself a feminist as well’. Elizabeth also framed her personal history in these terms:

I have been well-schooled in feminism and I think that my mother changed her views by watching myself and my sister demand things that she would never have demanded. And she was really impressed that we did that.

Feminism provided a framework and set of values for women to draw upon. Moreover the women felt that it gave them a base from which to assert themselves and ask for what they wanted. Chelsea described living in a different world to her mother where she had been embraced and supported by feminism:
I have had a much better education that my mum. I had far more opportunities. I’ve been embraced by feminism, I’ve been supported by feminism.

In particular, feminism provided a framework to support the values of independence and autonomy. Imogen described how she wanted to maintain her independence:

We [Dom and I] still have meetings about our finances, which was an issue to me because I wanted to have financial independence

Similarly, Katrina described how she wanted to keep working to ensure that she kept in touch with what was happening in her field. She said that she did not want to find herself unable to re-enter the workforce after a long period out of it.

I really wanted to stay in the workforce. I didn’t want to find myself in seven years time where I hadn’t worked from the beginning [of the children’s birth] and [ended up going through] all that crap that women go through.

7.2 Marriage

Rejecting patriarchal relations did not necessarily mean that the respondents rejected the institution of marriage. Of the 24 couples, nine were married and a further three were planning to get married. The other 12 couples were in de facto relationships. In this context, the men emphasised that the meaning of marriage had changed, from a social contract to a personal one. They stressed that the bond they had with their partner was the important thing rather than the social convention. In general, the majority of the men described marriage in terms of a celebration and public acknowledgement of the couple’s commitment.

Notwithstanding the widespread shift in the meaning of marriage there was a range of attitudes towards marriage. These views ranged along a continuum from positive to negative with ambivalent views in the middle. Thirteen of the men viewed marriage in a positive light, five held a negative view and six were ambivalent.
The majority expressed the view that marriage was a rite of passage. Of the 24 men, 13 expressed their view of marriage in these terms. They justified their views in a variety of ways. Sometimes they referred to the positive experience of their parents’ marriages. For example, Dennis said that he had never had any reason to doubt or question that he would get married. He felt that his parents and their friends had provided a good model of marriage so he had little reason to be critical:

Marriage is a life long commitment. I don’t think that I ever considered that it wasn’t and I suppose that that comes from having a very strong parental influence in the regard: that they were always close and that they just stayed married. Most of my friends’ parents had good marriages as well, so I had little experience of people opting out of marriage or getting divorced when I was young. So I suppose that you have a traditional, if that is the word, view that marriage is a commitment and not to be, not something that you can enter into with an out-clause. You go into it knowing that it is for life.

Experiences of divorce did not necessarily have a negative impact upon the men’s views about marriage. Four of the men’s parents had divorced. Two of these men expected that they would get married in spite of their parents’ divorce. For example, Dom did not question the institution of marriage:

Oh we want to get married. We don’t have anything against marriage, it is just trying to get it organised. Also we will pay for the wedding ourselves and we have put our money into our house rather than into the wedding.

Religion was not a significant factor in influencing people’s attitudes to marriage. Only one respondent in the study, Terry, described it as fundamental in influencing his decision. Terry’s father was a minister of religion and his parents believed that a de facto relationship was an unsatisfactory living arrangement. Terry described how after going out with his partner for a number of months, they needed to marry if the relationship was to continue:

I guess fundamentally, I had a Christian perspective. But that didn’t mean that I didn’t believe in sex before marriage or that you needed to be married. It just felt like it was a logical and reasonable thing for me and it seems to me to be a vessel
for you to grow in. I am not too concerned about leaning on social props like marriage because I think that you need all the help you can get. Because it can be quite hard to stay together because when you get kids, jobs, money, or lack of money or all of that stuff it is really hard to keep it going.

Some of the respondents’ attitudes about marriage had changed over the course of their lives. Two of the men who now held a positive view said that their ideas about marriage changed as a result of the influence of their partners. Their view about marriage had changed from ‘an anti-marriage’ stance to one which centred on marriage as a ‘celebration’ of the couple’s union. Andrew described how, before meeting his current partner, he had been against marriage. There were ‘all sorts of intellectual reasons why I didn’t like it’. After meeting his current partner he ‘realised the importance of it … the whole symbolism and the commitment’. Given his own positive experience, he now said that he would ‘recommend it to others’. Similarly, Dean had remarried. He emphasised that his own experience and knowledge of many unhappy marriages had influenced him to hold an ‘anti-marriage’ attitude. Meeting his partner changed his attitude:

I think that when I was growing up I didn’t have a firm view on marriage, in fact I was probably anti-marriage. Pretty concerned about the adverse impact on people and on life, marriage as an institution. I saw my mum and dad as having a good marriage but it was just a feeling, but also seeing a lot of people together who weren’t happy. I am not so worried about the institution but concerned about the commitments and the efforts. It has been a choice that we have made together and it just felt like a really nice thing. We were very happy to celebrate it with friends and family.

In contrast five men held a negative attitude to marriage. Two respondents explained their attitude in terms of their parents’ divorce. Another two respondents said that marriage was redundant: it was the quality of the relationship that was important, not the marriage certificate. For example, Gary explained his 24 year de facto relationship with Mary as follows:

No, we are not married and we never felt the need to get married. The important thing is the quality of our relationship and that we uphold our love … Although I am not against anyone wanting to be married or making a public statement about being married or personal statement. We believe that the proof and the richness of
our relationship is just in the being. I think, after ten years, we had a celebration that wasn’t very formal. We meant to do it after twenty as well.

The fifth respondent framed his response in Marxist-feminist language, defining marriage as a patriarchal institution. Robert emphasised that the bond or contract between a couple was a personal rather than a social contract:

I am not interested in marriage at all. You make the contract between yourselves, in your heart, you don’t make a contract on a piece of paper. I find the concepts of monogamy and ownership … it is an ownership contract basically and even though I don’t feel that I am particularly patriarchal, we live in a patriarchal society and it is a male ownership thing. And you can’t just strip away the history by changing a few words. And it’s dishonest, there is no permanence in relationships anymore, and whether you sign a contract or wear a ring it doesn’t make any difference at all. It is dishonest.

There were another six men who were ambivalent in their attitude. These men explained their views in terms of three influences; personal experiences, their partners’ views, and a critical perspective. Ron, for example, was partly influenced by his own marriage and divorce, as well as his parent’s marriage which he saw as dominated by his father. He had married, notwithstanding his strong belief that marriage was outmoded. This was essentially on account of his partner:

Well I think that it is an evolving institution for sure. What has been seen as the traditional way for the last couple of hundred of years is completely inappropriate now. In terms of having it all stitched up in terms of their sexuality and their income status, the male being the breadwinner and wife doing the … The old model is completely gone. Nowadays the importance of the ceremony is a personal thing instead of being a social expectation. There are some people who believe that you should still have the ceremony. Now I believe that that is their own personal business, it is not society’s business. Rosemary and I got married by a celebrant. We certainly rejected the church model; we chose the legal requirement model, and we have friends who haven’t bothered. I think the word is probably outdated now. I know of same-sex partnerships that have been very successful, I know of single people who have been very successful with child rearing, who have chosen to be single right from the outset.

One couple rejected the traditional church wedding and became what they described as ‘welded’ together by a friend who was a civil marriage celebrant. The couple had little interest in the formal marriage ceremony but they wanted to
acknowledge their commitment to one another in a public ceremony with friends and family. David explained:

We eventually got welded. We lived together in Elwood for a while and we sort of wanted to get married, but we didn’t like the connotations of that so much, and we didn’t agree with it. But we wanted to formalise it that we were together, and to share it with our friends. So instead of getting married we got welded … We had a friend… and she has a farm out in Rochester and she has a blacksmith’s forge there, it is a pioneer farm sort of thing.

Another man’s attitude was strongly influenced by his partner’s attitude. Eric’s partner, Hayley, was ambivalent about marriage in the light of her own experience of marriage and divorce. Both Eric and Hayley shared a similar view about marriage. Eric described how he ‘didn’t feel the need to legitimise’ their relationship with ‘a stamp of approval’. On the other hand, he did not have any major objections. Eric described how his partner ran hot and cold about the idea and therefore he did also:

We’ve talked about it and I don’t feel any need to conform to that institution. The times that we have talked about it, Hayley hasn’t really felt that it is something that she really wants to or needs to put a stamp of legitimacy on it, and then at other times she feels that she would probably like it. So she runs hot and cold on it. She may say that it is something that she would like to do and I would say that I don’t have a problem with that. I don’t have any major objections to doing it. I just don’t see any rationale in the context of … We have talked about it a few times over the last few months. It has never been an issue or that it demands to be given a high priority.

Dermot also held an ambivalent view that he shared with his partner. They both felt that marriage was not necessary. This was partly due to the fact ‘we don’t come from religious backgrounds’. Dermot reflected:

Oh, I am not really fussed. I think that if people want to do it, it is a useful expression of trust. I was much more anti-marriage when I was younger.
7.3 Having children

Whereas the respondents were divided in their views about marriage, their views about having children were more similar. The majority of the respondents (19 of the 24 men or 79 percent) expected to have children. For the majority of the men having children was an important aspect of a partnership. Two respondents described ambivalent feelings about having children. Three said that they had no desire to have children.

The majority of the men expected that children would be part of their relationship. It was not a matter of ‘if’ for these men and their partners: it was a matter of the conditions being right and personally being ready to take on the commitment. These respondents framed their attitude to having children in terms of the logistics. Dennis, for example, emphasised that he ‘definitely’ wanted to have children, but the desire was balanced by the contingencies of bearing and raising children when both partners had demanding careers:

Well I suppose there is always some uncertainty about how it is going to work and will you be able to do it. We have both had very busy and rushed lives. To fit a baby into that, how was it going to work? So initially I wanted to have children and I really like children but in terms of practicalities there were definitely uncertainties about how was it going to work and how were we going to make it work. I suppose that everyone goes through that experience, but yeah, I definitely wanted to have children.

Contingencies included the sense of being ready to have children. Four of the men expressed this concern. For example, Phillip and Laura had three children but they had never planned their family: it just happened. Phillip described how he and Laura had a ‘shared perception’ that they both wanted children, but felt that ‘the timing was never going to be right’. Both Phillip and Laura had challenging jobs. In spite of the challenges Phillip was able to take on in the public world, he was not sure whether he would be ready or when the time would be right to have children:

There were always going to be children but the time was never going to be right. I never imagined that I would be ready for children. I would say, “Oh yeah, I want
to have kids but” … I wasn’t trying to avoid it or anything but it was always a pretty scary prospect, having little tackers who are dependent on you. But there was never any doubt that we were going to have kids. It was just a question of timing and that was foisted upon us anyway.

Similarly, Dean and his partner Amanda both wanted to have children but Dean said that he had never felt old enough:

We would definitely like to have kids and we are seriously thinking about that now and we are in a relatively new marriage. So it is something that we have only just started broaching but I think that we would both like to do that. Even though I feel like I am young at heart, I have never felt that I am old enough to have kids. I haven’t actually thought much about that, but that is right.

Two of the men expressed ambivalent feelings about having children. These men were in their forties at the time of the interview and framed their concern about having children in terms of their age. Nathan and his partner had been married for nine years. They had been busy working, studying and buying their house. The years had flown by and now they were facing a dilemma about having children. Nathan was much more ambivalent or confused about having children. He described the pros and cons about having children. The result was that he tried to put it out of his mind:

Oh I don’t know, it is the sort of thing that I have put off in my mind I suppose. I guess it has always been too difficult. I have mixed feelings. I would like to think that I would have some children because as a personality I like to explain and teach things. So whenever there are young kids around I like to explain and show them things. But I am very busy at work and I don’t know if I have the time to give that time to the kids. We are both getting older now. It is a bit of a problem really because people are always reminding us that Pam is getting older, but you tend to put it out of your mind. There is a slight element of trying to please your parents. Particularly with my parents: you have a responsibility to carry on the seed and that their children will carry on the seed.

Similarly, Eric expressed his concern and ambivalence in terms of his age and the recognition of his partner’s circumstances. Eric had just turned forty at the time of the interview and Hayley was in her mid thirties. Hayley had recently completed her post-graduate studies and was in the process of forging a career in the academic world:
We are thinking about it at the moment, talking about it, feeling pretty positive about it. I think that we are at that time of our lives where you take into account that we are not getting any younger. I certainly wouldn’t want to have kids if I get too old. By the time the kids are in their twenties you are in your seventies or whatever. Then again I would have hated to have kids when I was too young.

In contrast to the majority of the men who largely expected to have children, there were three men who described having no desire to have children. David expressed this view most strongly. He did not provide any reason why he did not want children but emphasised that his relationship would not include children. The response came out of the question about whether he would construct his relationship differently to his parents’ relationship:

Yes. Children, I didn’t want any children for a start. What did I want out of it? I don’t know. It was partly an idea that we were living together. There was a business side to this arrangement. Somehow or other we achieve a house out of this, we stop paying rent, which would have been nice to achieve twenty or thirty years ago. It was a thing somehow we would get things done together. I don’t know what! There is a strong relationship between Carol and myself, but before the fact, thinking about what we were going to be … We wanted to be together, but specifically it would have been no children.

These men were not able to provide any reason as to why they did not want to have children. They described it as just a ‘feeling’. Andrew said ‘I have never felt like that was what I wanted to do’. Similarly, Ben framed his answer in terms of the way he felt: ‘For me, I think it is a lack of desire and a strong desire not to have them. I certainly did not have the feeling that I wanted to have children’.

The men reported feeling social pressure from other people to procreate and described how they had to explain and justify their decision. Andrew, in particular, described how other people had exerted pressure on him and Bronwyn to have children:

I have never wanted to have children and because of my last relationship that was something I asked right up front. Bronwyn said that she didn’t, so that was a good thing. And I have never flinched from that. I have never felt like that was what I wanted to do. It’s kind of like the end of your life as you know it. I have been called selfish and all sorts of strange things, so there is a lot of pressure out there.
Summary

This chapter described the way the men in the study think about family life, men’s and women’s roles, marriage and children. Consistent with other contemporary studies of marriage and family life, partnership rather than patriarchy was seen to be the conventional way of organising family life. Men no longer expected to be the sole breadwinner. The men expected that they and their partners would play a shared role in paid and unpaid labour. The men emphasised that the partnership was about equality rather than hierarchy and did not expect that their partners would play a subordinate role in their relationships. Gender roles were seen as obsolete. The men described expecting to share domestic labour with their partners. They expected to have a close relationship, and play a part in their partner’s growth and development.

The respondents generally described marriage in terms of a celebration of commitment. In spite of the general agreement about the meaning of marriage, the men had diverse views about how they would formalise their partnerships. About half held a conventional view and expected to marry, largely viewing it as a rite of passage. A little less than half of the men were ambivalent or against a formal ceremony. Ambivalence was largely driven by concerns about age and having the right conditions to support children. A small group of men described formal marriage as unnecessary, out of date or as a patriarchal institution.

The respondents overwhelmingly expected to have children. Notwithstanding the widespread consensus about children, the men articulated a range of concerns about them. These concerns went to the very heart of partnership, that is, how to raise children and balance careers on an equitable basis. There were only three respondents who were sure that they did not want children. These men struggled to explain their desire not to have children.

In some ways the respondents in this study were similar to those in other Australian studies during the 1990s. They described patriarchy as obsolete and had
replaced it with the concept of partnership. About half expected to marry and the majority wanted to have children. Yet all of the men were familiar with the feminist critique of the family. Many of them were in relationships with women who routinely called upon feminism to support their position. Some of them were very sympathetic to feminism. They were ambivalent about marriage on account of its history as a patriarchal institution. This is different from other studies of Australian men and family ideologies.
Part III - Doing Gender, Doing Relationships

The previous three chapters explored the male respondents’ backgrounds and where appropriate compared them with the women’s experiences. It provided some insight into the men’s experiences, ideas and expectations about family life and thus their gender projects. Those chapters demonstrated that, at an ideological level, the gender projects of these men were progressive. None of the men described any legitimacy for patriarchal relations and a number of the men used feminist ideas to underpin their ideas about family life and gender relations highlighting the value of gender equality. Part Three of this study turns attention from ideas to practice. More specifically it examines the men’s stories of gender practice across the three dimensions of power, labour and cathexis and compares the men’s accounts of what happens in practice with those of their partners.

