SILENT VIOLENCE: AUSTRALIA’S WHITE STOLEN CHILDREN

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In relation to adoption, the question needs to be asked:
In what other period of human history did young mothers willingly defy nature and give away their babies en masse to strangers?

(Jigsaw, Brisbane)
Abstract

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the existing knowledge on ‘unmarried mothers’. Much of the literature on ‘unmarried mothers’ has been written by white, male, middle-class professionals who assume that unwed mothers are happy to place their babies for adoption so that they can be free to pursue other interests, meet other men and make a new life. However, after interviewing many of the mothers who gave up their babies in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in Australia, I found this was not the case. Many of the mothers had wanted to keep their babies but were forced to relinquish them by their families and the wider society who seemed more intent on upholding nuclear family values than making available the resources needed to keep natural mothers and their babies together. My argument throughout this thesis is that given a choice – a viable economic and socially supported choice – many of the unmarried mothers, typified by those whom I interviewed, would not have parted with their babies. Most mothers interviewed, and presumably many of those in the community at large, have experienced much pain and grief as a result of the separation – a grief which is profound and lasts forever. Using Marxist feminist theories of the state and post-structural theories, my thesis highlights the perceptions and memories of birthmothers about the birthing experience and adoption as experience, process and life consequence.

I also argue that the removal of white, working-class babies from their mothers compares in some small way with the removal of the indigenous ‘stolen children’ in the same period. The removal of Aboriginal children from their homes and cultures has been referred to by some scholars and activists as a form of cultural genocide. While the removal of babies from white, working-class, unwed mothers was different in that it had few racial implications, I argue that the system in place at the time was patriarchal and class-based and as such left the young, unwed women with no options but adoption. The thesis makes a very important and socially significant contribution to our understanding of unmarried mothers in that it presents a largely unwritten history of women. Rich in the voices of unmarried mothers, there are important conceptual, empirical and practical policy implications flowing from the research findings.
This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed: ..............................................

Dated: ..................................................
## Contents

Abstract iii  
List of tables ix  
Acknowledgements x  

1. Introduction 1  
   1.1 Hypotheses 3  
   1.2 Marxist feminism 5  
   1.3 Post-structural feminism 6  
   1.4 The organisation of the thesis 9  

2. Chapter 1 11  
   2.1 Part A: changing definitions of love, marriage and the family 11  
      2.1.1 Introduction 11  
      2.1.2 Love, marriage and family formations 12  
      2.1.3 Orthodox religion – its history, function and effects on the  
           ‘unmarried mother’ 21  
   2.2 Part B: the literature on unmarried mothers 28  
      2.2.1 The view from above 28  
      2.2.2 Feminism as a global movement for the advancement of women 34  
      2.2.3 The feminist or alternative literature 38  
   2.3 Conclusion 45  

3. Chapter 2 Methodology 46  
   3.1 Introduction 46  
      3.1.1 An introduction to feminist experiential analysis 47  
   3.2 Elements of an experiential analysis and the interviewer as ‘coaxer’ 52  
   3.3 Advantages of the survey questionnaire 59  
   3.4 Limitations of the survey questionnaire 60  
      3.4.1 Lack of literacy among working-class mothers 61  
      3.4.2 Perceived deficiencies in the formatting of the questions 61  
      3.4.3 Differences in status or positionality of participants 62
### 3.4.4 A non-conducive social climate 63
### 3.4.5 Mistrust of academics 63
### 3.4.6 Very withdrawn mothers are not likely to reply 64
### 3.4.7 Trauma has its impact 65

#### 3.5 The sample 66
#### 3.6 Confidentiality and ethical clearance 68
#### 3.7 Conclusion 69

### 4. Chapter 3 Results of the survey questionnaire and personal interviews 71

4.1 Introduction 71
4.2 Hypothesis 1: Coercion involved with decision-making 73
4.3 Hypothesis 2: A class redistribution? 75
4.4 Hypothesis 3: Black/white similarities; black/white differences 77
4.5 Hypothesis 4: A universal practice with universal effects? 87
   4.5.1 Place of birth 87
   4.5.2 Extent of humiliation and betrayal 89
   4.5.3 Pain and suffering as experienced by the mothers 90
   4.5.4 Pain 91
   4.5.5 The mourning process 92
   4.5.6 The pain associated with the loss of a child to adoption 93
4.6 Conclusion 102

### 5. Chapter 4 Boundaries precluding legitimate marriages and births 103

5.1 Introduction 103
5.2 Complicating factors inhibiting legitimate marriages and births 105
   5.2.1 Age as a precipitating factor for marriage 106
   5.2.2 Ethnic, racial and class-based prohibitions inhibiting marriage 106
   5.2.3 Religious and cultural prohibitions inhibiting marriage 111
5.3 Doctors as gods: pressure from the medical profession 114
   5.3.1 The rise in status of the ‘scientific expert’ in the mid-twentieth century 114
   5.3.2 The powerful and the powerless 115
5.4 Abandonment by boyfriends 119
   5.4.1 Trickery 120
5.4.2 The non-negotiating position of women 125
5.5 Pornography: ‘the slime under the rug’ of patriarchy? 133
5.6 Conclusion 134

6. Chapter 5 Institutional constraints: the waiting homes and hospitals 136
6.1 Introduction 136
6.2 The homes and hospitals 138
6.3 Religious hostels 143
6.4 Words used as weapons 151
6.5 Withholding information 165
   6.5.1 Withholding of information on housing and pension entitlements 166
   6.5.2 Withholding information on revocation rights 171
   6.5.3 Withholding visitation rights 175
6.6 Fear, terror tactics, threats and intimidation 178
6.7 Physical constraints 184
   6.7.1 Spatial segregation 184
   6.7.2 Misuse of drugs 189
   6.7.3 Restricted viewing of babies 192
6.8 Rapid adoptions 201
6.9 The questions and the questioner 206
6.10 Conclusion 209

7. Summary, conclusions and directions for further action and research 211
7.1 Key research findings and suggestions for further investigation and action 214
7.2 A last word 220

8. Bibliography 223
Appendix

1 The survey questionnaire
# List of tables

1. Research models in contemporary sociology  
2. National return rate of the survey questionnaire  
3. Did you want to keep your baby?  
4. Class background reported by mothers at the time of giving birth  
5. Reported class background of adoptive parents  
6. Location of birth
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1. Introduction

I can recall vividly being held down by two nurses as I struggled desperately to break free only to see my daughter and a car disappear in the distance

(Interviewee 2, Brisbane, 1999)

The relinquishment of my son is the single most regrettable experience of my life….I am unable to forgive those who place me in a position of NO CHOICE….I was never given any help or support to grieve my loss…I signed papers in ignorance because I accepted that it was in my child’s ‘best interest’

(Interviewee 10, Toowoomba, 1999)

This thesis contributes to feminist knowledge by testing long held and arguably patriarchal and middle class notions that white ‘unmarried mothers’ willingly gave away their babies for adoption in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in Australia. Much of the conventional literature (see Chapter 1) refers to the ‘unmarried mother’ as irresponsible, flighty, feckless and lacking personal stability and/or integrity. The inference here is that her baby is ‘unwanted’. The mother is happy to give away her baby because she wishes to pursue another man, pursue other ‘lifestyle choices’ – other options. This thesis tests the possibility that ‘unmarried mothers’ were coerced into giving their children up for adoption by state and society. For instance, while the official rhetoric at that time emphasised adoption as in the child’s ‘best interest’, underlying the rhetoric was the patriarchal and capitalist class concern with maintaining social order and the non-transfer of private wealth (Selman 1996:119; Vincent 1961:4). Adoption as theory and practice became a convenient tool for stripping unwed women of their babies, whilst simultaneously freeing the Australian state from any further financial and legal obligation (Selman 1996:119).

Throughout Australian history, social work and/or mental health professionals, medical and other allied health professionals, social researchers, priests, members of the legal fraternity, members of the state and federal legislatives (many of whom are middle class men who hold middle-class views and values) have had a profound influence on the way in which ‘unmarried mothers’ are perceived and in turn treated (Delany 1997:129). I suggest
that a largely unwritten history of unmarried mothers will sound very different from the orthodoxy of this period which was written by professionals. Their understanding of adoption has been a particular and arguably limited view, and one which assigns fault predominantly to the unwed woman. The unmarried mother is seen as the transgressor/predator (Smart 1992:24). Using different concepts and different methods this thesis unveils a hidden chapter in the Australian sociological literature. It is my contention that rather than willingly giving away their babies to adoption, white, ‘unmarried mothers’ in Australia in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s were forced to do so by state and society unsympathetic to women falling pregnant outside of marriage. Because many natural mothers have been adversely affected by the lifelong separation from their children, I argue that the evidence in this thesis provides a basis of a review of adoption policies and practices. Furthermore, because of the potential for exploitation of unwed mothers in third world countries by childless couples in the developed world, I suggest in the concluding chapter that research into this area and others is timely (Lusetich 2001:19; Lague 1998:1; Perrin 2002:17).

In the current social climate some women (at least in the West today) have better access to well paid jobs, have greater control over their fertility, are better able to negotiate their needs and interests in their personal relationships with men and therefore are more able to exercise a choice as to whether to remain in or leave a relationship (Pettman 1992:17-34). Consequently, it is often very difficult for some sections of the community to understand or empathise with ‘unmarried mothers’ of the past who faced a very different set of social circumstances – a different social reality (Milliner 1999:24; Rickarby 1997:56). Unmarried women in the past could not access contraception (Weisberg and Siedlecky 1999:240; Segal 1994:261; Summers 1994:293; Selman 1996:121). In their personal relationships with men, they had very little sexual agency (Siedlecky 1999:243; Segal 1994:261). Unlike today, where both parents often share parental and household responsibilities and where both participate in the paid workforce and might expect relative parity of income, in mid-twentieth century Australia there were very clear gender role expectations, leaving women vulnerable to the goodwill of their husbands or boyfriends (Game and Pringle 1983:60; Eichler 1997:60,61). Men worked outside the home to provide financially for their families. Women often were confined to the home in their roles as wives, mothers and consumers (Matthews 1984:41). Whereas today women are most often actively encouraged to seek out
careers and the education suitable for this, at mid-century up until the early 1970s women were socialised into dependency (Spensky 1992:102; Summers 1994:298; Gregory 2002:43: a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:87). It was socially expected that women give up employment on marriage (Game and Pringle 1983:46,51). Because there was so much importance placed on marriage and children as the female vocation, an unmarried woman was seen as an abomination; an unmarried and pregnant woman – a social pariah (Summers 1994:298; Game and Pringle 1983:60; Golden 1992:10,17; Dworkin 1979:119).