Chapter 8 discusses 10 relationships where the men and women presented largely consistent accounts of reformed masculinity. It examines the characteristics of gender practice across the three dimensions of power, labour and cathexis and the effect these practices have for relationships.

Chapter 9 discussess the other 14 relationships where the men and women presented largely consistent accounts of gender division and struggle. The chapter shows that these men were well attuned to gender reform but struggled in carrying it off. It examines the characteristics of gendered practices of these men across the three dimensions of their relationships and discusses the effects these practices have for the relationships.

Chapter 10 discusses how the men rationalise progressive ideas with hegemonic or resistant practices. It discusses the strategies women employ in trying to achieve equality in gender relations and the strategies men use to resist change.
Chapter 8

Gender reform and partnership relationships

This chapter discusses the relationships and gender projects of 10 (42 percent) of the 24 men described as largely reformed, at least by the men and their partners. These were projects that were characterised by largely non-hegemonic practices according to both the men and their partners. As a result of these reformed practices the respondents described their relationships as characterised by harmony and ‘partnership’: hence these relationships are described as ‘partnership’ relationships (see Appendix 1).

There are strong grounds for scepticism about these respondents’ accounts of harmony in their relationships. Michael Bittman and Jocelyn Pixley have observed that couples go to extraordinary lengths to convince researchers as well as themselves that their relationships are characterised by partnership, notwithstanding strong evidence that they are not. The researchers found many inconsistencies and discrepancies in the stories of the couples they studied. Bittman and Pixley observed that couples often lied to themselves in their attempt to create this sense of partnership. They referred to this situation as ‘pseudomutuality’, which they defined as a false sense of complementarity (1997: 146). Perhaps the respondents in this study also tried to convey ‘a seamless family life’, or false complementarity.

There are at least three reasons to believe that respondents in partnership relationships were not driven by ‘pseudomutuality’, trying to present an image of harmony where there was none. First, all couples in this study – both those who described harmony and those who did not – generally presented consistent accounts, unlike couples in other studies. Moreover, the consistencies in the respondents’ stories stood up to a sustained test over a number of hours. The accounts of partnership and harmony would have been hard to sustain over that period without any cracks.
Second, in contrast to Bittman and Lovejoy’s study where the respondents tried to conceal the conflict in their relationships, the respondents in this study did not do so. The majority of the women who described conflict in their relationships were open about the conflict and inequality and welcomed the opportunity to tell someone about it. Even in the most conflicted relationships, both partners readily acknowledged the conflict in the relationship. Further, the men acknowledged that their practices were creating inequality in their relationships.

Third, the couples who described their relationships in partnership terms provided detailed examples to support their accounts. It would have been difficult to fabricate this kind of detail. Indeed, they often described their current relationships in comparison to earlier relationships. Their current relationships were the product of hard-won experience, and they took pride in having learned from that experience.

On this basis, it seems unlikely that the couples who described harmony and partnership in their relationships were ‘faking it’.

8.1 Reformed masculinity

The partners of the 10 men who had largely reformed their masculinity consistently described their partners in non-hegemonic terms. The women observed that their partners had constructed a different style of masculinity. In contrast to the hegemonic style of masculinity (as discussed in the literature review), where men dominated decision-making, and avoided responsibility for domestic labour, communication and emotional attachment, these women insisted that their partners were different to other men. For example, Laura said:

Phillip is very comfortable with himself. I don’t think that he has been caught up in those blokey types of things. He gets on well with other men but he also had lots of other female friends. I just don’t feel like he had to go through all the posturing and the other stuff young men seem to feel they need to do, to prove how manly they are.
A key characteristic of the non-hegemonic projects was a strong commitment to
gender equity. Josie stressed that her partner was ‘tuned into women’. Similarly, Imogen
explained that her partner, Dom, recognised that gender equity was a fundamental issue
of their relationship:

And one of the things about Dom is that he is in touch with women’s issues. He is
aware of women’s rights, women’s space, women’s…

The women explained the differences between their partners and other men in
terms of personal development. They observed that their partners were men who were
reflective and willing to learn from their experiences. For example, Rebecca described
her partner Will as someone who was concerned about his personal growth. She
explained that he had been through a traumatic experience that undermined his self-
confidence and made him question himself and his life. Rebecca said that this experience
was essentially a good learning experience for Will and that he had used the experience
to help create the life and relationship that he wanted:

He is a very warm, caring kind of person, always learning and always aware of
wanting to grow. He was very hurt from his [past] experience but he really
wanted to grow beyond those. He accepted that they were a part of his makeup
and he didn’t want to be stuck in it and he wanted to work towards his happy life,
a fulfilling, happy life. I admired that strength to search that out. And I think we
had a sense of adventure that we both wanted to grow and have adventure in our
lives and a richness and synchronicity there.

The men consistently related stories about developing the emotional dimension of
the lives. For example, Jarrod described himself as a progressive person. He emphasised
that a progressive person needed grow and develop. In particular a progressive person
would examine their emotional skills:

I am definitely aware that there have been changes and I have developed skills. I
have always reached out every time there has been a chance to authentically have
human development. So I have consciously and intentionally followed these
developments whilst challenging gender concepts. Like there are some silly things
that you can do in gender development. So I have really consciously and
intentionally followed those developments. I subscribed for a while to XY
magazine for three years. It is a men’s movement magazine. I have never been to
a men’s group, but I just followed those gender things … social development things?

It is not just intellectual, it could seem like it was intellectual and I was very intellectual, but along with that came the emotional thing. I suppose it is just around us. I guess you read the newspaper and you read that emotions are important so you look at your emotions. I have identified myself as a progressive person and part of the package of the modern progressive person is that you look at your emotions.

Similarly, Ben observed the importance of developing empathy. He described how he thought about what was going on in his partner’s mind and how she was feeling:

I try to think of her needs as well as mine. I try to think what they are and what they might be. So I would be sensitive to how she might be feeling. I’m not saying I am always successful, but I am trying to be aware of that by little surprises, of thinking of things that she might like.

The women observed that their partners’ style of masculinity meant that they were more relaxed in their relationships. For example, Hayley observed that her partner provided the conditions for her to be the person she wanted to be. She said that she did not have to act cynically or defensively as she had done in other relationships:

He has given me a framework to be nicer, or as nice as I would like to be. There is no need to have a hard edge with him. There is no need to be cynical, protective, those kind of defensive mechanisms that you get into when you are in a relationship that is not quite working. And so as much as he is a lovely person, we are lovely together, and that is something that I discovered and couldn’t imagine not being in. It is a great relationship.

Laura described a similar experience with her partner, Phillip. She explained that her partner’s gender practices had made her a better person. Phillip did not have a traditional view of gender relations, but was ‘fair’ and ‘disciplined’ which had the effect of bringing out the best in her:

Being in a relationship with Phillip has made me … He has certainly brought out the best in me, he has made me a better person. He isn’t a traditional guy who says that ‘you have to be like this or that, or you can’t do that’. He is so fair, so he has actually made me more self-disciplined.
In this context, relationships for these men were described as characterised by harmony rather than conflict. These were relationships where neither partner complained of a serious or chronic problem on any of the three dimensions. The respondents felt that they had largely achieved a partnership. Both the men and the women used the term partnership to convey a sense of compatibility, teamwork and togetherness.

Rebecca and Will, for example, lived in Adelaide and had been together for five years. Both grew up in what they described as traditional families. Both Will and Rebecca were tertiary educated, Rebecca currently doing her PhD. Will described how his ideas about gender had been heavily influenced by his studies in a sex and gender course at university. Both Rebecca and Will shared the perception that their relationship is characterised by partnership and compatibility. Both described the relationship as satisfactory across all three dimensions of the relationship. They emphasised that the relationship was meeting their expectations. Will observed the importance of mutuality, with both partners thinking about each other’s needs. In his words, ‘there is a real sense of partnership, of doing things together and sharing together and we both support each other’. Similarly, Rebecca said that the relationship was characterised by mutuality and reciprocity. Further, the mutuality provided a sense of progress:

Well, there is a sense of movement, that we are both moving forward together and independently. I am really loving my work and study and where it is taking me. I know that Will loves where he is going and we are kind of going there together. There are great links between our work and our philosophy of life. Even more so as we get further down the track in the relationship. It is a very strong spiritual relationship as well and we have kind of parallel - it is hard to describe - a sense that we’re both fulfilling a purpose, our purpose, and it is very right that we are together to support each other and do that.

Another couple, Imogen and Dom, described their relationship in similar terms. Imogen emphasised that the relationship was characterised by a strong sense of compatibility. She explained that she and Dom shared an understanding of each other and how the relationship should operate:
We are here as a partnership, to care about each other and this is a fundamental issue. I guess it’s that you respect each other, that you have a common understanding. That is a very important basis for a relationship for me. There is respect, there is not that dependent … there is still the ability to be an individual within your relationship. You are free to discuss any aspects of your relationships.

Dom spoke in much the same terms. He described the couple as a team and emphasised that they were ‘on the same wavelength’. He used the term ‘teamwork’ to convey the idea that they were working together to create a strong relationship but also to support each other individually:

I guess we work well as a team. When we put our efforts together as a team we achieve good results. That’s a really important part of our relationship. This is my belief and one that Imogen shares, that is, in a successful relationship, there needs to be two people who are independent of one another, therefore, when they work together they create a third person in a sense…

8.2 Power

A key characteristic of the reformed masculinity was that the men did not expect to dominate decision-making. The 10 women who were the partners of the reformed men, consistently emphasised that they were not subordinate or disadvantaged on this dimension. They described decision-making as a shared process in which they believed they played an equal role. For example, Laura felt that she had relative equality on this dimension. Laura had been in her relationship with her partner Phillip for fifteen years and married for ten years. Both she and her partner worked part-time to be able to be home when their young children returned from school. Laura described how decision-making was a dynamic process, and that the balance of power swung back and forth:

He certainly doesn’t need to be the head of the house. We are very equal, and the power balance changes a bit from time to time. Sometimes he’s the parent and I am the kid, and sometimes he’s the kid and I the parent. We share responsibilities, we share decision-making and I think that we both really respect each other, so we will listen to the other’s point of view.
Similarly, Imogen observed that her partner did not feel the need to control the relationship:

Dom doesn’t feel the need too prove anything about his relationship as some men do. Some men feel that they have to control things. A lot of the time it does come down to control and power play. There is not a lot of talk within relationships about social issues. We are both concerned about society and people and what we do. We are both quite politically active and all these issues have some influence on how we relate to each other.

Louise also said that her partner did not expect to control decision-making. She explained that they had a mutual understanding that any decision they needed to make would be negotiated:

If there is a big decision to made, I wouldn’t assume that he is going to make it, and he wouldn’t assume that he is going to make it. We just redesigned the back of the house and we thrashed it out together.

The women stressed that their partners had a strong commitment to equality. For example, Josie said that she moved in a social circle where both the women and the men had similar ideas and expectations about gender equality. She explained this pattern in terms of the similar paths that they had taken, and the social circle in which they moved:

In our social circle the women have worked just as hard as the men. Why should anything else be different? I think that he just knows that there is no difference between us. We have both studied the same thing, we both work the same hours, so why should anything else be different?

The partnership relationships were characterised by a lack of conflict. Respondents explained the lack of conflict in number of ways. First, they emphasised the element of compatibility, that is, shared ideas and values. Second, they were aware of each other’s needs. Finally, when issues did arise they worked it out in a way that resolved them rather than intensifying conflict:

For example, Hayley explained that her partner’s non-hegemonic style of masculinity meant that the dynamics in the relationship were different to those of most other
relationships. In contrast to the conflict she had encountered in her previous relationships she and her partner worked issues out in a different way:

In between meeting Eric [the current partner] the first and second time, I had been married and had several other relationships, and one where my partner drank too much. What I discovered with Eric was what it is like to never ever have an argument. We always work things out and he is very respectful, very supportive.

Similarly, Laura and Phillip agreed that they had little conflict. Laura remarked that ‘in the overall scheme of things there is no great conflict’. She stressed that they tried to sort things out in a respectful manner:

The other thing that I have noticed in our relationship that is different in other relationships is that we don’t bicker. We hardly ever bicker because there isn’t that jealousy and resentment that one of us is doing more than the other. We are both fairly careful that we speak with respect to each other.

Phillip agreed. He explained the lack of conflict in terms of their commitment to the relationship, and their awareness and responsiveness to each other’s needs:

I don’t think that it is anything more than being committed to a relationship, two individuals being committed to a relationship and being aware of what the other person’s needs are. And if both people bring that attitude to it, then whatever conflict does arise is likely to be negotiated.

8.3 Labour

Reformed masculinity meant that the men did not expect that their partners would assume responsibility for domestic labour. The men expected to share domestic labour with their partners and needed to do their fair share. It is not that there was absolute equality in these relationships, but what distinguished these 10 men from the others was their willingness to accept responsibility for domestic labour rather than play a helper role or resist participation. The women consistently stressed that their partners took responsibility for their share of domestic labour. They observed that their partners backed up their belief in partnership with corresponding behaviour. Will and Rebecca, for example, had been together for just over two years, but had known each other much
longer. They planned to get married and were thinking about having children. Will believed that domestic labour was ‘fairly evenly divided’. Rebecca confirmed Will’s perception and emphasised that he assumed responsibility for his part:

We have a fairly equal division of labour in the home … If I start cleaning the bathroom I don’t start announcing, ‘I’m going to clean the bathroom now’. Will will do something else, it’s a fluid thing. If something needs to be done, one of us will do it. Neither of us are really messy people. If the place is getting dirty we clean it. So it is not a gender issue at all.

Similarly, Phillip assumed responsibility for inside and outside the home. He explained that he retained responsibility for ‘those traditional blokey type things’, heavy lifting and outside work. Beyond that he said that he had a responsibility inside the house where the bulk of the labour accumulated. After the ‘traditional’ work was done, he moved on to the ‘not so traditional ones’:

Which are the ones that are shared like the cooking … I make all the lunches, I make sandwiches for five every morning. On my days at home I vacuum the house. I clean the bathroom, the toilet, mop the floors and that sort of stuff.

Laura confirmed Phillip’s account. She explained that he took responsibility and just did it himself and they worked together as a team:

Most of the stuff he just does. I come home and he has cleaned out the fish tank and cleaned out the freezer. He gets up in the morning and does all the lunches. That is something he just took on; I didn’t suggest it to him. I find that when we go camping we don’t have to communicate much at all about what we are doing and we don’t always do the same thing. We just work alongside each other. We know each other so well now that we just know what the other person is doing and just pick up the cues.

The women emphasised that their partners were not concerned about doing work that had traditionally been the domain of women. For example, Laura described how her partner had reconstructed his masculinity along non-hegemonic lines:

Phillip doesn’t see things as male and female things. You just do them because you need to know how to do them. He is not hung up about female type things.
Similarly, Josie remarked that her partner was ‘pretty much tuned into women’. Josie described Dennis as more progressive when compared to other men:

Dennis is pretty good compared to most other guys. He likes to cook, he doesn’t hate shopping and that sort of stuff. He just knows there is no difference between us.

The women emphasised that they did not feel that they were being exploited. In Laura’s words:

Neither of us feels that the other is welching out on things, whereas I know I have friends who have lovely partners but when they go camping the partners will slump in front of the tele because they are tired, and they will get very resentful. There is very little resentment in our relationship.

The partnership couples actively attempted to create the conditions for equality. For example, Phillip and Laura described how they organised their relationship in such a way so as to avoid gender roles. They described how both of them worked part-time and had a couple of days at home during the week, caring for the children and doing domestic labour. Phillip explained how the relationship was organised:

We have had a great arrangement for several years where we work half a week each so someone is always home with pre-school kids. Our youngest has now gone to school so we are now looking at doing a lot more work.

Ben and Louise had a similar arrangement. Ben and Louise had been in their relationship for nearly ten years. Over that time they had made a conscious decision to work similar hours, and attempt to earn similar amounts of money. Louise said:

Well we are both breadwinners and earn exactly the same amount of money. We both cook, clean and we both wash.

Research in the area of domestic labour observed that the arrival of children was often a defining stage in relationships. Researchers have described how couples often shifted from partnership to more traditional patterns of domestic labour with the arrival of
children. Once the conventional pattern was established, it often remained. The partnership couples also had to deal with this issue. The women experienced short periods out of the labour force with the arrival of children. Even so, the partnership couples made great effort to avoid falling into conventional gender roles.

Josie and Dennis, for example, had recently had a child and Josie had gone on maternity leave for six months. Dennis explained that this pattern was only temporary. Neither he nor Josie wanted to fall into a traditional gendered pattern. He said that both he and Josie wanted to create the conditions for a more even division of labour:

I am hoping to get to the stage where I can be at home fifty percent of the time. Josie enjoys being at work and I would like to share it a bit more as well. So for both of us, just being able to divide it more evenly we both find it more interesting. And I can see that if she spent all of her time at home it is not that much fun. You don’t enjoy it because you are just doing the same thing every day. So diversity makes it more interesting. And it also allows us to see what the other person’s life is like, and what they have done with their day.

Three of these couples described issues about gendered standards of work. Although none of the women complained that they were responsible for domestic labour, these couples described gendered standards of domestic labour. Louise, for example, emphasised that things were fairly even with her partner: ‘It is a fairly blurred line’, and ‘we both cook, we both clean and we both wash’. At the same time, she said, ‘I tidy up more than Ben, but I recognise it’s more an aesthetic thing’. Ben agreed that Louise is ‘much tidier than me’. Similarly, Phillip admitted that his partner did more housework than he did because ‘her standards are higher than mine’.

In general, most of these couples had similar standards of housework. These men wanted a similar standard to their partner. For example, Rebecca stressed that her partner wanted a comfortable and clean home as much as she did:

He is proud of the home. His home is a rich happy place, we love having visitors there and we like to make it look nice, but not too nice. He knows that he needs clean clothes and he virtually lived alone before we moved in together for a year or two, so we are both self-maintaining.
8.4 Cathexis

The reformed masculinity extended to the dimension of cathexis. Reform on this dimension involved meeting the partners’ needs. By the same token, not all of the couples placed the same emphasis upon cathexis. The majority of the men, eight of the ten, described a desire for intimacy and a high level of reflection about their emotional lives. In contrast, two of the men described a desire for companionship rather than intimacy. Regardless of the different types of bond that these couples described, all of their stories centred on the theme of symmetry between the men and the women.

8.4.1 Intimate relationships

In eight of the ten partnership relationships the bond between the partners was described in intimate terms. These relationships had the characteristics of the ‘pure relationship’ as described by Anthony Giddens. Giddens argued that the pure relationship was characterised by six key elements: the provision of sufficient emotional satisfaction, reciprocity, mutual alignment or compatibility, trust and commitment, intimacy and reflexive organisation. Moreover, these relationships resembled another important characteristic of the pure relationship highlighted by Giddens, that is, the tendency toward ‘eradication of the internal division of labour’ (Giddens, 1991: 88). It is useful to use Giddens’ key elements as a framework for the respondents in this study.

First, Giddens described the pure relationship in terms of providing sufficient emotional satisfaction. Consistent with this condition, both the women and the men described their relationships in glowing terms. One of the women insisted that ‘this relationship is a great relationship’. Another woman remarked that ‘this is the best one I have ever had’. Another said that her family had noticed that her relationship was making her happy:

My family thinks that I look happy. My sister made a speech at my fortieth birthday and she said that the family was absolutely delighted that I was happy. They were happy just to see me happy. That’s one of the very good things about
our relationship: I am cared for and I hope that Ben feels like that as well. It feels like a very safe relationship as well.

The men also consistently described being content in their relationships. For example, Ben, Louise’s partner, observed:

This is something really special, it is something that I am blessed to have … to lose it through mismanagement or lack of care would be unforgivable, I don’t think that I could forgive myself. I am constantly reminded of how lucky I am. I feel so lucky to have found such a relationship and to have been able to hang on to it because it is a very precious thing.

The women stressed that they felt loved, cared for, and supported. For example, Rebecca said:

I get great support from the relationship. We have a lot of fun, and I feel loved. It’s a very healthy, very supportive, very respectful, very loving and very communicative relationship. The best one that I have ever had.

Amanda, too, emphasised that she felt supported:

The time we spend together is very important. He understand and supports me in what I want to do, he is very supportive.

All of the women had previous relationships. The women consistently referred to their previous relationships as a benchmark to explain how their current relationship was different and better. In their previous relationships the women had encountered a range of problems; inequality, and a lack of intimacy, emotional support, commitment and trust. In contrast, the women described how their current relationships had transcended these problems. Louise, for example, described how she had been in a long-term relationship that made her very unhappy and in which she did ‘all the caring’. She eventually left that relationship. Her current relationship was ‘totally liberating’.

Hayley, too, had been married previously. She described her former marriage as ‘incredibly boring’ because she and her partner ‘had nothing in common’. Hayley’s main complaint about her ex-partner was that he rarely offered her any support and showed
little interest in her life. She emphasised that her current partner was totally different to her ex-husband. He supported her when she needed it. She recounted an episode where she was presenting a paper at a conference, and wanted her former partner to attend the meeting as a sign of his support. He did not go and she felt let down:

Rob didn’t come to the meeting, so I went home and I said everything went really well. He was on his way out to go windsurfing and he left me there by myself after such a big day. That just wouldn’t happen with Eric. He is interested. He is an amazing listener. The difference between Eric and Rob is amazing.

Like their partners the men stressed that they also felt cared for. For example, Eric emphasised that he had spent many years as a single man, experiencing times of loneliness. He said that being in the relationship meant that he did not feel alone:

That you are not feeling alone, that you are sharing experiences, you are sharing what you do. And that someone cares about the way that you do things, and you can reciprocate that as well.

Second, Giddens argued that the pure relationship was one in which there was ‘a balance of reciprocity’ (Giddens, 1991: 90). The women identified reciprocity and mutuality as key aspects of their relationships. The women in the partnership relationships observed that love and care were two-way processes. For example, Imogen described how in her previous relationship she cared for her partner but he did not reciprocate. In her current relationship it was different:

I think it is having a common understanding of each other, respecting each other, listening to each other, and that is a really important issue for me. And Dom has an enormous heart and is very, very supportive and I guess that has really contributed to…it is a two-way thing and that we treat each other the way we ourselves want to be treated.

Similarly, Louise described a previous relationship where her partner was ‘emotionally closed down’ and would not let her express love and affection. This was not the case in her current relationship. She explained:
I have a very strong feeling of being loved and being able to love back openly. I think, in essence, that is the most important thing. There are a whole lot of peripheral things that are attached to that, companionship, shared values, exploring ideas together and actually doing things together.

The men also described the importance of reciprocity. They were aware that their partners provided them with emotional support and that they needed to provide it in return. Phillip stressed this point:

That seems to go to the heart of what it is all about. If it is not mutual love, care, respect and support, then I am not sure what it is and what you couldn’t just get somewhere else. So that is what distinguishes a relationship from all those other things.

In close connection the respondents felt that they did not have unmet needs. For example, Denise declared that ‘my needs are met’ and she was happy with the way things were. Similarly, Imogen reflected:

I guess it is being responsive to each other’s needs and being in tune with how the other is feeling. I think through the time we have been together we have both learnt how we operate emotionally, and this fosters a more mature relationship. We are here as a partnership, to care for each other and that is a fundamental issue.

Third, Giddens observed that trust and commitment were basic characteristics of a pure relationship (Giddens, 1991: 91), replacing the external anchors that close personal connections had in pre-modern situations. Respondents emphasised the importance of commitment in their relationship. Denise, for example, explained that in her previous relationships her partners were ‘only in it for the present,’ which meant that she ‘didn’t really know what was going on’ and felt insecure. In contrast, Jarrod communicated to her his commitment to the relationship:

Whereas with Jarrod, I know that he really wants to be in it and loves it. He is really in it for the long haul, and he wants to be there and I haven’t had that before. I really know that he is in love with me and he really wants to be with me and nobody else. This is a qualitative difference that didn’t exist before.
Knowing that the partner was committed meant that the relationship felt strong. Denise used the terms ‘safe’ and ‘secure’ to describe what commitment meant to the relationship. She explained:

So it has grown, the sense of knowing that we are committed. That sense of security has grown

Hayley also stressed the importance of knowing that her partner was committed to the relationship. She described how, at the beginning of her relationship, she was not sure if it would be a long-term relationship, although both partners wanted it to become long term. Now Hayley felt that it had become what she and her partner wanted:

It has changed in regards our sense of security. We both feel very secure that this is something that we both want.

Fourth, Giddens emphasised the importance of compatibility which he referred to as ‘mutual alignment’ (Giddens, 1991: 97). A key aspect of alignment for respondents was similar perceptions about the priority of the relationship in the lives of each of the partners. Reformed gender practice meant that the men struck a realistic balance between work and their relationship. For example, Ben explained that he had chosen to work four days a week so as to have an extra day to spend with his partner. Prioritising the relationship had come at a cost for Ben, such as passing up promotion opportunities, but this was a cost he was willing to pay. Ben emphasised the importance of putting time and effort into his relationship:

I should be putting that effort into nurturing the relationship. As an example of that, Louise and I have chosen to work four days a week and that is to have more time, spending more time together. There have been jobs that I haven’t applied for because that would mean working full-time and even though I may have wanted some of those jobs, there are choices that have to be made. And I guess when it comes to the crunch the relationship is more important that the job.

A fundamental aspect of alignment was similar values and ideas. For some of the respondents, finding a partner who had similar concerns was an essential requirement. Consider, for example, Jarrod and Denise. They had been together for five years at the
time of the interview. Jarrod said that finding a partner who shared a similar philosophy about life was fundamental. Jarrod’s philosophy included the environment and ‘progressive social causes’:

There was the base that Denise had passed, the hurdles of my environmental values, social values and progressive thinking and all of that, so that was a baseline.

Denise confirmed Jarrod’s view of the couple’s compatibility. Denise emphasised that not only did the couple share similar social values, but they agreed on the desire to have children, how they communicated, and their lifestyle:

We seem to work well together in our relationship. We both wanted to have children, and basically he is all the things that I wanted in those respects. He’s fun as well and we are compatible in how we communicate and in our lifestyles, from our long-term plans right down to the things we eat and to our daily routine.

Alignment produced friendship. The respondents described a close friendship. For example, Imogen said:

To me, friendship is the most important part of the relationship. If you don’t have friendship within your relationship, you don’t have anything.

Many of the respondents had got to know their partners well prior to having a relationship with them. Their relationships had grown out of the friendship. For example, Louise and Ben worked together in an environmental organisation in Adelaide for five years before they began their relationship. Working side by side gave them the opportunity to establish a friendship and get to know each other:

We were friends for years before we were in a relationship. So we have known each other for quite a few years

Ben provided a similar account to Louise:

I really liked Louise as a friend. We had quite close contact through work and we got to know each other. We used to do things together, and I really liked her.
The respondents consistently emphasised a link between compatibility and a lack of conflict. For example, Hayley remarked, ‘I don’t think that we have any great differing views so there is not a lot of negotiation to be done’. Another respondent Phillip emphasised the same point:

There are always going to be different opinions about things, but the fundamental things about values and the way you see that world and honesty and integrity, we are so compatible in those areas that they tend not to give rise to conflict.

The fifth element of the pure relationship Giddens described was intimacy (Giddens, 1991: 94), a common theme among respondents. For example, Amanda had moved interstate to marry and live with her partner. In spite of being separated from her family of origin she emphasised that her partner more than replaced what she had given up and she did not feel alone:

I was talking to my grandmother on the phone and she told me that I must be lonely being away from home. I said no, I am not by myself, I am with Dean. It doesn’t matter where we are, I feel loved and cared for, and it gave me a lot of power because I felt that our love is strong.

Respondents described feeling ‘connected’ to their partners. Connection was essentially the feeling of being loved, cared for, and supported. It was described as the ability to communicate effectively; the feeling of being understood and supported; and as a close emotional bond. For example, Imogen described ‘connection’ in the following terms:

We have become really connected and become in touch with one another. We communicate effectively, and we are best friends. Because we are we do talk about everything, we do understand and can feel how the other is feeling and if somebody is upset we can we talk it through.

Similarly, Jarrod observed:

Overall, the most important thing is probably touch and the human connection. I can hold Denise’s hand and I get a lot out of that. I get a lot out of being with someone who knows me, who cares for me. I really like it when Denise looks out
for me and cares for me. It is really good to have someone doing that, that is really important.

Giddens defined intimacy as essentially an ‘emotional communication’ (Giddens, 1991: 94). Both male and female respondents stressed that the intimacy in their relationships was connected to the men’s ability to communicate on an emotional level. For example, Hayley explained that the development of her partner’s emotional literacy had taken place within the context of the relationship. Hayley described how at the beginning of her relationship Eric did not talk about how he felt about her, and she took this to mean that he did not care. She elaborated:

He was very reluctant to be open verbally, he really struggled with that. He was very affectionate but he wouldn’t say much about how he felt and that was really hard for me because I would assume that he didn’t really care. But now he is much better at being able to say what he thinks and I don’t expect him to say things all the time. So that has been a major shift for us.

Eric described this issue in terms of making the shift from self-sufficiency to opening himself up emotionally to his partner. Eric explained that he had spent so many years on his own that he felt this to be a challenge and difficult:

I think that there are certain areas where one or other would have doubts about the other’s commitment or understanding why the other is not responding to a certain emotional situation. You go through periods of doubt and they have to be talked out.

Eric described the original problem as one of masculine ‘self-sufficiency’. Sharing his feelings with another person was not something that he was practised in doing:

I think that it was just the background where I was coming from. Again it is the thing of self-sufficiency. I hadn’t been used to that level of sharing emotions. So I was being a little reticent about stepping out into us rather than me, and having to take responsibility for that and not knowing where it was going to lead. I had just been playing it a bit safe I suppose. It just took a while to get over that and to realise that that we could move towards some common ground. By making the effort that would then provide reassurance, and calm the doubt.
Similarly, Rebecca said that Will had developed emotional literacy as a result of the breakdown of his previous marriage. When they met Will was still coming to terms with the breakdown. One of the things that Rebecca felt good about was that Will was able to talk about the way he was feeling and express what was going on for him emotionally. She said that Will included her in this process rather than shutting her out. This gave her a greater understanding of what he was going through and brought them closer together:

We had access to talking about emotions or thoughts because we had to do it through the painful process from before. So that is something that we can do and sometimes we both have to feel brave to do it. But we raise issues and talk about the relationship and thoughts. And Will too, he … Sometimes I will see a thought flicker across his face and I will ask him about it: ‘What were you just thinking about’ and he will say, ‘Well actually …’. He will talk about those things, it is quite normal.

As a result Rebecca felt that her partner understood her, which was crucial to their relationship:

I think knowing that he knows me so well, that he understands my philosophy of life is very important. He knows what interests me. He reads me passages from a book because he knows that I am interested in it. Some days I know that he is really exhausted, but he still wants to listen and find out what has been happening with me.

Similarly, Laura described how her partner’s actions constantly communicated to her that he loved her. She related a story of how she and her partner went bike riding together. Her partner was fit and she often lagged behind him. But the difference between their levels of fitness did not bother him and he always waited for her: ‘So what he was telling me was that my company was more important to him than anything else’. Laura stressed that Phillip’s actions constantly communicated to her that cared about her:

In so many ways all the time he is reminding me that I am loved. Phillip just does things. He doesn’t need to do explicit things, he is just there, absolutely there when I need him. As example of what I mean, if I mention that I want to ride my bike he will just go out quietly in the morning and get it ready for me and put it on the back of the car and do all of those things like that. Or if as I am looking for work, he will take in the application so that we make sure it gets there on time, or
he will bend over backwards to make my life easier. They are not things that I have to ask him to do, but if I do ask him he will say yes. So that’s very affirming.

Finally, Giddens argued that the pure relationship needed to be organised reflexively (Giddens, 1991: 91). The respondents consistently observed that the relationship would not look after itself. They described how they reflected upon and monitored their relationships and made changes accordingly. For example, Dean and Amanda both described the process of reflexivity. Dean explained that he had come to realise the importance of maintenance and reflexivity as a consequence of his previous relationship experiences. He explained that he had lost a relationship because he failed to realise this. He used to think that it was good enough just to ‘love one another’. He came to realise that this was not enough, and that relationships needed attention and work:

Well the first thing you have to realise is that relationships do need maintenance. Whatever you want to call it, the caring about the other person’s spiritual growth and trying to make a contribution to that … It is not just maintenance but it is growth, growing, love and depth of a relationship. Then there is perhaps the maintenance, which means being attentive that love is not just enough. Realising that we do need to talk about anxieties or frustrations. You have to listen to your partner, and really listen and not just listening to what you want to hear. That is so you are not in a relationship with an ideal that you have just dreamed up in your head. You are in a relationship with a real human being.