This thesis explores a number of variables which impacted on the extent to which white, unmarried mothers in the past were able to keep their babies. Similar to much of the earlier feminist literature (see Chapter 1), I also focus on the social and economic constraints facing young, unmarried and unsupported mothers. However, there is one major point of difference here. It is my contention that the white babies were, for all intents, ‘stolen’, and I scrutinise the coercive methods used to effect this. Thus, by arguing that white, ‘unmarried mothers’ were in effect disenfranchised, my thesis parallels but intentionally does not overlap the research on the indigenous stolen generation in Australia. This was a parameter I intentionally put on this work.

1.1 Hypotheses

The key issue to be addressed in this thesis is the extent to which white, unmarried mothers in the mid-twentieth century in Australia were coerced into having their babies adopted. From this central point the following hypotheses are outlined for investigation:

- white, ‘unmarried mothers’ wanted to keep their babies but were coerced into surrendering them by state and society intent on upholding nuclear family values;

- white babies were taken from their working-class mothers and placed in middle-class families because it was less costly for the Australian state if the children taken from unmarried mothers are given to adoptive couples who are well established and therefore unlikely to call on funds for housing, income and other social assistance; white babies were taken from their working-class mothers and placed in middle-class families
because of the commonly held belief that they would be more likely to be well adjusted if placed in ‘nicer homes’;

- the removal of white babies compares with the indigenous stolen children in that both shared to some extent a working-class background; also the unwed status of both black and white mothers provided a rationale for removals by the state;

- all mothers, irrespective of race, geographic location (urban and rural) were likely to face trauma at the forced adoption of their babies; white unwed mothers felt betrayed and humiliated by their partners, families and trusted institutional representatives.

I regard the stealing of white babies as a phenomena occurring at a time when the newly emerging Australian capitalist state actively sought to uphold nuclear family values. Employing Marxist feminist theories, I argue that, in Australia, as elsewhere in other capitalist economies, the state is primarily concerned with the accumulation of wealth, not its re-distribution (Gamble et al 1999:189; Cass 1988:54-88). Since the single parent household unit does not conform to the capitalist prescription for what ought to be the happy, harmonious and self-sufficient family unit comprising mum, dad and two point two children, ‘unmarried motherhood’ presents a significant disruption\(^1\) to the smooth functioning of the capitalist economy (Gamble et al 1999:181; Kenway 1992:116). Unmarried mothers become targets for increased surveillance and control (Smart 1992:17; Spensky 1992:100; Vincent 1961:4,5). While I regard this phenomenon as structural to the Australian capitalist state – which sits easily within a Marxist feminist framework – I also use insights from post-structural feminism. It is to a description of these two theories that I now turn.

\(^1\) A significant disruption in that most single mothers and their children, who are reliant on state welfare provisions in the form of pensions, allowances and public housing, represent a direct cost to internal revenue. By comparison, married women are not a cost, but a cheap source of unpaid labour in the home......capital accumulation is sustained because of their unpaid domestic servicing (McIntosh 1999:181-182; Rowbotham 1973:18-33; Shawyer 1979:52).
1.2 Marxist feminism

Marxist feminism takes the basis of its positioning from the ideas of Marx (1848, 1869).\(^2\) Marxist feminists such as Marion Tapper (1985) and Deborah Rhode (1990) argue that the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women is just as significant as inequalities between classes: that gender is a major determining factor as is class for identifying the kind of inequalities embedded in liberal democratic (and other) societies (Tapper 1985:46; Rhode 1990:206). Women, and especially working-class women typically suffer from a similar lack of resources and experience forms of powerlessness in capitalist society similar to those identified by Marx among the working class (Taylor 1990:2; Graham 1993:465). Whilst Marxist feminists perceive an order of domination by men over women within liberal democracy\(^3\), they trace its cause to the sexual as well as the social division of labour (Pateman 1988:1-18; Scutt 1994:191-209).

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\(^2\) For Marx (cited in Kamenka 1983:369-507), production lies at the core of cultural evolution and has the greatest single influence on the way society in general, social relations and institutions in particular, develop. It is the way human beings organise themselves in the course of extracting a living from Nature – or producing their material means of existence – which holds the clue to explaining how entire societies are organised and the way in which they work. In particular, Marxists generally believe that it is the way in which the mode of production is organised – especially who owns or controls ‘the means of production’ or the key factors of production, on which the economy as a whole depends – that is the greatest influence on the distribution of power and resources throughout society. In all human societies since very early times, these key resources have invariably been controlled by a minority, a property-owning elite, while the majority have had little or no say over the way society’s collective resources have been exploited, or over the way resources and benefits are distributed. Marxists regard any society where a minority has secured an enforceable property-right in and over the key productive resources as a class society (Emy and Hughes 1991:507; Kamenka 1983:369-507).

\(^3\) Liberal Democracy refers to that form of representative government (such as in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom) which operates on the assumption that all citizens have equal access to the nation’s resources. Grounded in Social Contract Theory formulated by early seventeenth century English thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, Liberal Democratic Theory is based on three main premises:

1. All men are equal and there is no natural authority (Lessnoff 1990:3-4)
2. Society is seen as a compilation of free and equal individuals related to each other through their possessions. The relation of exchange (the market relation) is seen as the fundamental relation.
3. Because political society is regarded as a rational device for the protection of property, social rights alongside their correlated duties are accorded secondary status (Macpherson 1973:199).
While a liberal democracy is meant to be an association of free and politically equal citizens, each of whom is entitled to be regarded as a morally autonomous person, and to receive both equality of opportunity and equal consideration before the law (Macpherson 1973:3-36; Rawls 1990:138-164), Marxist feminists question the justice and rationality of liberal society, suggesting that the quality of one’s citizenship is a function of one’s class, gender or race (Spender 1997:140; Pixley 1992:217). Not all citizens are as free and equal as the official ideology implies (Macpherson 1985:575-589). While those without a property-right in the means of production are effectively powerless – notwithstanding their political rights – compared to men, women do not enjoy the same opportunity to develop their individuality (Blau and Ferber 1992:34-63). The structure of everyday life is constituted by beliefs and practices which presuppose that women are naturally subordinate to men (Emy and Hughes 1991:517-524; Kenway 1992:110).

1.3 Post-structuralist feminism

Marxist feminists such as Cora Baldock (1988) and Suzanne Franzway (1990) tend to concentrate on patriarchy and capitalism and related themes of economic and cultural subordination between men and women (Baldock and Cass 1988:1-295; Franzway et al 1990:1-168). The last two decades, however, have seen a turning away from women, as a sex, suffering exploitation or discrimination, and a new sense of the need to look at concrete instances of gender domination and its interrelation with class, ethnicity, sexuality, politics and culture – all analysed in the context of their historical development (Pringle and Watson 1992:64-65).

According to feminists (Kristeva, Irigaray, Mitchell) working from a post-structuralist perspective, patriarchy implies a model of power and domination that is constructed diffusely, rather than in ‘binary oppositions’, (that is, man/woman, good/bad, mind/matter, being/nothingness, truth/error) that they imagine limits Marx (Grosz 1990:93; Larner 1993:100; Irigaray 1993:30-32). Women’s oppression is sustained by the whole construction of sexual identity and desire, not necessarily by the literal overpowering of one interest group, women, by another, men. The categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’, the building
blocks of patriarchy, have come under assault as essentialist\(^4\) (Phillips 1992:10-28). ‘Woman’, it has been argued is an unstable entity, historically and discursively constructed, that cannot be relied upon to hold a constant meaning (Riley in Pringle 1995:208; Larner 1993:86; de Lauretis 1988:136). Post-structural theorists (Foucault, Irigaray) share the view that analyses of power should proceed from a micro-level (Foucault 1976:17-36, 92-102; Irigaray 1993:30-32). Whereas much traditional social science tends towards the empirical and the behaviourist, post-structuralist thinking is concerned with fragmentation and multiplicity of meaning (Larner 1993:85,86). It emphasises the importance of language and discourse, not just in describing the world but in constituting social reality. Neither social reality nor the natural world has fixed, intrinsic meanings which language reflects or expresses. Instead there has been an emphasis on the relational, historical and precarious character of ‘reality’ (Stasiulis 1993:50). While language is also the place where our ‘identities’ are constructed, subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices, the meanings of which are a constant site of disunity and conflict (Pringle and Watson 1992:64-65; Stasiulis 1993:47-50). According to Luce Irigaray (1993) and the psychoanalytic perspective:

Language is a product of the sedimentations of languages of former eras. It conveys their methods of social communication. It is neither universal, neutral, nor intangible. There are no universal linguistic structures in the brain of the speaking subject; rather, every era has its specific needs, creates its own ideas, and imposes them as such. Differences between men’s and women’s discourses are due to the effects of language and society, society and language. You can not change one without changing the other. Yet while it is impossible to radically separate one from the other, we can shift the emphasis of cultural transformation from one to the other (Irigaray 1993:30-32; Braidotti 1986:7-12).

Whereas Marxist feminists regard power as being based on structural, economic and sexual divisions in society, post-structuralists see power existing at all levels and in all social relationships. Power is everywhere and no one person necessarily has any more than

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\(^4\) Essentialism in this context refers to the tendency to reductionism. Postfeminists consider the idea of universal categories (in this case man the dominator, woman the dominated) to be redundant. However, women need universals. Despite their many differences, women do have things in common. Without a sense of commonality it is not possible to come together and fight for the improvements for all women (Murray 1997:41,42; Rogers 1983:40,41).