To make sure that the relationship was going well Dean and Amanda had meetings to address any issues that might undermine it. Dean described how the couple organised meetings to address issues in their relationship:

We do silly little things like we have a family meeting every now and then, where we sit down and discuss how we are going, what are the issues. We talk about this and that or whatever. We try and do that once a month. It is very nice, we both value that we will be talking about elements of our relationship, reaffirming them, and hopefully participating in things that are growing.

Amanda described how the couple had a ‘family meeting’ to monitor and maintain the relationship. She insisted that the point of having ‘family meetings’ was to
make sure that issues and problems were not building up and undermining the relationship.

Because we lead such busy lives we don’t always have time to address the things that are going on or getting out of control in our relationship. So we have organised a family meeting into our lives where we make a space to talk about things that may not get talked about because we are so busy. This allows us to talk about things that we might want to talk about and have been waiting for the right time. We ask each other how is the relationship going. If either of us is having any problems this is where it can be spoken about. If there are any problems we work out a strategy to overcome those problems and I think this works really well! Dean is the first person in my life I can tell anything to.

The reflexive organisation of the relationships was an ongoing process. The respondents described how they had put a lot of work and effort into setting parameters and guidelines around their relationships. For example, Imogen described how she and her partner spent a lot of time in the early part of the relationship talking about their expectations. She referred to this as ‘setting the groundwork’ for the relationship. She and Dom talked about their ideas and expectations of relationships, so that they had a good understanding of what the other person thought:

My relationship with Dom has been very fruitful. We have had a fantastic … well it has been going on six or seven years and we make sure that we have time for each other. We have made time to talk, if there are issues concerning us. We will sit down and talk about them. We did that a lot in the first three years of our relationship, more so earlier in our relationship. Setting the groundwork you could say.

With these elements present in their relationships, the respondents stressed that their relationships had grown ‘closer, stronger and deeper’. A key characteristic of the intimate relationships was the aspect of growth. The respondents consistently observed that they felt that their relationships had become closer and stronger. For example, Laura explained that she and her partner had been together more than fifteen years. Over the years they had developed a strong bond. Laura emphasised that the bond had developed because her partner was supportive, he was proud of her, and they had respect and understanding:
What I have realised that over the years is my love for him has grown so much. It just grows so much and it grows stronger every day. He’s very supportive. He has been very supportive to me in my career, and my interests. He’s proud of me when I have achieved something and I am proud of him when he achieves something. We are not motivated by jealousy, nor are we competitive with each other. So, over time we have grown much closer together as our knowledge of each other and our respect for each other has grown.

Louise told a similar story:

I guess it developed from that point (just meeting) to being a couple together, and going out together and being part of each other’s families, and gradually it developed deeper … I guess we just became an intrinsic part of each other’s lives.

The men’s stories echoed their partner’s stories. They described their relationships as growing stronger and closer. For example, Ben observed how he and Louise had grown together over time, building trust and a deep friendship:

I think it has grown much deeper, much stronger. I guess we have learnt a lot more about each other and had our little trials. I guess we found that trust in each other, and that’s probably the biggest thing. Trust which builds a deeper friendship.

8.4.2 Companionate relationships

On the dimension of cathexis, two of the 10 partnership relationships in the study were different from the eight intimate relationships just described. These relationships were characterised by companionship rather than intimacy. The couples in these relationships provided much less detail about their relationships and used a different vocabulary to describe the dimension of cathexis in their relationships. These relationships were symmetrical on the dimension of cathexis because both the men and women had similar expectations about attachment. Neither of the companionate couples identified any serious or chronic problem with attachment. Both partners described being happy and content on the dimension of cathexis.
The intimate and companionate attachment styles were similar in a number of ways, but different in others. Like the intimate couples, the companionate couples described themselves as a partnership. They emphasised that their relationship was quite flexible, roles were interchangeable, and both partners supported each other to create a good relationship. For example, Ashlyn described how she and her partner acted as a team to support each other:

I think that we are quite good together. We have adapted to each other’s changing needs. When Dermot has been really busy with his work I have kind of filled the gaps. I have taken on other roles in the relationship and visa versa. So, in that way we are quite supportive of each other.

The companionate couples described a strong sense of companionship and compatibility. They consistently emphasised that they got along well with their partner. Getting along well with the partner was a fundamental characteristic. For example Josie explained that she and her partner were acquainted when they joined a similar group. As they spent more time together they realised that they had a lot more in common. They shared similar backgrounds, ideas and values, ‘so we just really clicked’. Dennis, Josie’s partner, told a similar story. He explained that as they got to know each other they ‘got along well’:

We met in 1995/6. We met when I was writing a grant application with a friend, who was a mutual friend, who was working at the Wilderness Society. So we met through that mutual friend and we got along very well and we just kept running into one another and then went out in a similar group of friends, you know, the regular drink at the pub down the road. So I suppose that is how it happened … I suppose we got along really well

Ashlyn told a similar story. She explained how she and her partner got to know each other before they began their relationship. They shared similar thoughts and values that allowed them to get along:

I thought he was funny. We liked the same type of things. I liked what he was doing with the community side of the environmental stuff. We got on well. When you know someone you don’t have to go through all the stuff that people who are new to each other go through.
The companionate couples tended to describe their relationships in more functional terms. Both of the couples had children. The children were central to the relationships and played a key role in the couple’s bond. For example, Josie explained that children were essentially what marriage was all about:

I always wanted to have kids, yeah, and I wouldn’t have married Dennis if he didn’t want to have children. Well, I don’t think I would have. You don’t really know what you would do until you are in the situation. He said that he did want them so it wasn’t an issue. The maternal interest is pretty strong. I don’t think that I would have fallen in love with someone who did not want kids because kids are such a large part of the way you think about things. That is just a biological perspective but that is why I am here really, to have kids and show them the things I have seen or whatever. Dennis thinks the same way so that is one of the reasons that we get along. I don’t think I would have gone and fallen in love with someone who didn’t want to have children. I wouldn’t see any point in being here if I didn’t have any children. I know there are people who don’t feel that way, but that’s the way I feel.

Similarly, children played a pivotal role in Dermot and Ashlyn’s relationship. Ashlyn described how ‘becoming pregnant’ ‘solidified’ their relationship:

Well, I guess the long-term stuff … I suppose it was when I got pregnant with Melanie, that really solidified it in our minds. We had been going out together and we had some hiccups, but we were still committed to staying together. Then I got pregnant and we decided that we would keep the baby and move in together.

Moreover, Dermot described how the couple’s bond had been strengthened through having children. The children created a bond which ‘brings you together a bit more’:

The kids are great kids. They are quite good company, so that has brought us closer together.

Whereas the intimate couples stressed the intimate ‘connection’ and ‘understanding’ between each other, the companionate couple did not use such language to describe their relationships. They did not need to be ‘connected’ to their partners. Rather, they were generally content when the relationship ran smoothly. For example, Dermot explained that the important thing to him about his relationship was that it was
‘comfortable and routine’. Similarly, Dennis explained that the difference between his
current relationship and the previous one was that there was no drift away from his
partner. He emphasised that what was important was not intimacy or connection; ‘it is not
a matter of it not been right, it has been right all along, it is more a matter of it not being
wrong’.

The companionate couples provided much less detail about attachment than the
intimate couples. This was true for the women as much as the men. For example, when I
asked Dennis about the emotional state of his relationship, he described it as good, but his
answer amounted to a description of the logistical difficulties in the couple’s lives:

It is good. But it is a difficult question to answer because the relationship is linked
to so many things. I get caught up in my work more than Tanya does. Sometimes
I feel like I am bringing work home too much. Three weeks ago I had some time
off and we got along really well. I was able to be relaxed and calm all the time
rather than thinking about work. But generally I think that the relationship is
going very well.

The companionate couples could also be distinguished from the intimate couples
in that they were less inclined to monitor and analyse their relationships. Josie explained
that Dennis liked to think that things just sorted themselves out. She pointed out that she
had to bring issues to his attention, and that he was not ‘big on’ addressing relationship
issues. Similarly, Ashlyn explained that she and Dermot were not particularly analytical
regarding the relationship:

Sometimes that can be bad because you can let things slide that maybe should
have been resolved or discussed. But then again we don’t want to discuss
everything … Some people have to discuss everything to the nth degree. We are a
bit more ‘go with the flow’. I don’t think that you would call us active workers on
the relationship front: we kind of take it as it comes.

One of the key differences between the two attachment styles was the element of
growth. The conditions of the intimate relationships produced a sense of growth and
development. The companionate couples did not talk in such terms. As an example, Josie
described her bond to her partner as that of a ‘companion’. She explained that when they
first met they had plenty to talk about because they had similar ideas, values and interests. However, they had passed that stage and reached a plateau in their knowledge of each other:

I think most relationships are the same when you start going out together and you are all over each other. But, at the same time, you are getting older and starting work, you get more practical, you have to buy a house and things like that, so it becomes different. Then you have babies and then you don’t spend anywhere near as much time to spend together. When you first meet someone you have got all these things to talk about, and then once you know all that stuff about each other, well you just know it. So you don’t get to relearn all that over again, which is a bit of a pity because it is quite exciting getting to know someone for the first time and you never get to do that again. But I am sure we are just like anybody else; your relationship changes because you haven’t got that new exciting thing happening, but you have other things to look forward to.

The companionate couples emphasised that they did not have a lot of problems or conflict in their relationships. They were essentially compatible and the compatibility served them well. They shared similar views and ideas, as well as expectations. For example, Dermot and Ashlyn emphasised their similar relaxed attitude to life that created harmony and minimised conflict. Ashlyn remarked that she and Dermot were both ‘laid back’ and ‘I think it is just our personalities that we are not really stress heads in our relationship’. Dermot’s comment echoed Ashlyn’s sentiments

Ashlyn is easy-going. I am pretty easy going myself I suppose. We have similar personalities and we address things when they come up.

The only area that any problems arose was where the couple failed to address issues because of their ‘go with the flow’ attitude. They generally expected that there should be no problems so when problems arose they sometimes failed to address them. Ashlyn explained how this worked:

We sometimes get a bit grumpy with one another, then one of us picks up that we are grumpy and then we try to … but, because we are probably not the best talkers about what is going on, we have to go by who’s grumpy. We then have to think what have I done, have a little think about how things have been going. So that is
part of the give and take thing too and having space. We know each other pretty well, so I think that we know when we are starting to give each other the shits.

It is interesting to observe the different way children figured in these two types of relationships. In both the ‘companionate’ relationships children were central to family life and seemed to play a fundamental role in the bond the couples described. In contrast, only two of the eight intimate couples had children and one of these couples had had their first baby quite recently. This small number does not provide sufficient evidence to draw any conclusions about the children and the intimate relationships. Giddens argues that children had an adverse effect on the pure relationship, insofar as they create inertia (1991: 89). Although Giddens’ observation may be correct these two couples did not describe their children in these terms. For example, Laura described the children as adding another dimension to the relationship and solidifying the relationship. She emphasised that Phillip was such a ‘fantastic father’ and ‘again that just brought us closer together’. Similarly, Jarrod and Denise shared a similar view that the children had brought them closer together.

Summary

This chapter described the characteristics and dynamics of the partnership relationships and gender projects that were described as relatively reformed. The men’s partners consistently described the style of the men’s masculinity as non-hegemonic and responsive to gender reforms. These relationships were characterised by partnership on the three dimensions of power, labour and cathexis. The couples described partnership in terms of working together as a team, largely in a context of equality, to create a close and intimate bond.

The partnership relationships were those where the couples described having organised their relationships in such a way as to create the conditions of gender equality. Essentially this meant a shift beyond gender roles. The men in these relationships apparently backed up their belief in partnership with corresponding behaviour. Decision-
making was described as in terms of a process of negotiation in which the women
described feeling their partners’ equals. Domestic labour was largely shared and the men
assumed responsibility for their part. These arrangements generated harmony and good
will.

On the dimension of cathexis the respondents described two styles of attachment.
In both of these styles the respondents described being satisfied. These relationships were
fundamentally characterised by gender similarity rather than difference. The couples
described having similar expectations about this dimension of the relationship. One type
of attachment was defined as intimate. The intimate attachment style closely resembled
the characteristics of the pure relationship described by Anthony Giddens. These
relationships were underpinned by reciprocity and mutuality, compatibility, trust and
commitment, intimacy and organised reflexively. Moreover, the men’s partners
consistently described men who had developed a degree of emotional literacy.

Alongside the intimate relationships were the companionate relationships. These
couples described their bond to each other in terms of companionship. Like the intimate
relationships, the respondents highlighted their compatibility, trust, commitment and a
lack of conflict. In contrast to the intimate relationships, the relationships were more
functional in focus, that is, more child-centred. The respondents also described
attachment in different terms. They stressed that what was important was the ability to
get along well. They emphasised that they were happy in their relationships when they
felt comfortable and the relationship ran smoothly. These relationships were not generally
reflexively organised and the couples tended to let the relationship take its own course.
Chapter 9

Gender reform and conflict relationships

The previous chapter discussed 10 of the 24 (42 percent) men whose gender projects were largely described as reformed and whose relationships were described as characterised by partnership. This chapter discusses the other 14 men (58 percent) interviewed for the study. These men were attempting to reform their masculinity but they were struggling to do so. These men were described by their partners as practising gender relations in a way that was only partially reformed. In turn, these relationships were characterised by more conflict and resentment.

The chapter begins by examining the ways the men were attempting to reform their masculinity and construct it in a more progressive way. Then, it examines the ways in which the men’s masculinity was hegemonic. The chapter focuses attention on practices of the men in their relationships across the three dimensions of power, labour and cathexis.

9.1 Struggling with reform

All of these fourteen men were attempting to and perceived themselves as constructing relatively non-hegemonic projects. For example, Terry, unequivocally regarded himself as progressive in the area of gender. He explained that his progressive view of gender relations began in his family of origin where his family discussed ‘the role of patriarchy’ in the world along with other social justice issues. As a result, Terry described himself as a ‘feminist man for the new millennium’. Notwithstanding Terry’s progressive perception of himself, his partner described significant conflict over domestic labour.

The men related a range of stories that showed how they were going about gender reform. None of the men described any interest in doing work for the purpose of achieving a high salary. In fact, the men often commented how poorly paid they were
working for environmental organisations. These men had largely given up part of what Connell described as the ‘patriarchal dividend’. For example, Leyton told a story about giving up work in computer sales for work in an environmental organisation. The essence of his story was about constructing a less hegemonic project:

I had chucked in computer sales in a moment of truth. It was not the path for me, particularly the culture in that industry. I was contemplating my next move and I was looking for some work that had to satisfy a number of criteria. Not full time, flexible, not permanent, an organisation that had some principles and aims above and beyond simply making a dollar and a culture where people wore relatively less masks at work.

Leyton went on to say that he felt that the move to working for an environmental organisation fitted better with his ideals and values:

Culturally and socially I’m very happy with it and I feel that I am doing something worthwhile, particularly when I move to my new role, maximising what I have to offer. I enjoy working at this organisation and agree with its goals, and now I am in a technical position where I can make improvements that most people couldn’t.

Similarly, Jason told a story about his teenage years to demonstrate how he had distanced himself from hegemonic masculinity and attempted to construct a more non-hegemonic project. He described growing up in a social context that was dominated by hegemonic masculinity. He observed that his father acted in a very authoritarian way toward his mother, brothers and himself. His adolescent years were a ‘testosterone existence’, hanging around with other young men and chasing after women. By his mid-twenties he was finding the alcohol, drugs and sex more burdensome than rewarding and decided that had to make some changes to his life. He decided that his friends were ‘stuck in a rut’:

I moved out here because I had reached a point where I had had enough. It was at the stage where the longest relationship I had was about six months. And that was usual for me. I just didn’t pursue … I was starting to think about it, hey this kind of lifestyle has got to end. OK it is fun and it is quite comforting to go out and meet people you don’t know and have friendship at that level but I was lacking long-term, particularly with the opposite sex. I had long-term friendships with the
guys I had grown up with and I was getting a bit sick of that because we would get together and talk about teenage years … And as I said, now I sit back and have a different gloss altogether, but at that stage I was like, God, going over it and over it, let’s change and move on, and it indicated to me that these guys were just stuck in this rut. And I thought to myself that I have got to get out of it.

Another man, Shawn, spoke of constructing a non-hegemonic project in terms of ‘treating women well’. His aim was to ‘be the best person that you can’. This ‘involves some sort of self-reflexivity and having some kind of political understanding of your place in society as a white, middle-class, Australian male, and then building on that in your politics and the way you act’. In particular he emphasised that he did not want to be involved in violent incidents: ‘it was a matter of not getting into fights with blokes at the pub which didn’t make any sense to me, whereas for some guys it did’. He also wanted to work with and encourage other men rather than compete with them:

So you pat your mate on the back and tell him he has done a good job and not be competitive with him all the time, or whatever else what other mates may do. It has been useful to be exposed to that [growing up in a house with four sisters] because I have got the tools. That has made me a better person, but I don’t think that is the only reason. I think a lot happened in that period around year 12 and after that I had to deal with my temper and deal with issues that meant that I became a person that wasn’t necessarily prioritising what other men were prioritising.

Even so, all these men described difficulty achieving what they set out to do. Consider, for example, Matthew. Matthew came from a family where his parents operated from the ‘rightful patriarchal’ model. Matthew made clear that this was not how he wanted to construct his own relationship. Matthew had studied ‘feminist studies’ at university where he was ‘one of only two men in the class’. In spite of his efforts to learn and think about gender relations in a progressive way he realised that he had not achieved what he wanted. His partner often gave him feedback about their relationship that made him realise that some of his practices around gender in their relationship were more hegemonic than reformed. For his part Matthew was not pleased with himself when he was given this feedback and realised that he had to do better:

I can already see roles within my own relationship with my wife and it makes me cringe. I always said that I was not going to become anything like my father. I can
see some roles developing, for instance, if I cook a meal which I do. However, often it is perceived as if I am doing a favour, not as a part of....

Briefly, these men struggled to act on their professed beliefs. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to discussing the dynamics of the men’s relationships across the three dimensions of power labour and cathexis and the ways in which their behaviour was more hegemonic than progressive.

9.2 Power

Most couples in this study presented a consistent story in terms of power and decision-making. They agreed that they shared power on roughly equal terms. Only two couples in the survey described tension around decision-making. In both instances, the women said that they played a subordinate role in decision-making. They emphasised that their partners had greater input into decision-making processes. These relationships warrant closer attention.

Pam and Nathan were married but did not have children. They met through a shared interest in mountain climbing, although they had since discontinued this activity. Pam described herself and Nathan as a ‘conflict couple’. She used this term to describe conflict between herself and Nathan on all dimensions of the relationship. On the dimension of power, Pam said that her partner dominated decision-making. She described how Nathan largely did not consult her: ‘Nathan tends to be fairly autonomous in his decision-making’.

So he will decide that we need a new television and do the market research and work out what is the best buy and then go and buy it, often without too much discussion with me. To a certain degree I do the same but I am more likely to talk things through.

Nathan was aware that Pam was unhappy about the relationship and the decision-making process specifically. He described the relationship as a ‘partnership’ but added
‘that would probably be disputed by Pam’. Nathan did not perceive himself as patriarchal, but in more ambiguous terms. From his point of view he believed that decision-making was carried out in a ‘co-operative manner’:

I believe in talking and allowing someone to have and use their own skills rather than me doing absolutely everything. My image of myself is that I am more negotiation orientated than the average man around me. But then again I can be quite domineering. I swing between the two.

The problems this couple had in regard to decision-making were best illustrated in their decision about having children. Pam wanted to have children while Nathan was ambivalent. Pam observed that they were waiting for the time to be right and this time would never arrive. Pam felt that Nathan had probably made the decision not to have children but not informed her: ‘I guess that feels that it is not going to happen but he hasn’t been game enough to tell me’. Nathan had ‘mixed feelings’ about having children because he felt that the couple were ‘busy’ in their lives and ‘getting older’, but in Nathan’s mind it was his decision:

So there is no resolution in my mind. I haven’t quite worked it out whether we will have children or not.

Michele described a similar situation. Michele and her partner, Stephen, had been in their relationship for ten years at the time of the interview. Michele had been married previously in what she described as a ‘very traditional marriage’. She observed her that current relationship was ‘completely different’, that is ‘much more modern’. Michele stressed that decision-making was carried out in context of negotiation. However, she added that her partner was the ‘problem solver’, exercising what Safilios-Rothschild described as ‘orchestration power’ (Safilios-Rothschild, 1976: 359) As a result she felt that she played a minor role in the process:

It’s not like he has overall say in the decision-making or final say in decisions. We will decide on things together, we discuss things together, he might have a different view on. Overall, he would be the one that I would go to if there was a … He would probably be the problem solver of the big problems and that’s where
I see the dividing line of authority. He is also the initiator of things. He initiates the bigger things around the place.

Stephen rejected patriarchy as the basis of decision-making. He described his own father as ‘bossy’, ‘an autocrat of the old school’, who made decisions on the basis of ‘because I said so’. He believed that decision-making should be based on ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’. He was one of the men who described the question about ‘household head’ as out of date. At the same time, Stephen quickly added that ‘this does not mean that we are equal’. He explained that Michele ‘compromised’ more than he did. Moreover, Stephen did not perceive any problem in ‘getting my own way’ if he had the knowledge and skills to do so.

9.3 Labour

Although the majority of the men in the conflict relationships apparently accepted that decision-making should be shared, domestic labour was a major area of conflict. Eleven of the 14 women complained that their relationships were characterised by inequality on this dimension. For example, Rosemary was unhappy about the division of labour. She and her partner Ron had been together for almost twenty years. They had two adolescent children. Apart from the division of labour she considered it a very good relationship. But inequality on this dimension often made her feel angry. She observed that she did most of the domestic labour in her relationship:

There is a bit of division of labour in our house, but I do most of it even though Ron is at home now.

The main issue for the women regarding the division of labour was the issue of ‘responsibility’. The women consistently emphasised that their partners did not assume responsibility for domestic labour and therefore they were left with the burden. For example, Monica described how she and her partner Shawn had been in their relationship for a little over two years, but never lived together. In spite of not living together, it was
she who would end up being responsible for whatever the couple set out to do, whether it was cleaning, shopping or cooking dinner:

So if we cook dinner together I find that I am the one who has to take responsibility for it, and he will help. We will start doing it together, but after he has done a bit he will go and watch the news or whatever, and I will be left to finish and be the one who makes sure that it gets served up.

Irrespective of whether the women were primarily involved in home duties or in the paid workforce, they found themselves responsible for domestic labour. Seven of the eleven women worked in full or part-time jobs and felt that they were doing what Arlie Hochschild described as the ‘second shift’, returning home from paid employment to begin another shift of domestic labour while their partners began their leisure time. Katrina, for example, was married to Terry who was described himself as ‘the feminist man’. She had returned to full-time work after staying home with the children, but still found that she was responsible for most of the housework:

But that balance [of domestic tasks] has been hard to negotiate. After returning to full-time work for a few months I came home one day, looked around and said, ‘Who is responsible for cleaning out the car? Me. Who is responsible for doing the dishes? Me. Who …’ And I just realised that I had this whole list of things that I was responsible for and I couldn’t do now that I am working full-time. So we had to re-negotiate home duties. I was feeling really stretched.

Re-negotiation was only partly successful. Terry responded to some of the issues raised, but Katrina still felt like she was the manager of the household.

Where the women had responsibility for domestic labour, they described their partners as ‘helpers’. Acting as help meant that the men could choose if and when they were involved in domestic labour. For example, Rosemary described her partner as ‘the help’.

Ron helps, which is very common, isn’t it? We do work together but as far as household chores are concerned, from my point of view, Ron is the help.
Playing the helping role meant that men had to be constantly reminded that domestic labour needed doing. For example, Danielle explained that she was responsible and her partner never seemed to notice that jobs needed doing: ‘I always have to ask him to do it’. Similarly, Sonja emphasised that her partner was willing to ‘help’ but he never noticed that it needed to be done: ‘He just doesn’t notice’.

The other main complaint made by the women, consistent with other research, was that their own standards were much higher than those of their partners. The women observed that the house seldom reflected their standard of cleanliness, and when it did it was largely because they made it do so. Tammy, for example, described how she had dropped her standards in order to be able to live with her partner. They were largely living in a situation where very little housework was done and she had adopted an attitude of not caring to deal with the situation:

Well it is not balanced out, no one does it, it just builds up and up and up. Today I ran through and did a bit and had to have a nap. I did have a cleaner for a while which was fantastic. So basically we both hate it, we can both live without it, so we live in muck. But he has taken over a lot of jobs, but he still doesn’t do them to my standard. I did drop my standards when I met him. Over the ten years it has been horrible, but I have learnt to say I don’t care. It is a case of ‘have to’ for your own sanity.

The men largely agreed with their partners that their standards were lower. For example, Jason agreed that his partner, Danielle, did most the housework and that he did not pull his weight. He explained the inequality in terms of his partner’s standards:

Danielle is very particular when it comes to housekeeping, much more than I have ever been, but I am not going to use that as an excuse why I don’t sort of do it. But I think that I have always lived with a high degree of mess in my life. When I was at home my room was messy. I never really cared too much about vacuuming every week. It was a monthly thing as far as I am concerned … Get a dark carpet! I am that kind of person.

In previous studies of domestic labour, researchers observed that women often underestimated the amount of housework they performed and men overestimated their contribution to create a sense of partnership in their relationships. Although the women in
this study described similar problems to women in other studies, their partners were different from the men in that did not deny an uneven division of labour. The men were disarmingly honest in their accounts of domestic labour. They men admitted that they were not doing what they knew they should. For example, Ron provided a consistent account about domestic labour to that of Rosemary: ‘Yeah, to be perfectly honest, I probably bludge a fair bit in the relationship’. Similarly, Gary said that ‘I think that it is not even, know it is not even’, and that ‘it is an unresolved source of tension between us’. Another man, Jason, remarked, ‘I know that I don’t pull my weight … I could do a lot more’.

Although the respondents could be distinguished from men in other studies in their willingness to admit they were not pulling their weight, they were similar in the ways that they resisted their partners’ requests for change. Notwithstanding the fact that couples presented a consistent story about the decision-making aspect of power in their relationships, the way in which men responded to their partner’s requests to take responsibility for domestic labour can also be understood in terms of power. The men clearly resisted their partner’s requests, demonstrating that power relations were indeed an area of conflict in these relationships. This issue will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

### 9.4 Cathexis

On the dimension of cathexis, partnership means the reciprocal provision of emotional support and care. There was indeed a gap between the men and women’s sense of satisfaction on this dimension. The majority of the men were largely content with the level of attachment in their relationships, often describing partners who provided love and care. In contrast, 10 of the 14 women described the level of attachment in their relationships as unsatisfactory in one way of another. The dimension of cathexis was consistently described in terms of inequality. The women observed that they were providing emotional satisfaction that was not reciprocated. For example, Sonja,
emphasised that the love and care that her partner provided was not sufficient. She had a fundamental feeling of not being satisfied: ‘I do feel cared for but I need more; that’s how I feel’. The main theme in these complaints was differences in expectations around support, whether framed in terms of intimacy or companionship. A secondary theme was one of commitment and trust.

9.4.1 Intimacy and companionship

Complaints about the dimension of cathexis were overwhelmingly made by the women. The main complaint concerned different expectations around social support. For example, Pam described how she had once imagined that she and her partner Nathan would attend social functions together. Nathan did not share her expectations. He had no intention of going to events that he perceived as unrewarding. Pam described how her partner’s actions caused ‘conflict’ in the relationship:

I think that it is about expectations usually. I think that we come into marriage with certain expectations that you don’t even realise that you have got yourself. I guess I have expectations of Nathan that he will be the escort me, that sort of thing. That has caused a bit of conflict. I always assumed that when you got married you went out as a couple. But I have learnt that there are occasions that Nathan is just not going to come with me because he doesn’t want to come. If I want to go then I go by myself. So that does cause some conflict sometimes. So in some ways that is a bit sad because that is not the value that I grew up with and I thought would happen in a relationship.

Indeed, five couples found spending time together difficult because they did not share similar interests. For example, Sonja complained that Matthew was not interested in some activities. In Sonja’s words:

There are often things that he doesn’t like doing. So I get in a shitty mood and things don’t go well … Since the renovations of the house I have been thinking, well, I am working as well and I don’t get home until six-thirty or a quarter to seven. Why am I ready to do all these things when he is not?
Matthew agreed with Sonja that the couple had problems with compatibility. He confirmed Sonja’s view that the ‘quality’ of their time spent together was not rewarding. However, Matthew felt that the essence of the couple’s problems was related to the fact that they did not have sufficient outside stimulus:

We spend a lot of time together, but maybe it would be better to spend less time together and make that time more quality. To spark conversation and interest in each other’s lives you need some outside stimulus. And unless you have got your own lives you can’t bring that in.

Further, Sonja said that whereas she wanted more time together Matthew wanted to spend more time alone. Sonja described Matthew as ‘self-contained’:

He is very comfortable with his own self and it is probably hard for him because I am not like that. He could be on the middle of an island by himself and be happy with just his own company. I have to drag things out of him. He’s just happy being silent.

Matthew agreed. He explained that he was content to spend large amounts of time alone:

I am more comfortable with my own silence. For instance I can go for a long walk and be happy just thinking, just looking at things and thinking about them, whereas Sonja is a very open and communicative person and needs to express her feelings to feel that she has that feeling. Whereas I am happy having that feeling and knowing that I have it without having to express it to another person to know that it exists.

Similarly, Chelsea described wanting more ‘us’ time in her relationship. Chelsea described her frustration with the lack of togetherness between herself and her partner. The main issue as she viewed it was the lack of joint projects. She explained that both she and her partner Leyton invested ‘too much’ time and energy in individual projects. Asked about time together, she responded:

I’d like more! When I think about the relationship that’s often what I feel: it lacks a little bit. The relationship itself is not enough of a priority. We don’t give enormous amounts of time to each other, or do things together like going away on holidays or having joint projects. Leyton’s personal projects and my personal projects come way before the relationship projects. I want to do less of the
individual stuff and more of the relationship stuff. His individual time is so important to him, and for me he is not giving enough to the relationship, if that makes sense. We are still too much these strong pillars of individuals ...

In contrast to Chelsea’s desire for more time together, Leyton articulated a very different view. He wanted more time alone:

It seems like too much to me. To help with my soul, I need time alone, time doing nothing, relative to pottering or staring into space, or doing things like reading, writing or playing music. I need to go to cafes on my own, so I am not completely satisfied with the structure of time. I think I would be more satisfied with our time together if we had less of it, quantity versus quality.

While most respondents described a lack of compatibility in terms of activities and interests, one woman described incompatibility with her partner in terms of different values. In general, the majority of the couples did not have problems with different values. Their values were grounded in social justice. Hilary, on the other hand, observed that she did not share her partner’s commitment to the environment movement. She felt that Robert’s dedication to his work was obsessive and the movement was ‘cult like’. Since the beginning of the relationship, five years earlier, Hilary had come to the view that she and her partner had very different ideas about the world, and that:

There was a whole group of people involved in the environmental movement and they are not like me and I am not like them. Maybe if I had fitted in a little better with the social group then that would have been better. But I find the lifestyle of some of those people difficult to understand. Some of those people don’t believe in working for various people. Some of those people don’t engage with mainstream society, and I love it. I love working in a doctor’s office and having so much responsibility, and you are out there and you are with the world.

Hilary described how she felt that her life largely revolved around her partner. Moreover, she felt that partner’s commitment to the environmental movement was always interfering in their relationship. As a result she felt that she was not leading the life she wanted:

I still feel very strongly about him. However, I only have to spend two hours with him and his job is interfering. Also part of the problem was that I had chosen to
have a child when I was twenty-two and I really wanted to be young again and not have so much responsibility and have a different life sort of thing, and so it was restricted. For a long time I think that I was very happy to be a joined identity and to live my life with him as a barnacle on a rock, but now I am not happy to do that.