Post-structural theories are important to my thesis. For instance, the thesis records the perceptions and memories of birthmothers. The thesis provides the opportunity for women to speak of their different experiences of adoption and its aftermath. These are expressed in narrative form. However, it is Marxist feminist theories of the state on which I base my hypotheses. In this thesis I argue that the mothers lost their babies to adoption in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in Australia because of a huge power differential (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980:209; Rickarby 1998:8). Compared to adoptive parents who were well resourced and had the support of politicians and the wider community, most unmarried mothers found themselves in poverty and with little or no community support. Whilst many unwed women were rejected by their families of origin and/or their boyfriends, the major social institutions at the time (for instance, the churches, the media, the schools, the medical and social work professions, charitable organisations) operated on the assumption that in order to be ‘good’ the unmarried mothers should give away their babies (Farrar 1997:116,117,118,121; Rickarby 1997:56; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980:496; Merrington 1968:154). There was very little room for the idea that these mothers might keep their babies (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980:140-158,184-209; Clegg 1975:43,58; White 1971:749; Ahrne 1990:71,87; Rickarby 1997:56).

Hence, even where hospital almoners, social workers and others entrusted with the care of the unwed women might have actively sought help for these women, many were constrained in their efforts to do this (Farrar 1997:123; Clegg 1975:56-58; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980:449,509,510). For instance, the hospitals (public and private) where the women gave birth operated under strong institutional and technical demands (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980:208,209; Gouldner 1959a:409-420). Similarly, the homes to which the women were sent had to be cost effective (Gouldner 1959a:409-420). The homes and hospitals had to produce outcomes (Gouldner 1959a:409; Rickarby 1997:56). Unfortunately for the unmarried women this often meant separation from their babies (Farrar 1997:116; Rickarby 1997:56; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980:450).
1.4 The organisation of the thesis

Chapter 1 is important theoretical and empirical background material for the framework of the overall study and the more lengthy discussion on coercion in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Recognising that many people in the community have no comprehension of what it was like to be pregnant, unmarried and unsupported in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in Australia, in this chapter I pay particular attention to the different social expectations placed on Australian women in history. For instance, changing definitions of marriage and the family are discussed. However, the influence of orthodox religion is also discussed. In the final section of this chapter I review both the national and international literature on ‘unmarried mothers’. In the first part of this section I outline some of the more prominent and often male, middle-class ways of writing about single mothers, identifying in this way a dominant paradigm. The second part provides a feminist critique. In that section I also describe how my argument fits into the scholarly literature.

Chapter 2 describes the research design and techniques used in this thesis. While highlighting the benefits to be gained by adopting a feminist experiential research model, this section also outlines why my research necessitates the use of the mailed questionnaire in addition to personal interviews. The chapter also refers to the difficulties associated with accessing severely marginalised groups; in this case, women who have lost a child/children to adoption.

Chapter 3 presents the results of my research. The original data is italicised for clarity and the secondary evidence supports this data. The overall result of my analysis does confirm my hypotheses – that is, if white, working-class, unmarried mothers in the mid-twentieth century in Australia were coerced by state and society into relinquishing their babies for adoption then these mothers today are still suffering because of these past adoption practices.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide an in-depth analysis of the concept and practice of coercion which took place. Chapter 4 examines familial and other institutional pressures leading to the young unwed women being ostracised from their families of origin and in many instances their own communities. Chapter 5 details the coercive practices employed by state agents. Here I argue that once ‘incarcerated’ in the homes and hospitals the unwed mothers had no choice but to let go of their babies. The last section of my thesis provides a
concluding summary and discusses the theoretical and empirical implications and significance of the findings.

In this introductory section of the thesis I have argued that birthmothers’ perceptions and memories of adoption as experience, process and life consequence is an important issue, worthy of interest in this study and to future researchers. This section has introduced the issue of interest in this thesis, the four hypotheses to be tested, the two major social theories underpinning the research project (Marxist feminism and post-structural feminism) and a chapter by chapter outline of contents. Whilst this section has been concerned with the topic of interest, in the chapter following I refer to the changing ways of viewing love, marriage and the family. I examine the influence of orthodox religion. I also introduce the literature on unmarried mothers.
2. Chapter 1

2.1 Part A: Changing definitions of love, marriage and the family

How can anyone give away a child?.....it is probably the worst thing anyone could do and I did not make that decision......that decision was put upon me.......so many people believe that I had a choice......modern day philosophers talk about life as the choices you make and in many areas of life you do have a choice but not this one.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:147)

Maternity is an emotional and material tie for which there is no dissolution by decree or mutual consent.....a mother is permanently branded and the more voluntaristic and singular a woman’s entry into the condition of motherhood, the greater the significance of its mark she bears.

(Crouch and Manderson 1993:185)

2.1.1 Introduction

In today’s world babies can be created by sperm donors from sperm banks (Gilding 1997:246-247; Stanworth 1994:227; Sweet 1999:28; Cosic 2002:17). There is now far greater relaxation of social taboos surrounding sex and sexuality than the period that this thesis addresses, 1950 to 1970 (Segal 1994:277). For the first time in history western women who find themselves pregnant and abandoned, can now seek help in the form of state assistance, that is, pensions and other entitlements which provide to the so-called poverty line (Thurlow 1992:6; Australian Council of Social Services 2002:1).

In the current era there is considerable diversity of family formation (Gilding 1997:248; Boyd 1988:85). There is no longer the same stigma attached to ‘illegitimacy’ and the old prejudices towards the ‘unmarried mother’ and her child are not nearly as prevalent as they once were (Matthews 1984:181). Today’s world seems very different from the one of yesteryear. Recognising that many people in the community have no comprehension of
what it was like to be pregnant, unmarried and unsupported in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in Australia, in this chapter I refer to some of the prejudicial attitudes leading to the young mothers being rejected by their own families, communities and boyfriends – attitudes which have a long history. I also refer to the more rigid social institutions harbouring these attitudes. Whilst this will involve a discussion of orthodox religion, the different ways of viewing love, marriage and family are also discussed.

2.1.2 Love, marriage and family formations

The status of being married or being not married is no longer as sharply differentiated as it used to be, either in terms of interactions between a couple, or in terms of rights and obligations (Eichler 1997:42,44). This is due to changing sexual mores and the prevalence of divorce. One of the interactions once expected of couples was that they not engage in any sexual activities until the wedding night. Today pre- and non-marital sex, for both women and men, are socially openly acknowledged. A significant proportion of couples live together in a common-law relationship before they marry, and legal marriage (if it takes place) is only one of a series of steps. If a marriage ends in divorce, most likely one or both partners will remarry or live in a common-law relationship with someone else. The marriage tie is no longer severed only by death but quite frequently by a comparatively simple legal act (Eichler 1997:42-44).

Whilst it could be argued that the coming together of heterosexual couples in a legally binding marriage where the needs and interests of all family members are taken into account is still the ideal in contemporary Australia, marriage as a union that is socially sanctioned and assumed to be permanent is no longer clearly reserved for heterosexual couples. Few countries allow marriage between same-sex partners (Albrechtsen 2004:25). However, lesbian and gay domestic partnerships can now be registered in some international jurisdictions. For instance, some employers treat employees’ same-sex partners like legal marriage partners with respect to eligibility for fringe benefits (Eichler 1997:43,44). Furthermore, whilst single parent household formations are now more socially acceptable and viable (Chesterman 1989:31-34; Matthews 1984:182), some sociologists today suggest that rather than looking at who is married and who is not, it is more important to recognise and assist those people who carry out familial functions: that is,
people who raise children, who live in supportive unions of adults, who provide intergenerational care for the elderly, who look after temporarily or chronically ill family members. It is not important whether the adults involved are of the same sex or of different sexes, or even if there is a sexual relationship at all. What matters is whether the union of adults is a mutually supportive one and whether any children or other dependants are well taken care of. The vital question becomes one of ‘does this family constellation address the needs of all its members and is it beneficial for all participants?’ The family is thus conceptualised as a group of individuals (men, women and children) who form an entity, but within which all members maintain their individual needs, rights and responsibilities (Eichler 1997:28; Chesler 1988:122). Egalitarians tend to support this concept of family because not to do so could lead to a violation of one’s basic human rights – that is, family members could be harmed by group (in this case family) participation. On the other hand, conservative thinkers tend to view only the patriarchal family as family (Eichler 1997:28).

Patterns of parenting, marriage, kin relationships and responsibilities vary across cultures and societies, as does the nature of family life, child rearing and care for dependents. Historically, there have been considerable and continuing changes in each of these areas. Shifts in family formation and family life both in Australia and worldwide are part of an ongoing process. Just as there is no universal and enduring form of the family there is no single way of defining family (Hartley 1995:4,5). Rather there are endless variations all of which should be seen in cultural and historical perspective (Hartley 1995:4,5; Elliott and Dickey 1994:58,59; Jacques 1994:29). Furthermore, the way in which families are formed is closely related to gender identity and gender roles.

For instance, if one goes back far enough or into very different cultures one can find almost complete reversals of the roles expected of men and women that one finds in mid-twentieth century Australia. There have been matriarchal societies in which women were the leaders and decision makers. There have been times and places where women were the providers for the family and men were essentially idle. Through long ages and in many lands the extended family was often the rule with grandmothers being the childminders and homemakers because their daughters (as young mothers) had to labour long and hard in the fields (Wedel 1966:168; Matthews 1984:186-187). In more recent times in many agrarian economies, including Australia, husbands and wives shared almost equally in earning the living and keeping the home. This was true of the agricultural past as well as in the long era
of the small family business. It was only with the industrial revolution and then only in western society that the familiar pattern of mum, dad and 2.2 children developed (Wedel 1966:168; Matthews 1984:187; Leach 1994:14). This pattern has existed for only a brief period in history and in a limited area of the world (Wedel 1966:168). In this chapter I trace the various definitions of marriage and the family as these institutions have evolved over time and in different places. Prior to the mid-twentieth century (the period under investigation in this thesis) Australian families were often extended families – mum, dad, aunty, uncle, grandma, numerous cousins and perhaps other relatives – all living under the one roof and contributing to the household as a collective. Since the turn of the twentieth century, however, Australian families and society have undergone several major upheavals including war, a great depression, and the economic boom post-World War II. Consequently family structures have evolved substantially as have the policies which deal with family changes. Whereas in the nineteenth century many natural mothers (married or not) might be assisted (emotionally and financially) by kin in their maternal or child-rearing role, by the mid-twentieth century in Australia it was socially expected that mothering could only take place within marriage (Matthews 1984:187). As in very early history many women who found themselves pregnant outside marriage were socially condemned. They could expect very little social or economic support (Wiesner 1993:62,72,73).