Although most of the men did not complain about compatibility, one man, Stephen did. Whereas the women complained about closeness, Stephen observed that he and Michelle were separated at an intellectual level:

I have discussed this with Michele before. I don’t know if she mentioned it to you. Intellectually I don’t think we are equal and intellectually I have a lot of needs. I am unfulfilled with her so … there are certain topics that she doesn’t know enough about or isn’t interested in for me to have a really good rave about it. And there are certain interests that she just doesn’t share with me. Our musical tastes for example. There is some overlap. There is also some music that she has no interest in whatsoever. There are certain books that she would have no interest in whatsoever. That’s the main sort of area. I think that’s the main area that lacks fulfilment. But luckily one has friends as well as partners to fulfil some of those things.

A key element of the asymmetrical expectations was the priority the men gave to their careers. The women observed that their partners prioritised their work and their individual interests, and did not give the relationship sufficient priority. Elizabeth and Martin, for example, had been in their relationship for ten years at the time of the interview. They met though their work in the environmental movement. On the dimensions of power and labour both partners provided a consistent story centred on partnership, but on the dimension of cathexis their stories diverged. Elizabeth explained that Martin committed large amounts of his time and energy to the environment movement and this commitment pervaded their lives. He often let his work life interfere with their weekends, a time where he continued to make himself available to people who wanted to speak to him about environmental concerns. Elizabeth described her partner’s commitment to his work this way:

Martin’s work is not work, it is his life. His whole social life is work life. So when he gets to the weekend he doesn’t want to talk to anybody because he is recovering … I think there are more important things to him that get in the way,
or he sees as more unimportant [than our relationship] and other people. He is very available for other people. I have a constant battle with him to say that I should be more important more often.

In contrast, Martin felt that the relationship was going well and that there were no real or major problems. He described the relationships as ‘stable’ and explained that ‘we are both low-key type of people and don’t go out of our way to have any traumas or difficulties or problems’. He explained that he and Elizabeth were ‘companions’ and that they had a sense of ‘travelling together’. He made no reference to Elizabeth’s complaints about his commitment to his work but admitted that he was consumed by it. In a question about what would be missing in his life if he were not in the relationship, Martin explained that his focus in life would be totally consumed by his work:

The big thing would be just having time. I would work 24 hours a day. I think that my life would be entirely subsumed rather than 90 percent subsumed. I think that I am self-contained in how I am travelling in life stuff.

In the context of different expectations, some of the women described how their partners largely failed to understand their desire for intimacy. Rather, the men mostly described a desire for companionship. Consider for example, Michele and Stephen. Michele was conflicted over the dimension of cathexis in her relationship. On the one hand, she acknowledged that it was quite a good relationship in that the couple enjoyed each other’s company and had a sense of companionship. On the other hand, she a deep sense of something missing. Essentially she was looking for ‘connection’ with her partner. Michelle’s main complaint was that she could not express her feelings for her partner. For example, she remarked:

I don’t show him a lot of care in the relationship because that isn’t important to him. You know, you go for a cuddle and you get a pat on the back. And you know he is thinking, ‘What can I do, where can I go’? And I think no, you are not going yet, you can finish this cuddle and you can do it properly.

This dissatisfaction had developed over a long period of time. Michele and Stephen had been in their relationship for fifteen years at the time of the interview. They
had three young children. The couple met through their shared political activity. Michele described being attracted to Stephen as she found him ‘sexy’: he ‘dressed a lot in black’ and ‘had an air of confidence and self-reliance’. Stephen explained that he thought that Michele was ‘easy going’ and had ‘a good sense of humour’. The couple agreed that the relationship had changed since it began. In contrast to the sense of growth in closeness and intimacy described by the couples in the previous chapter, Michele described how the relationship had shifted from the honeymoon period to something more functional. Michele said:

We don’t have as much fun as we used to. When we started out everything was new and exciting, you have fun. Now it is more … but it is natural in a way because you know each other.

Stephen agreed with Michele that the relationship had changed. He described the relationship shifting into a functional everydayness. He explained that children had changed the dynamics of the relationship:

It has become a bit less light, perhaps it has become a bit heavier. I think it is related to the children, but I think it is also related to, you know, you lose some of the gloss of the relationship. It is not so thrilling anymore, so you lose that over time. I guess it has become more stodgy.

While they agreed that the spark had gone, it meant different things to each of them. Michele wanted greater closeness:

It’s just that closeness that you create between each other. I think I have talked about it way back and he can’t change it. There is so much other good stuff that you can’t say that this relationship isn’t working

In particular Michele identified ‘emotional support’ as missing from the relationship:

Yes, I feel close to my partner, but I feel that in a different relationship with a different partner it could be closer. And what would make it closer is, I think, that age-old question of emotional support
In contrast, Stephen felt that the relationship was very good. He agreed with Michele’s view that the relationship had changed and the ‘gloss’ had gone, but he had a different perception about the level of attachment in the relationship. He felt that the couple were very close. In contrast to Michele’s perception that the relationship was lacking closeness and emotional support, Stephen observed that his relationship was characterised by:

security, love, warmth and comfort. I think there is a certain security and comfort being in a relationships and I certainly get a high degree from mine.

Moreover, he described Michele as a ‘loving and caring person’: ‘emotionally I don’t think that I would feel closer to anyone’. Whereas Michele stressed that she wanted intimacy, Stephen explained that he needed to feel ‘comfortable’. The relationship was characterised by companionship which made him feel comfortable.

The women consistently observed that their partners lacked skills in this area. Interaction between themselves and their partners was not what they wanted. Their partners failed to communicate their thoughts about how they thought the relationship was going, and communication on an emotional level was lacking.

Yeah, Steve isn’t very forthcoming in that type of feelings type stuff, it is very much part of his personality too. He will initiate discussion if there is a problem happening, but he won’t sit down and talk about the more intimate things about how he is feeling … He is not the sort of person who is troubled by it. He doesn’t worry a lot about feelings, not a huge amount of intimate feelings are expressed. I just don’t think that he has a need for it, it is not important to him, he is so self contained. Because he is so self-contained, if there is a problem, I find it difficult to show support. I feel that he doesn’t have need for it.

The women identified the partner’s inability to communicate as a major factor inhibiting the couple’s closeness. The women emphasised that they were unable to talk about the things that they wanted to talk about. Like Michele, Elizabeth described how she wanted to be in a relationship with good communication but she found that her partner could not communicate in a way that she wanted:
Martin and I don’t talk as much as I think we should. I don’t think we talk about the core things in our relationship, like we should. And there are a number of things that we find very difficult to talk about. I have tried to talk about it and it is obvious that we are not going to talk about it, so there are real messages from him. He just freezes up and won’t talk.

The women complained about men’s ability to communicate emotionally. For example, Elizabeth described how she had consistently explained to her partner that she was not content with the level of intimacy in their relationship, whereby they could not talk about ‘the core issues in their relationship’:

Martin is a gorgeous person and he is wonderful to be around and he makes people feel very comfortable. As I said before he is very placid and therefore people think that he is a good communicator and a good emotional person, and in some aspects he is. But when it comes down to it, he is not a good communicator of his own emotions.

The women also observed that their partners lacked empathy, and were often unaware of their needs. Joan, for example, had been in a relationship with another man who had these skills which made her feel ‘looked after’, but her current partner, Malcolm, lacked these skills:

I have to say that with the finer details he is [lacking]. My ex-partner was very attentive and he showed me that he loved me. He looked after me in that way … [Malcolm] wouldn’t even realise that … like I needed a glass or I needed a drink now, he may get a chair for himself and forget me. He is not as fine as him [the ex-partner], but I don’t mind.

Similarly, Michele described the connection between empathy and listening. She explained that her partner did not listen to her in the way she wanted and lacked empathy:

You know how fellas tend to be problem-solvers and women tend to want to tell the problem. It is hard to get the fella to say, ‘That’s really horrible that that happened and I’m really sorry for you, sit down and I will make you a cup of tea’. Instead they try to solve the problem for you. Because they can’t [interact in the way that you want] then they don’t engage with you very much about it. Stephen does do that to a certain degree, but that is something that I feel I would like more of and he would probably know that too.
9.4.2 Commitment and trust

For the majority of the couples who described problems with attachment, commitment was not an issue. For two couples, though, it was a major issue in their relationship. Both these couples were among the youngest of the respondents, in their twenties. These respondents described some degree of uncertainty about their commitment to their relationship that had the effect of destabilising it. They described a contradiction between being in the relationship and their personal autonomy. These were problems that posed problems for the women as much as the men.

In one instance, the couple had been in their relationship for a little over two years at the time of interview. Shawn had been unsure about his commitment to the relationship, that is, whether he was ready to close off other options. He reflected:

I think about a year ago we got a bit unhappy, and we couldn’t really work out why, and we had the sense that had something to do with a two-year thing. We talked about it a lot and that has been good. We have had lots and lots of communication about everything, and we both knew that we felt strange about something and we talked about it and we couldn’t really understand it apart from that ‘two years’, what does that mean?

Shawn raised the possibility of an ‘open relationship’ with Monica. She felt ‘threatened’ by the idea. She also felt that the dynamics of the relationship had fundamentally changed, from certainty to uncertainty. For his part, Shawn felt that nothing had been decided as a result of their discussion: ‘We never really signed off on it [non-monogamy] or agreed to it anything, and we were still talking about it, and we made that clear that we are not ready for this’. For her part, Monica felt that the discussions were a license for action. She proceeded to have another relationship, but neglected to tell Shawn about it. When Shawn finally found out, he felt that it undermined the trust that they had established. Although Shawn was the one who introduced the idea of an open relationship, he was unhappy that Monica had an affair without discussion or agreement.

The thing that I have trouble with is that Monica didn’t tell me about it. I think that knowing what was going on was the important thing, the trust, the not
knowing for that time. So that was the big trust thing. We had always talked about absolutely everything together and we always have and we still do now to a large degree as friends, but she didn’t tell me about this major thing in her life. And it took me a month, month and half, to work out what that really meant to me, and that was quite hurtful and that was something that I found it very hard to forgive her about. And from that point it has taken a lot for me to get some trust back. And I don’t know if it completely recovered. And from that time on we have been fighting and things just didn’t seem to work.

With the other couple, uncertainty about commitment was closely linked to the respondent’s questioning of her identity. Jacinta had been in a relationship with her partner for three years at the time of the interview. Jacinta and Gordon met at university. Jacinta described being relatively happy but uncertain in her relationship:

I get worried that my commitment to the relationship doesn’t allow me to explore what I feel that I need to explore. I sometimes feel that I spend too much time with Gordon and not enough time on my own just thinking and reflecting.

Jacinta felt that she needed to work out issues to do with her sexuality. She explained that she was not sure if she would rather have a relationship with a man or a woman. She described past sexual experiences with women, but explained that she had not worked out what they meant:

In the past I had a sexual experience with a women and that has happened while I was in the relationship. And we haven’t really resolved what that is going to mean and partly because I haven’t worked it out myself what that meant for me. It is one of those big things that I am not really interested in discussing it with Gordon until I have had a good think about it myself.

Jacinta reflected that she and her partner had only ‘just got to the point of discussing the issue of being interested in other people’. She did not know how this issue should be handled. For example, should it be discussed in theoretical terms, or should she wait until somebody interesting came on the scene and ‘something happened’? She observed that this issue was just ‘something that we are just getting to deal with but we haven’t dealt with it very well in the past’.
Jacinta had aired these issues with Gordon. Like Monica, Gordon felt that Jacinta’s uncertainty about her sexuality created some uncertainty about the couple’s commitment. In light of Jacinta’s own actions, Gordon had had an affair with another woman. This created some tension with Jacinta. Although she herself had had an affair within the context of the relationship, she felt that the couple had not made any agreement about an open relationship and Gordon’s action had not been sanctioned. Both partners blamed the other for destabilising the relationship.

Summary

This chapter discussed the relationships and gender projects of 14 of the 24 men who were struggling with gender reform. These gender projects were characterised by both reform and resistance around gender relations. These were relationships where men struggled to put the ideology of partnership into practice. From the women’s perspective at least, these practices produced conflict in their relationships.

By their own accounts, there was not much conflict on the dimension of power. Only two of the 14 men, according to the respondents’ accounts, dominated decision-making. The majority of the men were described as practising negotiation rather than autonomy. However, power relations were implicit in the men’s responses to their partners’ requests about accepting responsibility for domestic labour. These responses were characterised by resistance.

The dimension of domestic labour was characterised by on-going conflict for 11 of the 14 couples. Although all the men rejected a patriarchal organisation of their relationship at an ideological level, these 11 relationships were characterised by an unequal division of labour. Both the men and their partners described practices structured around a ‘traditional’ pattern of gender relations. The men’s partners described being left with the responsibility for domestic labour while the men played ‘the helper role’. Both men and women described gendered standards of domestic labour where the men had lower standards than those of their partners.
The dimension of cathexis was a major and complex area of conflict. Ten of the 14 couples experienced conflict in this respect. The women often expressed dissatisfaction with the level of attachment, while the men were generally content. Conflict on this dimension was closely connected to gendered expectations around intimacy. The women often described a desire for greater closeness and more time together which their partners failed to understand. The men often wanted more time alone. The hegemonic dimension of the men’s masculinity was evidenced in the way their partners described men whose identities were fundamentally bound up in their work lives and who lacked knowledge and skills about cathexis and intimacy in particular. Two of the younger couples described different types of problems around cathexis, concerned with commitment and trust. They addressed the tension between being in a couple and personal autonomy.

The next chapter examines how these men and women manage conflict in their relationships. It also examines how men manage the gap between a belief in gender equity and unequal practice.
Chapter 10

Managing conflict and resistance

The previous chapter discussed the gender projects and the relationships of the men who were struggling with reform. This chapter examines how the men explained their hegemonic or resistant gender practices, given their advocacy of progressive beliefs about partnership and gender equality. Further, it examines how the men’s partners responded to practices of resistance. Finally, it examines how the men responded to their partner’s strategies for change.

10.1 Power

None of the men in this study gave any credence to the ideology of patriarchy. The men consistently endorsed the ideology of partnership. Even so, at least two men unambiguously dominated decision-making in their relationships. Having rejected the idea of patriarchal relations, how then did they explain their actions? In accordance with their beliefs about partnership rather than patriarchy, neither man attempted to use biological differences or patrimonial inheritance as a way of justifying their actions. Instead, the men drew on the concept of competence. The men emphasised that they were either better educated than their partners, or had greater knowledge than their partners. As a result they tended to see their partners as less capable than themselves of making important decisions. For example, Nathan described how he felt that his partner was not at the same level in relation to making decisions:

There are times when my father comes through and I know I am right because I have thought this through and I know that his is the right answer and therefore I am sure of it. And sometimes I see my mother in Pam, someone who is not philosophical and practical in day to day things. And therefore I project this authority and superiority.
Similarly, Stephen described in a matter-of-fact way his superior position in decision making:

Without being unfair to Michele, there are just some things that I know more about. I am better educated than she is and perhaps because of that I get my way more than she does. I am not for one minute saying that she is stupid, but it is hard to say - probably I can use my intellect better than she can and that probably means that I get my way a bit more than she does. If it comes to a … but it rarely ever comes to that, I think it is that she will give in. Rather than a situation of ‘I win and she loses’, she would more readily make compromises than I would.

The men’s resistance to change was effective. The women generally felt that there was very little that they could do about the power difference. Both women felt largely powerless to challenge their partner’s actions. For example, Pam largely accepted the decision-making dynamics. She described how she tried to extend negotiations around a decision that the couple had to make, but Nathan largely refused to participate:

I think it is one of my values that in a relationship you do a lot of joint decision-making but I think that drives Nathan mad. I say we need to sit down and plan and he runs away screaming. So I think that he makes a lot of decisions by himself for us.

Michele also largely accepted the power dynamics of her relationship. She did not feel that there was much that could be done about the situation. She agreed with Stephen that he had greater knowledge, and emphasised that this knowledge made her feel inferior:

We have different qualities. I don’t know if they are better or what, but that is something I feel quite strongly and that is something I have to deal with. And from my point of view I might feel slightly inferior in some ways because Stephen is a very knowledgeable person whereas I am the sort of person who hears something and then forgets it. I don’t retain a lot of knowledge and therefore I can’t use it in the way Stephen does.
10.2 Labour

The dynamics of change and resistance in gender relations were most apparent for the dimension of labour. The domestic division of labour was described as unequal by 11 of the 14 women. The women were unhappy about their situations and generally wanted change. In spite of the common reference to partnership as the way of organising relationships, the men consistently used the framework of ‘gender roles’ and ‘gender socialisation’ to explain and justify the unequal division of labour in their relationships. For example, Jason drew upon the discourse of gender roles to explain the inequality and his resistance:

I put the rubbish bins out. I have very much fallen into that male thing, that stereotypical male role. I am not entrenched in that notion of me being the breadwinner and Danielle being the housekeeper, but I still do fall into the pattern of doing those things that are traditionally done. Stuff like cooking, I am very bad with cooking, very bad. Yeah, yeah the house chore stuff, I just don’t see things that Danielle sees.

Similarly, Nathan described the lack of equality in terms of ‘traditional’ ‘gender roles’, and also that he had become lazy:

In some ways it is traditional. I don’t do the cooking, which is interesting in that when she met me one of the things that probably impressed her was that I could cook, as I had been living on my own for a fairly long period of time. But as it has worked out, I expect Pam to do that. I tend to work a lot longer than Pam, and I often don’t come home until seven or eight in the evening and she is only a five minute drive away from her work. So I suppose that there is an expectation that she does the cooking. So in that respect I have become lazy.

Some of the respondents elaborated upon a discussion of roles, explaining the division of labour in terms of socialisation. For example:

David: I am not particularly good at cleaning up. Some men are. So I haven’t tended to clean things up, I have tended to be much more of a hoarder. Tammy is much more organised than I am and I think that I have brought her down to my level. There are things that I am not fussed about if they are not done, but there are things that Tammy does that annoy me. I won’t say that I don’t push it because I do push it, but at the same time it worries me less. Tammy is not greatly
concerned changing some of those things. So we both have our points of resistance is what I am trying to get at.

_Shawn_: Monica has been socialised to be good at cleaning and being tidy. Whereas I have been someone that just throws everything everywhere, which is also part of being a boy, who had a mother who cared about how tidy my room was, and who said she wouldn’t clean up after me but often still did.

The women in this study also explained the unequal division of labour in terms of gender socialisation. For example, Chelsea explained that watching her mother for 25 years had a lasting effect on her behaviour. She described how she would rush in and do most of the domestic labour before her partner had a chance to do it himself. So although she had ‘embraced feminism and been supported by feminism’ it did not ‘undo 25 years as the centre piece of role model that I had as a women’:

When I come home after work and I find Leyton sitting on the couch, I come in and within thirty seconds I have taken out a load of washing. I’ve put on another load of washing. I’ve cleaned up the kitchen and I can’t [relax] ... it still takes me ... I might go through a couple of weeks where I don’t do it and then I’ll be back in the same old bad habit. So to a certain extent I am still the house-worker.

Although women were unhappy about the division of labour, it was less clear how hard they were prepared to push for change. Dempsey argued that although the great majority of women desired greater equality on the division of labour, many were not willing to push for substantial change. In general, the majority of women in Dempsey’s study were only seeking ‘help’ rather than a radical re-organisation of domestic labour. These women, Dempsey argued, were not willing to compromise the harmony of their marriages by pushing for structural change (1997: 170). The same pattern was true for at least seven of the eleven women who described inequality in this study. They described feeling largely powerless, or being unwilling to address the situation. For example, Pam largely accepted the development of gender roles in her relationship:

He does have the European expectations of marriage that the wife does all the cooking. Nathan has cooked maybe once in all the eight years [that we have been together]. I don’t mind too much because I like cooking, but it would be nice
sometimes not to have to do it. Nathan’s answer, if I don’t cook: he will get takeaway, which is not good. So we have never had a really clear discussion of who does what, so we have basically fallen into roles. I certainly didn’t think that it would be an issue, but it is the old perennial thing: once you marry things change. Before we met Nathan lived on his own. He was very capable of cooking and cleaning and doing his own laundry and he did. And I certainly didn’t expect that to change particularly when we got married.

Tammy, David’s partner, was not happy about her situation either. She explained that before living with her partner she had a very tidy home, but when she began living with him things changed. She described how living with David’s standards of cleanliness and tidiness had been a ‘nightmare’ and over the years she had dropped her own standards and adopted his:

Over the ten years it has been horrible, but I have learnt to say that I don’t care. It is a case of have to for your sanity.

Similarly, Gary and Mary had largely established a traditional division of labour. This was largely on account of the fact that they did not want to put their children into day care. Mary observed that she did most of the domestic labour. Implicit in her account was the message that she felt that there was little she could or would do about it:

It is in constant change. At the moment he has got so many things on that I do get a bit irritated. I find it all totally boring [the housework], I hate doing the domestic stuff, and before we had kids he would be the one doing the washing up and I would be out mowing the lawns … But yeah, he doesn’t do that much at the moment. But while I cook tea he will play with the kids, and I would rather he do that because I have been with the kids all day. So the way it tends to break up naturally, it is probably alright. I would just rather do less domestic stuff.

These women did not describe the division of labour as a structural issue. The women described asking for help rather than a radical re-organisation of domestic labour. The women largely let the issue rest when their partners responded to their requests for help. For example, Sonja explained:
Matthew doesn’t mind … I often say to him, ‘how about doing a bit of washing, the clothes are hanging over the basket’, and he immediately says ‘you’re right, you’re right, I will, I will, I will’. And he doesn’t get in a shitty mood.

Similarly, Danielle did not do much about changing the situation. In spite of being unhappy, her only comment about change was just that Jason ‘could do more’.

The women were often content when their partners responded to their reminders about domestic labour because the issue was temporarily resolved. The upshot was that the problem returned to haunt the women over and over. They had to go on reminding their partners each time domestic labour needed to be done. For example, Sonja remarked that she only had to remind Matthew that the domestic work needed doing and he would do it: but, she also said, ‘He just doesn’t see it, he doesn’t take the initiative’. Similarly, Danielle described how Jason responded in a positive manner when she asked him to help out with the housework: ‘If I ask him to do something he will do it’, but she also said that ‘I always have to ask him’. Although the men did not actively resist their partners’ requests for help, they did not change their behaviour and take responsibility. The men consistently failed to notice that domestic tasks needed doing.

By their own accounts, four of the women went further than asking for help; they pleaded for it and demanded greater equality. For example, Katrina, was not going to settle for what she perceived to be inequality. She was determined that she would continue to push for the change that she wanted:

I think that I need to do a bit more work on instituting change. It often feels like I am the one who is saying this isn’t right, that isn’t right, rather than Terry. Sometimes I feel like I’m unrelenting, but I can’t help myself. I feel like it has to be fairer.

But at the same time her determination was undermined by dominant discourses about the ‘good mother’:

On a conscious level it is, but on some other level I feel a bit guilty. There are still all those messages about to be a good wife I would be ironing all his shirts. So on
a conscious level when I see him ironing his shirts in the morning I think that’s fine because I am getting myself ready and we are both getting the kids ready, I haven’t got time to stay home and iron shirts. But on another level I feel that that is not fair. It causes a conflict and undermines my assuredness.

One woman explicitly supported Dempsey’s claim that women were not prepared to compromise the harmony of their marriages to achieve equality. Rosemary was a full-time worker while her partner was in the process of moving from one job to another and was currently at home during the day. In spite of this, Rosemary came home to a house that needed cleaning, a sink full of dirty dishes and an expectation that she would cook the evening meal. Rosemary described feeling like she was exploited:

At times I’ll go home and there are no dishes done and I say, ‘Jesus Christ how hard is it for someone to do the dishes?’ Because the one thing that I really like if I am going to get a meal is a clean sink before I start. And that is my big argument ‘Can’t someone do the dishes? The three of you are on holidays’.

With the same issue recurring time after time, Rosemary eventually felt that if she pleaded with her family things might change. She described how she ‘ranted’ and ‘raved’ about the situation to no avail: ‘I whinge, I get sarcastic, but that didn’t change anyone else’s behaviour’. Rosemary said that although the inequality in the division of labour was tiring and made her unhappy, she also felt that they could only push the issue so far:

I won’t negotiate. This is going to sound awfully contradictory … Do you know what I mean when I say that there are certain barriers in a relationship that are risky to cross over? I feel that if I push too hard I am crossing into non-negotiable territory and I feel at risk to make an issue of it. It is easier for me, and it is part of my personality. I will put up with that, I will do it, it is not worth an argument.

Reaching what she perceived to be the end of the limit and feeling defeated, she decided that she needed rationalise her thoughts about the situation. She said:

So rather than try to change other people’s behaviour I changed mine. It is the confrontation of it all. I feel that I have changed my behaviour continually to maintain the relationship.
One woman, Monica, was not going to settle for inequality. She took action that the other women did not. Unlike all the other couples in the study, Monica and Shawn had never lived together, in spite of being in their relationship for more than two years. Monica said that she raised and discussed the issue of domestic labour with Shawn, but it was never satisfactorily resolved:

Most of our conflict, well, we just talk about it. I guess that is something that we don’t do completely adequately because quite often there are other things happening, so probably a lot of things just don’t get resolved, it just sort of dissipates.

However, in contrast to the other women who largely accepted their situations, Monica decided she would not subject herself to chronic battles over domestic work and that she would not live with Shawn:

I think it had an effect on the fact that we never lived together, even though we spent every night at each other’s places. There were at least three or four times when one of us was moving and we contemplated whether we should live together or not, and the last couple of times I think it was me who pulled out, and that [the division of labour] was a pretty big factor. I was just scared of just being angry and frustrated.

When we consider reorganisation of domestic labour, we are also considering power relations. Although only one of these women complained about the dimension of power as an issue in her relationship, power was an ongoing issue in these relationships on account of the division of labour. Kenneth Dempsey observed that when women push for change in the division of labour they are essentially attempting to exercise power by influencing their partner’s actions. Many of the women in this study were unsuccessful in influencing their partner’s actions. The men’s attitudes to power were readily revealed in the way that they resisted change on the dimension of labour.
10.3 Cathexis

For ten of the 14 women in the conflict relationships, the dimension of cathexis was characterised by tension and confusion. Whereas respondents were relatively clear about what constituted inequality in relation to the dimensions of power and labour, and used the idea of partnership to evaluate what was fair and appropriate, they were much more uncertain in relation to cathexis.

The respondents employed social concepts such as ‘tradition’, ‘roles’, ‘stereotypes’ and ‘socialisation’ to make sense of inequalities around power and labour. They were much less certain of how to explain differences around cathexis. A few drew on social concepts. More commonly, they simply described sexual differences as if they were in some way innate, essentialist and intractable. It was at this point of the interview that some respondents referred to popular essentialist theories of gender, such as those of John Gray’s *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*.

For example, Sonja was frustrated and emotional about the level of compatibility between Matthew and herself. She concluded, ‘I probably need to understand that we are different’. Similarly, Michelle complained that she felt that her relationship with Stephen was not as close as she wanted and that Stephen did not allow her to express her love for him or generally express himself emotionally. Stephen did not see this as a problem because he perceived men and women are largely different. He viewed himself as rational and intellectual while Michelle was more emotional:

I don’t think that I do express my thoughts and feelings terribly much about the relationship. I do sometimes, but they would be more my thoughts. In the Myers-Briggs test, I am definitely a thinking person, not a feeling person. I would rarely talk about it from a feeling point of view. I don’t know if she has taken the test, but I suspect that she is a feeling person.

Managing conflict or achieving change on this dimension made more difficult for two other reasons. First the men did not generally perceive there was a real problem in
this area because their needs were met, and second they generally did not understand what their partners wanted.

For example, Martin did not perceive the problem that his partner Elizabeth did. Elizabeth observed that the relationship had failed to reach the level of closeness that she expected. This was partly because she felt that Martin’s main focus in life was his work, on which he devoted the greater part of his thoughts and energy. For his part, Martin did not share Elizabeth’s perception. He described the relationship as ‘stable’ and felt that his ‘emotional needs were met’. Martin described the relationship in terms of companionship, beyond which anything was superfluous:

So the relationship keeps changing, but the bottom line is that we enjoy each other’s company and it is also true to say that we are each other’s best friend, so we are just good mates and that gives you a lot of glue.

Because of the dynamics described above, the women found it difficult to address and resolve the problems they perceived. For example, Elizabeth complained that she could not talk to her partner about the ‘core issues’ in their relationship and that her partner was not ‘a great communicator of his own emotions’. Elizabeth had tried to change this situation by discussing her concerns with her partner, but she never got very far. She explained that the couple had got to the point where conversations about their unsatisfactory communication had reached saturation level and now ‘we joke about it’, but to take it any further was ‘just nagging’. Martin largely agreed with his partner that his ability to communicate with his partner on an emotional level was lacking: ‘I am my father’s son as far as communication is concerned’. In spite of this recognition, Martin did not address this issue. He described himself as focussing on the positive aspects of the relationship, and he felt that ‘there aren’t any big issues in our relationship’.

Even where the men recognised that the level of attachment between themselves and their partners were not satisfactory, they dealt with this knowledge in a different way to their partners. For example, Pam and Nathan had come to very different conclusions.
about the state of their relationship and what it meant. Pam described how she and Nathan were largely living separate lives. This development had occurred over a long period of time: ‘Nathan started studying and so I started a business to fill up my time, so that was pretty rocky for a time’. The couple had come together through mountain climbing but no longer did this, undermining their attachment. Nathan confirmed Pam’s view. He described how there was little sense of partnership, and how both of them had gone off in their own directions:

I think some of the original missions and dreams you have end up going out the window. You go past that honeymoon stage. Possibly we are not working together ambitiously to some goal and that is probably not a good thing, and that probably would be something that would be good to revisit. We don’t have children so we don’t have a focus upon bringing up a child, worrying about its needs, taking it to school or whatever. We are not doing much around the house so that means that you don’t have a dream together. So a lot of things have fallen by the wayside, so there is that element of disillusionment and I am not blaming her. It is just the way things tend to happen.

Notwithstanding Nathan’s ‘disillusionment’, he still described feeling ‘comfortable’ in the relationship. Whereas Pam described the relationship as in trouble, Nathan had reframed what he expected in the relationship. In his own words:

And in many ways I feel that Pam is now more of a companion rather than the romantic, physical attraction thing. To me it is more about maturity and companionship. Since I have completed my studies I have gained some self-esteem and that has improved our relationship.

Achieving change on this dimension was also inhibited by the fact that the men failed to understand what their partners wanted. The women described their partners as lacking knowledge about intimacy. For example, Michele explained that she often tried to talk to her partner about the issue. Michele described how her partner could not understand what she wanted and tried to solve her problems: ‘men tend to be problem solvers and they don’t engage with you’. She explained that ‘we’ve talked about it’ but ‘he can’t change’:
The problem is that I don’t think they know what it is. I don’t think they [men] know what it is. [Mimicking what she would say to her partner] ‘I want emotional support!’

Similarly, Sonja found that Matthew could not understand what she wanted:

He knows what the problems are but he doesn’t believe that the communication is bad. And I don’t think that he realises … As I have said, he is so into his own world, he is happy and satisfied, for him there are no problems. All that I have been telling you would not be news to him. It is just that he doesn’t have the answers to it all. He doesn’t know how to act.

Sonja observed: ‘I am not the one who needs flowers all the time, just little thoughts’. She tried to explain this to Matthew, and believed that he took her concerns seriously. From her point of view, though, nothing changed. Matthew did not do anything differently to what he had previously done. Sonja described how Matthew reacted to her concerns as to whether the relationship was going last:

He says ‘Don’t say that, of course we will work it out’. He doesn’t explore it, he doesn’t go really deep into it. He says, ‘Yeah, yeah, we are going to do something, we are going to talk more’, but the problem is that it is done in a superficial way.

For his part, Matthew was confused by the situation. He thought that Sonja wanted more ‘romance’, including flowers and candle lit dinners. For example:

Yeah, she would say that I am not romantic enough. Sometimes I bring her flowers when she is least expecting it. That gives her a bit of a thrill. Occasionally, we have candle lit dinners. It sounds like a cliché, but she goes for that more than I do and therefore I have to make a conscious effort.