In early history up until recently, in many cultures, including European culture, marriages were arranged (Duby 1994:60). Unlike today where marriages are very often the result of the free choice of the individual bride and groom who unite on the basis of romantic and sexual attraction and similar interests, in earlier times couples were often strangers to each other (Stone in Coser 1974:190). Parents arranged the marriages of their sons and daughters and there were several reasons for this. Firstly there persisted very strongly the suspicion and dislike of passionate love between the sexes which was shared by both the Ancient World and the medieval church (see discussion of orthodox religion below). Secondly there was the firm belief in the subjection of children to parental control which was natural to a society in which family discipline was the main guarantee of public order. Thirdly, in the days before contraception, parents often wished to seal a marriage in order to avoid fornication which was seen as sinful, brought scandal and could lead to expensive consequences. Thus marriages were not only arranged to ensure the production of a male heir to carry on the family name and family property, marriages were also
arranged to keep money in the family; the more wealthy families were particularly concerned that their children marry into the same class (Stone 1974:175-177,186; Shorter 1975:5; Eichler 1997:69; Turner 1984:118,120; Duby 1994:108,111). “Social and territorial endogamy were highly prized by public opinion because they concentrated the wealth: dowries wouldn’t escape the village if marriages took place only within it, and fortunes wouldn’t leave the family if sons and daughters married only people from other equally wealthy families” (Shorter 1975:150).

At this time and before women were able to control their reproduction, gender relations were articulated around the control of women’s bodies in order to ensure male reproduction. Women had to remain non-sexual till their wedding night, after which it was their marital duty to allow their husbands – and no one else – to have sex with them, whenever they wished. Marriage gave women the status of respectability and some limited – but real – legal protection as dependants (Taylor 1994:175; Scutt 1994:193). The second best option for women with regard to respectability was not to marry but to stay at home with their parents and look after them in their old age. They were supposed to remain non-sexual all their lives. Women had no autonomy whatsoever (Shorter 1975:72,73). Men owned women on a private basis to ensure the continuation of their patriarchal lineage through marriage, and collectively through the organisation of prostitution which provided them with non-procreative pleasure. In this scenario the women’s roles were all subservient (Shorter 1975:72; Turner 1984:115). It was not merely that she occupied roles different from her husband (Shorter 1975:66). In several important realms she was expected to be the inferior. For instance in the realm of external relations the husband was to take the active role, the wife the passive. In every point at which the household’s life touched that of the surrounding outside world the woman was not expected to initiate interactions or exchanges. It was the husband who was responsible for dealing with state officials or handling external threats to the family’s interests from any quarter. Women who stepped from their passive places to discharge this role would be condescended to as minors (Shorter 1975:74,75; Eichler 1997:9,26). Unlike many husbands who could and did take every opportunity to take off for the local tavern or café, wives did not arbitrarily or impulsively decide to ‘go visiting’; wives would not leave their homes just for the sake of sociability (Shorter 1975:72-75). Unlike husbands who had numerous little socially approved pleasures such as playing cards with the boys at the bar, or fooling around with
the servant girls, women engaged in no such behaviours. The self-indulgence that ran through the man’s week in this ritual manner was absent from the woman’s life (Shorter 1975:74,75; Eichler 1997:27). It was socially expected that women sacrifice any personal interests to those of their husbands and families (Shorter 1975:74,75; Flacks in Skolnick and Skolnick 1974:348; Eichler 1997:59).

Gradually, with the advent of women’s rights, the idea of the equality of people and the right of the individual to make personal choices even when these conflict with group pressures (the desire for personal autonomy), companionate love and marriage became more widely accepted (Lantz and Snyder 1969:239; Shorter 1975:71,227; Eichler 1997:40; Hamilton 1988:14). Where previously young couples entered into marriages which were arranged for them, by the early twentieth century many couples (not all couples) wishing to marry had more freedom in choosing their marriage partners due to the now far greater emphasis on affective ties, love, and in particular, romantic love (Shorter 1975:151,161; Stone 1974:198; Scanzoni 2000:19). Families, the church and neighbours still influenced decisions about who one should or could not marry (Laslett 1977:109). However the earlier stringent controls were now more relaxed (Shorter 1975:167; Lantz and Snyder 1969:165,239). Whilst many young people were no longer subject to the same controls by the church or family, at this time intimacy and the quality of relationships were promoted and it was now more generally accepted that most people (both men and women) marry because they are ‘in love’ (Hamilton 1988:17; Shorter 1975:162,164; Winter 1966:216). Furthermore, whilst the return of economic prosperity post-World War II meant that young couples wishing to marry now had more opportunities to do so, early marriage was seen by many (and particularly women) as not only their path to autonomy from parents, it met their needs for sexual intimacy in the only way that was then socially acceptable (McDonald 1995:32; Shorter 1975:165,166; Scanzoni 2000:20). Whilst at this time intimacy and the quality of relationships were promoted in the media and elsewhere and the younger generation had far greater freedom to socialise with each other and choose their marriage partner, it was women, however, who were still expected to exercise caution and restraint in their personal dealings with their partners (Vincent 1961:3; Cox 1966:49). In the event of an unplanned pregnancy it was the unwed woman who bore the brunt of social hostility, not the unwed man (Vincent 1961:4; Shorter 1975:219,220; Cox 1966:52; Duncan and
Edwards 1997:100). Failure to marry was the mark of an unworthy woman, not an unworthy man (Duffy 1988:114; Cox 1966:55,57).

In turn the level of hostility felt by women reflects differences in socialisation and a different emotional investment in romance, marriage and family life which prevailed at that time (Cox 1966:52; Tuchman et al. 1978:14). For instance, compared to most men who were and continue to be brought up to value their independence and by their early twenties are often pressured by their male peers to view monogamous marriage as a somewhat stifling institution which ought to be resisted for as long as possible, women at the time (and still today) were socialised into the culture of romance (Shorter 1975:164,167; Cox 1966:52,53; Skolnick and Skolnick 1974:237,238; Lakoff 1975:53,54). From a very early age women were reared with the notion that their one goal in life was to meet and marry the right man (Scanzoni 2000:39). Fairy tales, television, magazines, films and books instil this in women (Wedel 1966:167; Duffy 1988:114). Hence, unlike men, who in the event of the dissolution of a marriage were more likely to be self-supporting because they were socialised into the husband/father/provider role, women in mid-twentieth century Australia could do none of this. Socialised into dependency, in the event that her marriage did not work, there was usually nothing for the young ex-wife to fall back on in the way of work experience or a career. Whilst many a divorced woman found herself in an almost untenable financial situation, the plight of a pregnant, unmarried woman was even worse (Hamilton 1988:17; Matthews 1984:126).

In nineteenth century Australia, prior to increased urbanisation and the changes in the social formation accompanying this, families (particularly rural, working-class families) were often characterised by symmetrical dependency. The husband and wife were mutually dependent for survival, status and riches (Wedel 1966:165). While a wife would have been hard-pressed to survive without her husband’s cooperation and contributions, this was equally true of the husband (Duffy 1988:126). Furthermore, in a society more amenable to

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1 In mid-twentieth century Australia it was expected that a woman would leave work upon marriage. It was desired by many women because of their limited job options and low pay. It was insisted upon by many employers who relied for profitability on a fairly rapid turnover of junior female staff. It was sanctioned by many men who saw non-working wives as symbols of respectability and working ones as competitors for their own jobs. It was encouraged by state legislation placing disincentives upon married women workers in the interests of gender discipline for economic and domestic harmony (Matthews 1984:191).
the notion of reciprocal giving and taking, a woman who was pregnant and unmarried could (though not always) expect to find support and refuge from either her family of origin or extended kin (Scanzoni 2000:23). This was not the case for the unwed mother in mid-twentieth century Australia. The nuclear family unit at this period in Australian history was afforded paramount importance such that other family forms were not recognised (Matthews 1984:187). The nuclear family at this time was also characterised by asymmetrical dependency (Duffy 1988:126). While the wife depended on the husband for food, shelter and clothing, the husband could if necessary purchase replacements for his wife’s services since she needed him more than he needed her and he often had more power in family relations (Duffy 1988:126; Scanzoni 2000:6-40; Eichler 1997:27).

In mid-twentieth century Australia the nuclear family, comprising father, mother and children with the mother not in paid employment, was seen as better equipped than other family forms to operate in the modern economy which revolved around individual achievement and social and geographic mobility (McDonald 1995:33; Eichler 1997:35; Pitcher in Wynn 1966:192). At this period in Australian history one of the most important of all Australian family values – owning one’s own home with its own backyard – was possible for some families and was promoted as such by the middle-class media (McDonald 1995:33). For instance the dominant image of advertising at the time was one of the nuclear family, happy and fulfilled through new consumer goods (Reiger 1985:15; Pitcher in Wynn 1966:199,202). In the post-war decades ‘the family’ became popular currency, referring unambiguously to the nuclear unit. Whilst advertising presented images of happy families fulfilled through the housewife, the family as a whole was expected to be the chief nurturing and socialising influence for children, the site for satisfying and intimate relationships for adults and children and a major support network throughout life (Hartley 1995:16; Pitcher in Wynn 1966:191). Families should exist on only one model: that of the two-parent nuclear family with father as breadwinner and mother as homemaker in which the father has complete authority over women and children. Whilst it was a woman’s function to bear and raise children without question or complaint about the circumstances under which this was to be done (McDaniel 1988:179), a mother was to be judged on and held responsible for the successful development of her children and for her husband’s happiness (McDonald 1995:30). So that her children would be successful, a wife and mother placed emphasis on the quality of children and not the quantity (McDonald
In this she was guided by ‘expert’ rather than traditional knowledge, characterised by affectionate rather than remote relations between parent and child and directed towards full development of the child’s capacities (Gilding 1991:115; Scanzoni 2000:41; Winter in Wynn 1966:211).

In nineteenth century Australia many young children were looked after by grandparents or other kin, family friends, neighbours, wet nurses perhaps, in a communal environment which indicated that other people helped with childrearing responsibilities (Pitcher in Wynn 1966:193). By the mid-twentieth century, however, increased state intervention in the form of child management practices meant that the mothers themselves were expected to take on the full responsibility of caring for their children; grandparents and other kin could be admonished for interfering with her efforts in this endeavour (Gilding 1991:93). Whilst fathers (that is married fathers who assumed their responsibilities as fathers) were excused from greater involvement with their children because of the demands of work or career and the travel time associated with maintaining such careers, fathers who produced children outside of marriage were not legally or socially bound to take any interest in their children (Scanzoni 2000:41; Eichler 1997:69,70). Since there was no recognised relationship between them and the children, (in theory at least) illegitimate children belonged to their mothers. The unwed mothers might ‘choose’ to keep their babies or give them up for adoption (Eichler 1997:69,70).

Whereas many children in the nineteenth century did not receive an education since they were either forced out to work to help with the costs of rearing large families or were simply too busy with the physical demands of family and farm work, by the mid-twentieth century there was more emphasis on delaying the child’s entry into the workforce and extending her/his education in the hope that this would improve future work and marriage prospects (Gilding 1991:35,36,115; Scanzoni 2000:177). For the individual the emphasis was on aspiration and acceptance, but marriage (often early marriage) was also seen as providing autonomy and intimacy (McDonald 1995:30,33; Lantz and Snyder 1969:166). Hence the newly emerging marriage guidance movement emphasised personal development, partnership, sexual compatibility and communication within marriage. In order to allay divorce, marriage came to be seen as a vocation and the emphasis was on masculinity and femininity within heterosexual monogamy (Gilding 1991:119; Reiger 1985:38). Mothering was to be done in the privacy of one’s home but under expert
guidance from child welfare professionals and other ‘experts’ who, via state and voluntary agencies, increasingly endeavoured to take control of and supervise maternal care (Gilding 1991:115,118-119; Scanzoni 2000:41; Reiger 1985:212). For instance, by 1939, in Sydney alone, there were 56 state clinics and seven Mothercraft Association clinics instructing mothers-to-be in the virtues of appropriate mothering. Similarly, state and voluntary agencies often mounted exhibitions or published weekly columns in women’s magazines and manuals on issues such as ‘The Errors of Maternity’ and ‘Danger Days for Babies’. A constant barrage of publicity, via the press, radio and film, promoted this ‘new motherhood’ (Gilding 1991:90; Matthews 1984:98-102).

Whereas in the nineteenth century children might be looked after by numerous people in a variety of household contexts, by mid-twentieth century, in Australia, the burgeoning child welfare industry expected that the mother (within the privacy of the nuclear family unit) would devote her life to her children, to make them the core of her life enterprise, to willingly sacrifice on their behalf and to involve herself in their lives as completely as possible (Duffy 1988:116; Gilding 1991:65). To keep house, cook, nurse and delight in making others happy was her mission, duty and livelihood. Since a woman was socially expected to be wife-and-mother and nothing else (Hamilton 1981:88; Scanzoni 2000:213), the women who failed to reach this ideal – that is women who had babies without being married – were suspect, and increasingly targeted as ‘deviant’ (Wiesner 1993:62; Matthews 1984:103,185).

While it is not the purpose of this chapter to single out the role of male-dominated religion for its part in the separation of the ‘unmarried mother’ and her child, nevertheless religious bigotry is pertinent to any discussion on the persecution of the ‘unmarried mother’ in history (Gage 1985:223). In regard to twentieth century adoption practices in Australia, the churches, alongside the medical and social work professions, had a huge part to play in systematising the removal of babies from their natural mothers. (see Chapters 4 and 5). Whilst numerous feminist academics have referred to the influence of orthodox religion in history, a Brisbane birthmother makes a similar point when she states: “that adoption seems to parallel that point in history when the Christian churches came to prominence and exerted the most influence. The 1950s in Australia was the period of great Christian purging and mass revival meetings such as those involving Billy Graham and other Christian evangelists (Jeffreys 1985:148; Safe 2000:22-26). The purging of ‘sin’ and
‘sinners’ became a preoccupation of this (mostly male) evangelical movement. They possessed the power and authority to define who was the ‘good’ woman and who was not. The ‘sinful’ women, the ‘Jezabels’, who engaged in sex before marriage became scapegoats of society, that is, society’s ‘whipping girls’. Whether their babies were created in love, incest, rape or whatever, the ‘she asked for it’ mentality was rife” (a Brisbane mother at Q43, see Appendix 1; Shawyer 1979:50; Jeffreys 1985:54-71) and can be traced to early Christian and non-Christian teachings on gender difference and what constitutes appropriate female behaviour.

2.1.3 Orthodox religion – its history, function and effects on the ‘unmarried mother’

Historically, male intellectual structures and institutions, that is, the ideas and laws propagated by white, western, middle-class, educated men have had considerable influence on the differential gender roles experienced by women in any given society. Educated men have been thinking and writing about women since the beginning of recorded history, trying to determine what makes women different from men. In turn, they have allocated to women a very narrow prescription for what they regard as appropriate female behaviour. Because their ideas expressed in all types of work – religious literature, scientific treatises, plays, poetry, philosophical discussion – have spread to the vast majority of women and men who could not record their own ideas or experiences, it is the views and attitudes of this educated, male elite which has served as the basis for all law codes attempting to regulate female conduct (Wiesner 1993:6; Scutt 1994:196; Rose 1996:19-36; French 1992:81-86).

Christianity was the most important source of ideas about women for early modern Europeans, and Christianity had, in turn, inherited many of its ideas from Judaism. Although there are two somewhat conflicting accounts of creation in Genesis, it is the second account that comes to be retold and portrayed visually much more often, so that medieval and early modern Europeans were much more familiar with it. It is also the one that goes on to describe the first human sin, in which Eve is tempted by a serpent to disobey God in order to gain knowledge and then tempts Adam. Although it is their combined disobedience which gets them expelled from the Garden of Eden and comes to be described
in Christian doctrine as the ‘fall’ or ‘original sin’, most later Jewish and Christian commentators chose to view Eve, and by extension all women, as the source of evil and sin in the world (Wiesner 1993:11).

The most important early Christian philosopher, St Augustine, asserted that the initial decision by Adam and Eve had ended human free will for all time, and also created sexual desire. He saw as proof of this the fact that men cannot control the actions of their sexual organs by virtue of their will alone. Although for a time, even sexual activity within marriage was considered sinful, it did find a place with early Protestantism. For example, the early Protestant movement was particularly forceful in advocating marriage and motherhood as a woman’s highest calling. Motherhood was regarded as a vocation as well as a living arrangement and Protestants urged all women to marry. Since no woman had the special divine gift of freedom from sexual urges, unmarried women were suspect not only because they were fighting their natural sex drive, but because they were upsetting the divinely imposed order, which made women subject to men (Wiesner 1993:23; Golden 1992:256).

The Greek philosopher Aristotle was the most influential non-Christian source for ideas in many fields up to the seventeenth century, many of which had very unfortunate effects for women. To Aristotle, women were imperfect men, the result of something wrong with the conception that created them – their parents were too young or too old, or too diverse in age, or one of them was not healthy. Nature always aimed at perfection, and Aristotle termed anything less than perfect ‘monstrous’, a woman was thus ‘a deformity’, but one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature (Wiesner 1993:13).

Beginning in the twelfth century, theologians and religious writers, generally called ‘scholastics’, attempted to bring together the teachings of Aristotle and those of early Christian writers, creating one grand philosophical system. Thomas Aquinas, the most brilliant and thorough of the scholastics, synthesised classical and Christian ideas about women, stating that women’s inferiority was not simply the result of Eve’s actions, but was inherent in her original creation. Even in procreation her role was minimal, for the mother provided simply the material substance in the child, while the father supplied the active force (an idea Aquinas drew largely from Aristotle). Women needed male assistance in everything because of their physical and intellectual weakness, though they did have souls and so were responsible for their own salvation (Wiesner 1993:14).
At about the same time as the emergence of scholasticism, a new emphasis on the veneration of Mary developed in western Christianity. During its early centuries, Christianity had not stressed the role of Mary because it wanted to differentiate itself from pagan religions with female goddesses. By the twelfth century, all of Europe was more or less Christian, and many churches began to be built which were dedicated to Mary. Mary’s peculiar status as virgin and mother allowed her to be honoured as both pure and nurturing and she came to be viewed as the exact opposite of Eve, creating a good woman/bad woman dichotomy that would become extremely strong in European culture (Wiesner 1993:14). By the end of the Middle Ages, many writers of courtly love literature, such as Andreas Capellanus, also wrote cynical satires mocking chivalric conventions and bitterly criticising women as devious, domineering and demanding so that their misogyny matched that of the harshest clerical writers. Whilst similar views of women also dominate most of the popular literature of the late Middle Ages, they also infiltrate the visual media in this early period. For example, single-sheet prints (which were hung in taverns or people’s homes) juxtaposed female virtues alongside female vices. The virtuous woman was almost always depicted as those in the classical or biblical past, while the vice-ridden were dressed in contemporary clothes. Whilst the favourite metaphor for the virtuous wife was either the snail or the tortoise (both animals that never leave their ‘houses’ and are totally silent) most of the wall hangings displayed negative stereotyped images of women. Women are shown with their hands on men’s purses, tempting men by displaying naked breasts, or neglecting their housework (Wiesner 1993:10-29; Pateman 1994:109).

Because of the strong tradition of Christian morality operating in early modern Europe, women in general were very aware not to transgress societal expectations as to what constituted ‘normal’ behaviour. Both religious and secular institutions at the time placed heavy emphasis on marriage and the family, based on heterosexual monogamy. Because patrilineal blood-lines and the preservation of male property were so important, premarital and extramarital sex as we now know it was absolutely forbidden. For women, ‘normality’ meant marriage and motherhood. Men were to be head of the house. Women were to be content as ‘pious’ wives and mothers, ever attentive to the needs of their husbands and children. Alongside feudal obligation and wifely obedience, sexual honour was an extremely important (male) concept in defining the legal status of women. Because this concept encompassed the idea that women would only be honoured through their fidelity to
one man within marriage, those women who found themselves pregnant and unmarried were socially ostracised and in many cases punished. Whilst this in turn was meant to serve as a deterrent to so-called ‘female promiscuity’, it also served as an effective means of social control at a time when public authorities were increasingly concerned with how to keep unmarried mothers, widows and other unmarried women from needing public assistance (Wiesner 1993:62).