Yet he also knew that he was struggling and felt that the course of events was beyond his control:

I just want to say that sometimes you just end up in a place [situation]. Things just happen. I feel that that is where our relationship is, it has come to a point that somehow we have been put on these railway tracks and we’ve tried to do things differently, but the same problems are there.
Similarly, Leyton did not think that his partner’s complaints about the relationship were really justified. Leyton felt that Chelsea’s unmet need for intimacy was going around in circles and that they were going over the same old ground. Leyton concluded that he was not going to satisfy his partner and that the problem lay with her rather than him:

But there is still an unmet need. Maybe it’s not about the relationship, maybe some of the unmet needs are about what is going on internally. If she says she is feeling unloved I wish you would pay me more attention … another way of understanding that comment is that maybe she is not loving herself in that moment Then it doesn’t matter how much attention I paid her, she wouldn’t feel loved enough.

Living with a lack of love, care, companionship and intimacy was a difficult experience. The women expressed dissatisfaction and disappointment at the fact that they had not been able to achieve the intimacy they expected. Sonja, for example, said that her relationship was ‘very emotional’ and that she felt ‘very unhappy these days’. Similarly, Michele described feeling disappointed because she could not achieve the intimacy that she wanted. Not being able to achieve intimacy made her feel lonely:

So I feel that I have to give up that part of the relationship a bit, which is my character. So for me showing how I care is that sort of thing, so I think that I don’t show it a lot in the relationship because that isn’t important to him. It is not that I need it, that I am craving it. I enjoy it, and I like it. It is not like ‘I need to you to show me that you love me’. I am not the sort of person who is so unconfident that I need it. I just like it and it feels natural to me.

When the women were unsuccessful in their attempts to achieve greater intimacy, they realised that they had to manage the situation. In general the women largely accepted the situation. For example, Pam described how she had tried to discuss things with her partner and made little headway. She has come to the conclusion that it was not worth all the effort and she may as well just accept the way things are:
I have learnt that it is not really worth fighting about, because quite honestly he would have been totally bored if he had come [to the party], so it probably wouldn’t have been a very positive experience if he had come. So in some ways that is a bit sad, because that is not the value that I grew up with and I thought would happen in a relationship.

Accepting one’s situation involved lowering of expectations. Elizabeth decided to stop trying to make her partner into the man she wanted him to be: ‘Something else is that I don’t try and change him as much as I used to’. Moreover, she realised that in comparing her current relationship to her previous relationships, this one was not perfect but better than what she had before:

I think it has got to do with expectations versus reality. Learning to not have expectations, and realising that the expectations that you are brought up to believe that you should have are a fairy tale and a crock of shit. So I guess my expectations are not based on those old ones. They are based on comparing relationships that I have had, then those expectations are realistic And that is that thing of learning not to …. as I said earlier, stop trying to change him. It is getting rid of those expectations that he won’t be like this, and he is who he is.

A final aspect of acceptance was to re-evaluate the relationship and focus on its positive elements. For example, not only did Elizabeth lower her expectations, but she decided that compared with her previous relationship, the current one was pretty good. The relationship was characterised by ‘stability’, the couple were ‘very comfortable with each other’ and were ‘settling into old age at the moment’. Similarly, Michele decided to focus on the positive elements of the relationship. Although she could not create the intimacy with her partner that she wanted, she decided that her relationship was not so bad:

Well the first thing that comes to mind is the stability. We don’t fight and there are no big issues that annoy us. We don’t bug each other that we have to fight about it. We have a nice lifestyle together. We enjoy the same sort of things … There is so much other good stuff that you can’t say that the relationship isn’t working because of those things. You just find them with other people.
As women lowered their expectations, they sometimes blamed themselves for having demanded something that could not be met. For example, Sonja described how she had been too ‘negative’ in the past:

It is hard to see … maybe I am putting so much pressure on him. Maybe what I have been saying has had the reverse effect. Maybe that I have been so negative telling him all the time that I want to go home, this and that, we need to paint, we need to clean, it has had the reverse effect … I don’t know…

Similarly, Chelsea spent lots of time and energy running the problems she perceived about attachment over in her head hoping to resolve them. She described how she spent ‘way too much time’ thinking about the relationship, which was to her ‘detriment’ because her partner did not do likewise. Eventually she started to blame herself:

I’ll often analyse it away. I think that’s because I generally don’t want to have a confrontation unless it is absolutely essential. But analysing it away is just a load of shit, because what you often do is say right, Leyton and I have just had this fight. You initially hate him for it or you’re really angry and then five minutes later you go. You think, maybe it was my fault because I did da da da, and maybe I did this and maybe I just have to accept the way he is, blah blah blah, but after it happens ten times you explode. So, I think that there is nothing that I can’t talk to him about or don’t feel comfortable talking to him about. Sometimes I think it is more a reflection of me rather than him so I don’t tell him about it. Does that make sense?

**Summary**

This chapter examined the men’s explanations for hegemonic rather than reformed practices. It discussed how the men explained the inequities in the light of their stated beliefs of partnership and equality. The chapter then described how the men’s partners dealt with the hegemonic practices and resistance to reform. Finally, it discussed how the men responded to their partners’ requests for change and reform.
On the dimension of power, some of the men used the concept of competence to justify the unequal dimension of decision-making. The men perceived themselves to be either more capable of decision-making, or better educated and more knowledgeable than their partners. Within these dynamics the women felt that there was little that they could do.

On the dimensions of labour, both the men and women described gender roles and gender socialisation as the basis of their behaviour. The women found it difficult to challenge or object when their partners adopted a system of gendered roles. Some of the women tried to negotiate for greater participation and a more equitable division of domestic labour. They bargained with their partners and a small number of the women pleaded. Generally, the men did respond to their partners’ requests and ‘helped’ with the tasks needed doing, but they did not change their behaviour to the extent that they took responsibility for it. As a result the hegemonic pattern continued. The lack of change around domestic labour had the effect of creating tension and conflict, with the women feeling that they were being exploited.

On the dimension of cathexis, men and women struggled to explain the asymmetry that seemed to characterise their relationships. It was on this dimension that they were most likely to resort to essentialist explanations, involving intractable differences between the sexes. The men and women often described very different expectations and ideas about attachment. The women perceived problems that the men did not perceive. The women expressed desires that the men could not generally understand. In this context, the women found it difficult to negotiate with their partners about change. Where the men did not share their partner’s perception, they tended to ignore the problem or trivialise it and focus on the positive elements of the relationship.
Chapter 11

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate Connell’s proposition that men active in the environmental movement were attempting to reform their masculinity, constructing progressive rather than hegemonic gender projects. The evidence from this study supports Connell’s argument about gender reform among men active in the environmental movement, but also highlights the persistent influence of established gender roles and hegemonic practices. All of the men in this study were attempting to construct reformed gender projects. At an ideological level they overwhelmingly described hegemonic masculinity as outmoded. All of them argued that ‘partnership’ had replaced ‘patriarchy’ as a basis of organising their relationships. However, putting ideas into practice was more complicated.

In-depth interviews were used to collect the data for this study, enabling the collection of data that was rich in detail. The evidence for the thesis was based upon the respondents’ stories about what they perceived took place in practice across the dimensions of power, labour and cathexis. The respondents described two main stories; those that were characterised by gender reform and relative harmony, and those characterised by hegemonic practices and varying degrees of conflict. There was widespread consensus in the respondents’ stories. In general, both the women and men provided consistent stories about the dimensions of power and labour in their relationships, regardless of whether they described harmony or conflict. The stories about the dimension of cathexis were less consistent and more complex.

11.1 Non-hegemonic masculinity

There is now a substantial body of research concerning the construction of hegemonic masculinity. There is broad agreement that hegemonic masculinity is constructed around values of power, hierarchy, competition, independence, emotional detachment,
fearlessness, the denial of vulnerability, sexual objectification of women and homophobia. As researchers have noted, practices around these values help to reproduce hegemonic masculinity and deny legitimacy to practices that challenge it.

The men in this study consistently articulated non-hegemonic gender projects. They advocated principles of gender equality, collectivism, social justice and environmentalism. They rejected notions of masculine privilege. Many described giving up opportunities to work in jobs that would have provided a life of economic security.

A substantial number (corroborated by their partners) also described putting their values of gender equality into practice. In ten of the 24 couples interviewed, both men and women described shared decision-making, taking responsibility for domestic labour, and taking responsibility for the emotional dimension of the relationship. Their relationships closely followed Gidden’s ideal type of ‘the pure relationship’. In 14 couples, both men and women agreed that they had not been able to put their values into practice. They described the enduring influence of hegemonic masculinity, and a mix of reform and resistance in men’s everyday practices.

There were at least three factors commonly identified as underpinning the ability to put values into practice. First, families of origin had a significant influence on gender reform. The men who had been most able to sustain non-hegemonic gender projects came disproportionately from what they described as ‘non-traditional’ families. These were the families, such as those ‘partnership couples’ described by Fallding in the 1950s, who had actively questioned the structure of gender roles and gender relations. The mothers of these men often described themselves as feminists. The issue of gender equality had been an enduring one for these men, canvassed frequently in the course of their upbringing. Their families had re-organised decision-making and domestic labour in order to accommodate the demand for equality.

Second, the men who had made most progress were disproportionately likely to describe a personal crisis in the course of describing their relationship history. The crisis
emanated from the breakdown and loss of an earlier relationship. In turn, the loss of the relationship initiated reflection about gender relations, relationships and masculinity, which led to reflexivity. The men described giving more thought as to where their relationship fitted into their lives. As a result they attempted to balance their work and relationship commitments in their current relationships. In particular, the crisis seemed to initiate thoughts about the emotional dimension of their relationships and a degree of emotional literacy.

Third, the men who made most progress attributed it to the influence of their current relationship partners. Women who viewed themselves as feminists or held strong feminist values seemed to influence their partner’s action. These men described how their partners influenced them to leave high-paying jobs to pursue their commitment to the environmental movement. They also described learning relationship skills from their partners, especially in relation to intimacy and emotional literacy.

More generally, the environmental movement provided a supportive context for the construction of a non-hegemonic masculinity. On the whole, the respondents did not describe the movement as a decisive influence on their gender projects. Many described an all-consuming involvement in the movement that left little time for their relationships, and meant that they were ‘slaves’ to their work no less than men in the mainstream workforce. Even so, it is striking that of the ten men who had made most progress in gender reform (in ‘pure relationships’), nine of them had been in the environmental movement for ten years or more. In contrast, only six of the 14 men in ‘conflict relationships’ had been in the environmental movement for ten years or more.

Notwithstanding non-hegemonic gender projects, there was a common failure among men in the study to reflect upon their relationship histories. This was in stark contrast to their partners. Whereas 18 of the 24 women described stories of past experiences that acted as a catalyst for reflection and re-evaluation of their ideas and practices within their relationships, only four of the 24 did so. Most men wrote off past relationship experiences and described moving on in their lives without garnering any
particular lesson from the experience. Perhaps this is why more than half of the couples in the study described enduring conflict and resistance.

The rationale provided by men and women for enduring conflict and resistance were revealing. Respondents overwhelmingly explained inequalities of power and labour in terms of social dynamics, using basic sociological concepts such as ‘role’, ‘stereotypes’, ‘tradition’ and ‘socialisation’. In a few cases they also used ‘competence’ as a rationale, like Fallding’s respondents in the 1950s. These concepts seemed to provide both men and women with an acceptable explanation for the failure to live up to the ideal of partnership. As a result the men did not feel obliged to change their behaviours, and the women (as Dempsey observed in his studies) did not see cause to press their partners for major change.

The rationale provided by men and women for inequalities of cathexis were more diverse. The respondents seemed to lack a framework or language for explaining these problems. In contrast to the dimensions of power and labour where respondents framed their discussion in terms of partnership and gender equality, participants seemed unable to decide what was fair and appropriate in relation to cathexis. Couples often described their impasse in intractable terms, as if it was grounded in essentialist differences between the sexes. For the most part, the women felt that they had no choice but to accept their situation and lower their expectations.

11.2 Masculinity, gender and relationships

In Harold Fallding’s study in the late 1950s of middle-class Sydney couples, the majority of couples were what Fallding described as ‘patriarchal’ in their organisation. Moreover, most couples accepted patriarchal relations as natural and legitimate. These couples were the ‘happiest’ in the study. A significant minority of the couples, though, rejected the patriarchal model, espousing instead a model of ‘partnership’. Some of these partnership couples organised their lives in precisely the same way as the patriarchal couples, the only difference being that they justified what they did in terms of
‘competence’ rather than ‘nature’. A small number of couples experimented with different models of decision-making and work. These couples were the most conflictual and also the unhappiest in the study.

Two decades later, in the 1970s, Claire Williams’ study of working-class couples in a north Queensland mining town in north Queensland found that the ideal of partnership had made strong ground, among women at least. Most of the women believed in the partnership model. Unfortunately, most of the men did not. Like Fallding, Williams found that the happiest couples were those where the women accepted patriarchal relations and acquiesced to their husbands. The unhappiest couples were those where women unsuccessfully pressed their partners for greater equality and partnership.

Another two decades later, in the 1990s, Ken Dempsey’s study of Melbourne couples observed large-scale change in attitude among men as well as women about gender relations. The majority of the men described a belief in the concept of partnership in marriage. In spite of shifting attitudes, Dempsey observed widespread inequality in all areas of these marriages. Notwithstanding inequality, he also observed that the majority of these relationships were apparently content. The women did not for the most part complain or perceive that they were being treated unfairly (Dempsey, 1997: 146). It would appear that couples were able to rationalise the gap between ideology and practice.

The current study of environmental couples found that by the late 1990s patriarchy, for this sample at least, had lost its legitimacy. All the couples perceived themselves as a ‘partnership’. Almost half of the couples had – by their own detailed accounts - put their ideals into practice to a significant degree. These couples were the happiest in the study, at least by their own accounts. A little over half of the couples described enduring inequalities in power, labour and cathectic. In turn, these couples described enduring conflict. The men were not much distressed by this conflict, mostly describing their relationships as ‘comfortable’. The women were distressed by enduring inequalities, although they were resigned to them.
The snapshots provided by these very different studies are revealing. There has certainly been dramatic change in the ideology of gender in relationships. In turn, gender practices and gender projects have been more contested. This study supports Connell’s analysis of the environmental movement as a supportive context for non-hegemonic masculinity and progressive gender politics. It also provides evidence that non-hegemonic masculinity might be the basis for happy and non-conflictual relationships, characterised by intimacy and equality.
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Appendix 1

Introduction Letter

My name is Stephen Leyden. I am currently doing my PhD at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne. This thesis is about men and women’s perceptions of their relationships. In this study I am focusing on several issues:

1. Men’s and women’s perceptions about their relationships.
2. How partners negotiate relationships issues and allocate domestic tasks.
3. How people experience attachment their relationship.

The sample for this study is focused on men involved in the environmental movement and their partners. The rationale for the sample is based on the argument advanced by Sydney sociologist, Professor Bob Connell, who argues that men in the environmental movement are likely to have broader perceptions of relationships because of the values that they subscribe to by being involved in the environmental movement.

I should emphasise that this study is sociological in orientation. Therefore, the focus and analysis of the study is on the social similarities and patterns that arise in relationships, rather than the personal details of particular relationships. By being involved in this study you will be able to help develop some information about this topic which may be of value to the community and of help to other couples.

Participation in this study would involve a separate interview for both partners. I want to emphasise that ethical concerns are an important part of this study and therefore I offer both partners total confidentiality and anonymity. This means that the content of any interview cannot be discussed with anyone else. The interview takes roughly an hour. The interviews can take place in the interviewees home or alternatively my home. You can contact me on 9529-7169 or email me at stephen.leyden@bigpond.com

Thank you for your attention to my inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Leyden  BA (Honours)
School of Social and behavioural Science  SUT
Appendix 2

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Demographic questions
Age
Occupation
Ethnic background
Education

Biography
Tell me about your family background

Forming
Relationship history – previous relationships
How long have you been in this relationship?
How did you meet?
What did you like about your partner?
How did you know this relationship would be long-term?

Change
Has the relationship changed since it began?

Marriage and children
Did you want to construct your relationship differently from your parents’ relationship?
What is your view about marriage?
Where do children fit into the scheme of things?

Power and negotiation
How are decisions made?
Household head

Labour
How does your relationship operate?
Who actually does what?
**Cathexis**

Are you happy in your relationship?
What makes you feel close to your partner?
Do you spend anytime thinking about how your relationship is going?
What sort of things do you think about?
Do you do things together? (time together)
Are there any things that you feel reluctant to talk to your partner about?

**Problems/Conflict**

Are there things that get in the way of your relationship going well?
Are there similar problems that crop up?
How do you deal with problems?