Because there was so much social stigma attached to unmarried motherhood, women who found themselves in this situation went to extraordinary lengths to try and overcome their dilemma. Whilst many attempted to deny the pregnancy as long as possible (fortunately clothing styles, that is, full skirts and aprons, allowed most women to go until late in the pregnancy without showing any real signs), many attempted abortion either by physical means such as tying her waist very tight, carrying and lifting heavy objects or by consuming herbal concoctions. Since marriage was the preferred option but often not the outcome (due to the irresponsible and unpredictable behaviour of many men), in the vast majority of cases women resigned themselves to having the baby the best way they could. This often meant delivering the infant anywhere they could find shelter – cow sheds, haystacks or outhouses – before taking the baby to a foundling home (these opened in the fifteenth century) or killing the child out of sheer poverty and desperation (Wiesner 1993:51; Scutt 1992:200).

When infanticide increased to the extent that it did by the seventeenth century, instead of looking at the material circumstances surrounding the unfortunate mother and devising ways of alleviating her distress, the male intellectual elite set about implementing the death penalty for any woman found guilty of killing her infant (Smart 1992:16; Wiesner 1993:52; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980:493-494). Since such draconian legislation begs the question ‘Whose interests are at stake here?’, it soon becomes apparent that these harsh measures were implemented so as to act as a deterrent to unrestrained femininity, that is, fornication outside the legal confines of marriage (Smart 1992:17).

By the end of the nineteenth century special homes for ‘unmarried mothers’ and their ‘illegitimate’ offspring were opened by different philanthropic missions. Created on the model of the penitentiary, the mother had to repent her ‘sin’. She stayed in the home with her child for a year or two while she was taught a trade, usually that of domestic servant. When she came out, she was sent into service so that she could pay for the upkeep of her
child who was sent to a foster mother. The natural mother was encouraged to visit her child as often as her job allowed her to. Only the mother of a first ‘illegitimate’ child was considered as ‘deserving’ of treatment better than that of the workhouse where other lone mothers were received. She was given alternative accommodation on the basis that once at the workhouse she might be contaminated by tougher women, fail to repent and become a prostitute (Spensky 1992:110). Although the homes were opened because of the increase in numbers of poor mothers and their children requiring assistance, they also served as a means of regulating women’s sexuality and way of life. The woman who came out of the home was supposed to be very different from the one who had entered: amended, respectable, employable and a ‘good’ mother, that is, one who provided for her own child. Whereas early European society was not highly organised, in the nineteenth century and particularly in the latter part of that century and beyond, laissez-faire capitalism was to gain momentum so that there was a very clear demarcation as to what constituted appropriate sex roles. As the glorification of motherhood within marriage intensified, so also did the stigma surrounding women who were pregnant and unmarried (Smart 1992:24).

In fact, in the aftermath of World War II (the historical period under investigation in this thesis), so concerned were the growing legal, medical and social work professions with the perceived social disruption associated with single mothers, this new officialdom came to view any woman bearing a child/children without a husband as pathological (Spensky 1992:116). According to this view, the healthy mother was one who was satisfied merely with being the healthy environment for her child by having secured a husband\(^2\) before she

\(^2\) In the last century up to and including the historical time frame under investigation in this thesis (1950s, 1960s and early 1970s) every Australian woman’s sexuality has always been central to her femininity, both to herself and others. Man is the measure of all things. Woman’s status is dependent on the nature of her relationship to him, and fundamental to all these relationships is sexuality. In the Australian gender order, women's sexual attractiveness should be confined to catching a suitable husband, and sexual activity confined to marriage. Lack of a husband was and continues to be seen as a critical absence in the life and being of an adult woman – hence many single women but particularly ‘unmarried mothers’ are vulnerable to labels such as ‘slut’, ‘whore’, ‘those girls’ or ‘bad girls’ (Hollway 1996:90,91). Although the standard and the labels have diminished somewhat since the 1970s (as the meaning of marriage itself has changed), the ‘good’woman is still the married woman (Matthews 1984:132-133) – a notion reaffirmed in the words of one mother who in 1999 states: “even with the advent of pensions, single motherhood is stigmatised” (a response to Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1:10).
had a baby, while it was assumed that the ‘unmarried mother’ must be unhealthy (Spensky 1992:109). Rather than being the victim of seduction as was often asserted by nineteenth century philanthropists, unmarried motherhood was now a plan carefully orchestrated by the unconscious self – “obviously she wants a baby but an out-of-wedlock baby” (Spensky 1992:109). Since this led the male-dominated medical and legal fraternity to look upon single mothers as unbalanced, it should come as no surprise that at this time there was an increased call for the adoption of ‘illegitimate’ children, and special homes for ‘unmarried mothers’ were built with this in mind (Spensky 1992:110-118; Vincent 1961:199). The home for ‘unmarried mothers’ became in Martine Spensky’s phrase a ‘producer of legitimacy’ (Spensky 1992:112; Chandler 1991:143). The unmarried, expectant mother would enter the home a few weeks before confinement, give birth, (either in the home itself or in hospital), and finally she would return to the home for a few weeks after which her baby would be adopted. The baby would be legitimised through adoption, the childless couple would acquire more legitimacy by having a child, and the unwed mother would come out, apparently, as if nothing had happened. Cured of her ‘pathological unconscious urges’, it was assumed that she would then be more likely to be able to get married and in turn bear legitimate children (Spensky 1992:112; Healy 1996:123).

This focus on unmarried motherhood as individual pathology is reflected in the literature on unmarried mothers which is discussed in the next section. These and related themes comprise much of the conventional literature on unmarried mothers which is reviewed there. The literature on unmarried mothers is extensive and of variable quality. However much of the literature is written by those (men and women) in a position to write (Wiesner 1993:48; Scutt 1994:24; MacKinnon 1987:92).

Hence, although there is an extensive literature on unmarried mothers, the literature specifically related to my theme on stolen children is sparse. Apart from the indigenous stolen generation in Australia and other countries such as Canada and Argentina

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3 In mid-twentieth century Australia these specially designed and built homes for unmarried mothers exhibited all the characteristics of a ‘total institution’. There were legal and administrative locks and keys as well as physical constraints, solitary confinement, segregation (Goffman 1961:1-46; Goffman in Lemert and Branaman 1997:1ii,1viii; 1v; Tatz 2001:35; Farrar 1997:116-126; Grosz 1990:64,65) (see Chapters 4 and 5).

4 For instance, Geoffrey Robertson (1999) refers to the Argentinean military junta’s removal of children from their unwed mothers and their placement in families loyal to the military (Robertson 1999:310).
(Robertson 1999:310; Stewart 1997:13; Haebich 2000:1-619), I found it very difficult to find anything directly relating to my thesis on white stolen children. A parliamentary report into a white, stolen generation in Australia has just been released (Wright 2004:17). However, this report deals with the abuses experienced by white children who were made wards of the state in the mid-twentieth century in Australia (Forgotten Australians 2004:1-275). By comparison, this thesis, Silent Violence, refers more specifically to the plight of unmarried mothers once placed in the homes and hospitals to have their babies. Unlike Forgotten Australians, which refers to children who were abused while in state care, Silent Violence makes a very significant and original contribution to our knowledge on unmarried mothers. According to the perceptions and memories of the birthmothers interviewed for this thesis, white, unwed Australian women in the past did not willingly place their babies for adoption. Most women felt that there were no other choices open to them. The major social institutions at the time heavily promoted adoption as the best course of action for any woman facing an ‘unplanned pregnancy’. The Australian state sanctioned such action because it was less costly to internal revenue (Rowbotham 1973:18-33; Shawyer 1979:52).

Thus far in this chapter I have referred to the different ways of viewing love, marriage and the family as these institutions have existed throughout time and in different places. The changing roles of women were discussed and the effects of orthodox religion were particularly pertinent to this discussion in that unmarried mothers came to be seen as different and a deviation from their married counterparts. Much of the conventional literature on unmarried mothers (which is discussed in the next section) reflects this preoccupation with deviance. Historically, unmarried mothers have been seen as unintelligent, irresponsible and causing their own predicament. Much of this literature, however, may be a reflection of male, middle-class, conservative bias. Men with a view to controlling women and keeping them in their place tend towards negative views because it is in their interests to do so. In order to counter their claims I introduce some of the more positive literature by feminist scholars acting in the interests of women.
2.2 Part B: The literature on unmarried mothers

In the first part of this section, The view from above, I discuss the dominant western and patriarchal views on unwed mothers – attitudes which have a long history. In the second part (or feminist response) I provide an alternative account of what it is to be an unmarried mother. Whilst in this sub-section I introduce the reader to the ideas, feelings and life experiences of unmarried mothers as written about by western feminists, I also record the thoughts, feelings and experiences of unmarried mothers who reflect on their reality. Whilst some unmarried mothers are from middle-class backgrounds, many are from the working class. Hence unlike those (highly educated men and women) who are better situated to discuss, write and recommend the policies to be implemented in law, working-class women are poorly situated to create state policy on issues concerning them. Up until very recently, these women have certainly not been in a position to recommend what they think ought to be implemented in law and yet it is their ideas/perspectives/experiences which are so very crucial to the development of sound policy (Tanesini 1999:156,157; Beresford 1995:20; Yeatman 1993:242; see also Chapter 2).

2.2.1 The view from above

Male, middle-class legislators and others with a view to maintaining the status quo and thus preserving their own class and gender interests have throughout history blamed the unmarried mother for her predicament (Wedel 1966:170). Her ‘out-of-wedlock’ pregnancy is always ‘her fault’ (Goulding 2000:138; Robinson 2000:27,29; Gordon 1994:7,27,39; Golden 1998:240; Cosic 1999:11). She is seen to have no integrity and is not to be trusted (Robinson 2000:89; Gare 2000:20; Dixon 1992:220; Meggitt 1992:53). The unmarried mother will take what she can from one man and then move on to the next (McCabe 1995:75,77). This literature alludes to her predatory and supposedly ‘sphinx-like’ nature (Graves 1980:10,13; Steiner 1963:34). She is the legendary sphinx …a feline cat, a tigress …laying in wait and ready to pounce (Summers 1985:307; Ward 1984:36,37; Lurie 1980:171,172,173). Perceived as an evil seductress, the predator and demon nymphette, the unmarried mother is ever willing to ‘take a roll in the taro and with whoever’ (Brislin
Since it is she, and not he, who is the lewd and lascivious creature of the flesh, it is never men who are deviant, feckless and irresponsible. Rather unmarried, pregnant women are the ‘deviants’ (Reekie 1993:11; Harrison 1995:28; Field 1992:164,165). Some literature asserts that unmarried mothers are too interested in having a good time to really care for their children (Vincent 1960:15). Furthermore, the younger her age, the more ‘incompetent’ the parent (Oakley 1993:149-150; Vincent 1960:15; Field in Jones 1997:164,165). Unwed, and therefore unintelligent and ‘unfit’, unmarried mothers in the past and still today have been socially constructed as not really wanting the responsibility of their own children (Delany 1997:145). It is assumed that they actively seek out adoption as the solution to their predicament. According to this perspective, once the child is relinquished the mother soon forgets and resumes her ‘proper’ place in society (Colt and Grant 1988:10; Ongley 1998:1; Farrar 1997:117; Delany 1997:145; Ellison 1963:54).

Historically and particularly in the early part of the twentieth century (just prior to the implementation of adoption policy), the legal, medical and scientific community focused to a large extent on the ‘unmarried mother’ as the delinquent of gender relations (Spensky 1992:101; Chandler 1991:143). Unmarried mothers were perceived and in turn labelled as sexually precocious, promiscuous and irresponsible. At the time the most frequent diagnostic label attached to these women was the term ‘feeble-minded’. Feeblemindedness in women was linked to early sexual maturation and sexual precociousness, the general idea being that an overdeveloped body signalled an undeveloped mind. While no comparable association has been made between men’s sexual maturation and activity and mental inferiority, unwed motherhood, dependence and deviance has had a long history of association in the official mind, providing justification for either the incarceration of the unmarried mother or separation from her child (Hobson 1987:190-191). This idea of feeblemindedness is in turn closely associated with the development of eugenic theories,

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5 By the mid-twentieth century in Australia science had usurped the role of religion; science and scientists were accorded social prominence hitherto unseen, thus providing them with the power to intervene in all aspects of social life (including home or family life). Medicine, as a special sub-branch within science, also assumed social prominence – hence the term medical or scientific ‘experts’ (Ehrenreich and English 1989:68-77,191-247; Ham and Hill 1984:143).
which, while coming to prominence in early twentieth century America and Europe, left their mark in Australia (Caplan 1990:35).

In Australia at the turn of the twentieth century eugenicist theories emphasising population quality gained ground at the expense of pro-natalism with its emphasis upon population quantity. According to eugenicists, the problem was not so much restriction of fertility, but rather unrestricted fertility among ‘mental defectives’, an amorphous category of people including (according to some exponents) larrikins, prostitutes, homosexuals, radicals, strikers and the unemployed (Gilding 1991:75). Eugenics promoted the idea that undesirable physical and mental characteristics, in particular feeblemindedness, were passed on genetically from one generation to the next. In some populations, it was argued, there was an inherited predisposition to high rates of ‘illegitimacy’. Because feebleminded women of the working class reproduced prolifically, typically giving birth to illegitimate children who were themselves likely to be feebleminded, the illegitimate and the feebleminded were thus responsible for perpetuating a degenerative cycle (Reekie 1998:121). For example, in his publication, *Infant Mortality* (1922), British physician Hugh Ashby, like many of his colleagues in the 1920s, was confident that “few facts are more sure or better known than that a great many of the illegitimate children are feebleminded and born of feeble-minded women” (Ashby in Reekie 1998:121). Similarly, Australian doctor and child welfare reformer, Sir Charles Mackellar in his work *Mental Deficiency: Medico-Sociological Study of Feeble-mindedness* (1917) stated that “the most sad and indeed horrible experience of my professional life was the sight of an unfortunate and very badly deformed idiot girl who was about to become a mother” (Mackellar and Welsh, cited in Reekie 1998:121).

These ideas on feeblemindedness were accepted by a wide range of medical ‘experts’, psychologists, sociologists, child welfare and social workers, with the latter in particular coming under its influence. For example, social workers, practising within this frame of reference, were encouraged to gather as much information as possible about the women they were studying. For instance, they sought data on the unmarried mother’s social and family background, her personal relationships, her health and mental state. Social work assessments often included a ‘mental’ or psychological examination (Watson in Reekie 1998:121). Percy Gamble Kammerer refers to this type of assessment in his publication *The Unmarried Mother*, written in 1918. Like Mackellar, Kammerer, an assistant minister of the Emmanuel Protestant Episcopal Church in Boston, wanted steps to be taken to control
and segregate mentally abnormal women of childbearing age, an estimated 30 or 40 per cent of all the women he studied whom he saw as “incapable of self-control” (Kammerer in Reekie 1998:123). While Kammerer and other ‘illegitimacy experts’ tended to assume that the mentally defective unmarried mother was located at one end of a broader continuum of female sexual and mental abnormality, in *What Becomes of the Unmarried Mother? A Study of 82 Cases* (1922), Alberta Guibord and Ida Parker diagnosed the intelligence status of 82 unmarried mothers, and found them to be either normal, dull normal, borderline, feeble-minded or psychopathic (Guibord and Parker in Reekie 1998:123). Mentally, according to such ‘experts’, most unmarried mothers were not normal (Guibord and Parker in Reekie 1998:123).

As the idea of feeblemindedness receded, IQ (Intelligence Quotient) tests gained in popularity and these tests did not paint a flattering picture. For example, in 1927, psychologist Charlotte Lowe in her publication *The Intelligence and Social Background of the Unmarried Mother* revealed the results of her study of a group of 344 unmarried mothers in this regard. Commissioned by the Research Bureau of the State Board of Control of Minnesota, Lowe found that over 66 per cent of the women studied had below-average IQ scores (Lowe 1927:786). Similarly, in *A Study of Twenty-five Adolescent Unmarried Mothers in New York City* psychologist Enid Severy Smith (1935) found a diverse array of intellectual abilities suggesting the existence of biologically normal, healthy, adolescent, pregnant girls in the public schools who ought not be confused with “older, less intelligent, unmarried mothers of lower social status” (Smith 1935:86).

By the late 1930s unmarried mothers and their children were being subjected to a wide variety of intelligence, personality and associated tests. However, by the 1940s researchers began to focus much more on the emotional state of the ‘unmarried mother’ and quite a number of studies were advanced in this area. For example, while some social workers in this period observed the traumatizing effects of allowing unmarried mothers to nurse their babies for a few months before placing them for adoption, other social workers, such as Florence Teagarden (1946) in her publication *Child Psychology for Professional Workers*, argued that it was virtually impossible for the unmarried mother to develop the ‘emotional poise’ – the emotional maturity and stability – so necessary for assuming the parental role (Teagarden 1946:245; Vincent 1960:115; Jones 1997:154). Whilst parental incompetence and/or parental neglect are negative characteristics which have always been ascribed to the ‘unmarried mother’, they still have credence today (Jones 1997:154). For instance, in *Teen
Sex: truth and consequences, part one, Douglas Besharov and Karen Gardiner (1993) argue that teen mums cannot assume the responsibility of parenthood because they lack ‘the emotional and cognitive maturity’ (Besharov and Gardiner 1993:52-59).

Similarly, in The Relationship of Unwed Status to Infant Mortality, Hein et al. (1990) found that young unmarried mothers who are poorly educated often fail to present for prenatal check-ups, even when they are readily available. These authors conclude that young women need to be educated in ‘responsible’ parenthood, with the strong implication that illegitimate infants are placed at risk by the neglect or indifference of single mothers (Hein et al. 1990:7633-8). American academic Nicholas Eberstadt has contributed probably more than most to the idea that high rates of illegitimate births are closely linked to high infant mortality. In publications such as Why are so many American babies dying? (1991) and Out of wedlock and into danger (1989), Eberstadt describes illegitimacy as a ‘public health hazard’ and one of the ‘major killers of American children’. The basic problem, Eberstadt suggests, is a behavioural one where low-income unmarried parents (such as those on government welfare programs) prefer to spend their available income on entertainment, alcohol and tobacco than on health care. High illegitimate infant death rates are, at bottom, the result of the ‘attitudes, inclinations and preferences of individual decision-makers’ – that is, the irresponsible life-style choices of the young women concerned (Eberstadt 1988:36-39; Oakley 1993:150).

A similar concern with unmarried motherhood as a ‘public health hazard’ was made as early as 1960 by American social scientist Clark Vincent. In his publication Unmarried Mothers he suggests:

If the demand for adoptable infants continues to exceed the supply, if more definitive research using additional sample sources, substantiates our hypothesis that the majority of the unwed mothers who keep their children lack the potential for “good motherhood” and if the laws and courts continue to emphasize that the “rights of the child” supersede the “rights of the parents” then it is quite possible that, in the near future, unwed mothers will be “punished” by having their children taken from them right after birth. A policy like this would not be executed nor labeled explicitly as “punishment”. Rather, it would be implemented through such pressures and labels as “scientific findings”, “the best interests of the child”, “rehabilitation of the unwed mother”, and “the stability of the family and society” (Vincent 1960:199).
Whilst Eberstadt, Hein, Vincent and other social scientists have made assertions which portray the ‘unmarried mother’ as somehow personally deficient – that is, she is irresponsible, neglectful, flighty and not to be trusted – in quite recent years politicians of all persuasions reiterate such themes. For instance, in her publication *Path to Power*, British ex-Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (1995) makes the unsubstantiated assertion that unmarried mothers put themselves in poverty. According to Thatcher, and others, unmarried mothers of today are deliberately having babies in order to get cheap housing (state housing) and other benefits (Thatcher 1995:562; Page 1997:163). They are seen as leeches on the public purse, using motherhood to draw income support and to jump the housing queue. In the past, unmarried mothers were pilloried for their moral decadence and their sexual delinquency (Selman 1996:119). Such attitudes justified the harsh treatment of unmarried mothers and in turn denial of any appropriate income support (Selman 1996:119). Unmarried mothers today are still perceived by some to be ‘loose women’. However, contemporary criticism has a much stronger monetary flavour (Lister 1996:23). Due to the gains won by the feminist movement since the 1970s (see discussion below) the ‘unmarried mother’ today is much more likely to be castigated as the irresponsible, flighty, selfish/self indulgent ‘user’ of the system – a woman more interested in her own personal and economic welfare than looking out for and caring for her baby (Chandler 1991:171; Arndt 1995:25,26).

Thus far in this section I have focused on the (mostly) male literature. Historically, that literature has stereotyped the unwed mother as promiscuous, lascivious, feckless, irresponsible, unintelligent and devoid of the personal qualities/characteristics necessary for adequate parenting (Ranke-Heinemann 1990:178,179,238). In the next section where I provide a feminist critique, I consider literature that suggests that, given the right circumstances and opportunities, unmarried mothers (whether very young or not so young) are also capable of being good parents (Page 1997:160). All they need is the right social supports, improved social attitudes – greater understanding from the wider community (Page 1997:168-170). In the next section I elaborate on these themes. Before doing this, however, I think it is necessary to inform readers of some ways in which western feminism as a social movement has developed over the past two centuries. Whilst second wave  

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6 The feminist movement is often referred to in three stages – first wave feminism, second wave feminism and third wave feminism. It is the second wave feminists who are responsible for the structural advantages to be
feminists are responsible for the reforms enabling single mothers to exist as they do today (at least in the highly industrialised west), at the time the women under investigation in this thesis lost their babies to adoption, the feminist movement was only just gaining in strength as a movement for the advancement of women. Unfortunately, single mothers have not historically had the support that they may have today (Horin 1990:2; Egan 1989:3; Arndt 1995:24-27).

2.2.2 Feminism as a global movement for the advancement of women

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, arguments for women’s advancement have often grouped around two logically opposing poles which can be referred to as the ‘same’ or ‘difference’ debates. On the one hand, some feminists have claimed that women have the same spiritual and intellectual endowments as men and as such deserve equal or similar opportunities. On the other hand, many feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon (1987) have argued that women differ from men. Whether through natural endowment, environment or training, women have specific attributes which require special or preferential consideration if women are to achieve equality (Sullivan 1990:1173-186; MacKinnon 1987:276). While this focus on either ‘same’ or ‘difference’ can be said to have helped many women, the reverse is often the case as the Preferential Treatment Bill implemented in the American Congress in the 1920s illustrates. Deborah Rhode (1990) points out that although many women were to benefit from the regulation of hours, wages and working conditions, the price of protection was often increased unemployment and competitive disadvantage. There is evidence to suggest that restrictive maximum hours laws substantially increased unemployment among female immigrants, and the minimum wage guarantees in certain states restricted opportunities for native women workers as well. Legislative bans on overtime forced some women to moonlight at jobs without overtime pay; prohibitions on night work compromised their ability to care for children or invalid relatives during the day. Since protective statutes generally exempted domestic service and farm labour, they offered little protection to women of colour who needed it most (Rhode gained by many women and particularly in the west. Such gains involve greater entry to and better paid jobs for some women, legislative changes such as Anti-Discrimination and Affirmative Action. Many of these gains were fought for and won in the 1970s. Single mothers, for the first time in history, were provided with a guaranteed minimum income and the right to state provided accommodation (that is, state housing) (Page 1997:156-157; Chesterman 1989:31-34).
Apart from this, there are other matters that need considering with regard to Affirmative Action and Anti-Discrimination. One is that, in effect, attempts to minimise differences often amount to attempts to change women, that is to encourage women to dress, to behave, to adopt career patterns like men such that men will have nothing to ‘notice’, no grounds for complaint or discrimination. This leaves the values of the public sphere intact and presupposes that the lifestyles of men are the only ones that deserve to be taken seriously (Tapper 1985:45).

According to Marion Tapper (1985), what is required is not merely laws to prevent discrimination but to change the significance or meaning of sexual difference, to change the way people think about it. The language of abstract individualism makes it impossible to deal with sexual oppression as a political problem by turning it into an issue of discrimination against individuals. It can be true that some women are happy and successful or satisfied with traditional female roles, some may win anti-discrimination cases and some men might not have sexist attitudes. However, this does not deal with patriarchal values and assumptions that are deeply embedded in the basic forms of social relations, cultural traditions, political organisations and structures of consciousness (Tapper 1985:46). Adrienne Rich speaks of a capacity to “think through the body” and argues that liberating women means “to change thinking itself: to reintegrate what has been named the unconscious, the subjective, the emotional with the structural, the rational, the intellectual and in turn to erase those dichotomies”. The feminist project becomes one of the most fundamental reconstructions, contingent upon women first regaining control over their own bodies. Due to their corporeal status, it is claimed, women have access to superior forms of knowledge, to richer ‘thought’ processes (Coole 1988:273-274). Insofar as Rich and others retrieve for Western culture that which has been previously denied concerning women’s creativity, their attempts at liberation can be said to be very positive. Nevertheless, it is important to note that in constantly drawing out women’s better qualities, such an approach is in danger of proposing that which it first set out to deny, that is, that any one sex should be deemed superior to the other (Coole 1988:274).

According to Elizabeth Grosz (1994) the question of sexual difference admits of no outside position. The proclamation of a position outside, beyond sexual difference is a luxury that only male arrogance allows. Only men can afford the belief that their perspective is an outside, disinterested or an objective position. The enigma that ‘woman’
poses for men is an enigma only because the male subject has construed itself as the subject par excellence. If one takes seriously the problematic of sexual difference, then as mysterious as ‘woman’ must be for men, so too must men be for women (and indeed so too must woman be for women and man for men). There is no position outside of or midway between the two sexes, from which to objectively analyse them. The task is not to establish a neutral or objective perspective on the question of sexual difference but to find a position encompassing enough for a sexually specific perspective to be able to open itself up to, meet with, and be surprised at the (reciprocal) otherness of the other sex(es). Sexual difference entails the existence of a sexual ethics, an ethics of the ongoing negotiations between beings whose differences, whose alterities, are left intact but with whom some kind of exchange is nonetheless possible (Grosz 1994:191-192).

This concludes the brief overview of the direction feminism has taken over the past two centuries. I have included this section so that the reader can more readily understand where my thesis sits within the scholarly literature (this is discussed in the next section). As will be seen in that section, much of the literature on single mothers to emerge from the feminist movement has come from Marxist feminist scholars (for instance, Swain and Howe) who refer to institutional barriers, discrimination and stigmatising of the unwed mother in history and across cultures. Whilst this has proved invaluable for implementing important practical initiatives (such as housing and pensions) which have led to real improvements in the lives of unwed mothers (in the West since the 1970s), I am also aware that, in the current era where most people have greater access to consumer resources and some state pensions, that is, a social wage, such initiatives have led to a sort of complacency or misunderstanding, if you like, of the reality of many unwed women prior to the 1970s (and still today – see the introduction to this thesis). In turn, this complacency is often fuelled by those scholars who, in their current quest to promote their own perspective (postmodern, poststructuralist, liberal) tend to negate the enormous contributions Marxist feminist scholars have made in the past and are still making (Rottner 2002:2; Marotta 2000:177).

Historically, unwed mothers have been represented in the visual and print media as loose women, promiscuous – prostitutes perhaps (Summers 1994:342). However, delving deeper into the events surrounding her unwed pregnancy and the surrender of her child, Marxist feminist scholars – for instance, Swain and Howe (1995) – unearth various and

7 See discussion of pornography in Chapter 4
hitherto socially unacknowledged reasons for letting go of her baby. Where the student of anthropology and the public more generally sees an irresponsible and apparently carefree woman only too willing to be rid of her incumbrance and ‘get on with her life’, the feminist scholar records a whole litany of social control mechanisms specifically aimed at separating mother and child and thus keeping the unwed woman in her place (Rawady 1997:397). Callahan (1995) in her work with women at risk, contends that the most important feature of empowerment is that it begins with an analysis of inequality and how this is maintained by the process of stigmatising. In the past, unwed mothers were branded as unworthy, morally unfit…unclean. Although this was a label and a category handed down often and by a mostly male-dominated legislature, she argues that it is surprising just how ignored the process of stigmatising was and has become in child welfare circles (Callahan in Ansiewicz 1997:349). My thesis makes the point that a whole class of women were stigmatised so that they could be ignored. Many of the unmarried mothers were young and therefore very helpless women. They were desperate to keep their babies but were not provided with the material means to enable them to do this. Because my thesis talks about violence done to vulnerable women, many readers may find this work unpalatable. Who wants to acknowledge that mothers and babies were separated because no one was willing to help them (Ansiewicz 1997:348)? Who wants to acknowledge that the actual separation process was often not only violent but that it could have dire consequences, for both mother and child, at a later date? (Wellfare 1997:355; Ansiewicz 1997:347; Rawady 1997:398,401). These and related themes comprise some of the alternative feminist literature which is discussed in the next section, together with a recap of some of the literature from the traditional male perspective.
2.2.3 The feminist or alternative literature

A bit of **Reality** must come into play and the **Myth** has to go.

(Wellfare 1998:107)

What a person sees depends both upon what one looks at and also upon what her/his previous visual/conceptual experience has taught one to see ….in the absence of alternative points of view, there can only be confusion and negativity surrounding the subject ….more positive views continue to be submerged.

(Kuhn 1970:113)

The traditional literature, referred to above, suggests that the culture in Australia in the mid-twentieth century was dominated by middle-class priests, social workers, medicos and psychologists imbued with the notion that in order to be good, unmarried mothers should part with their babies. Since it was assumed by many that unmarried mothers willingly placed their babies for adoption, there was very little room for the notion that separating mothers and babies would be harmful. When pain on separation was recognised it would be dismissed by workers (state agents) who acted within the constraints imposed by their institutions and those of the wider society (Rawady 1997:389; Ham and Hill 1984:138,139). Many in authority assumed that the natural mothers were not only unintelligent, but unfit to have custody of their own babies (Rawady 1997:392). In this section I refer to the evidence from alternative sources which suggest that not only were mothers forced by poverty to give up their children to adoption, discourses at the time and still today tend to focus on her negative attributes: not the positive (Ansiewicz 1997:349). Furthermore, these writers suggest that many women have been harmed by past adoption practices, not helped (Ansiewicz 1997:348,349).

In the past but still today, male legislators interested in containing and controlling what they see as the ‘unruly, irresponsible and disruptive behaviour’ of unwed mothers have used such justifications for promoting adoption. Instead of providing the financial outlays so necessary to enable mother and child to remain together, authorities have prioritised adoption as the solution to ‘unwanted’ pregnancies (Ansiewicz 1997:348). Seen as a way of providing fathers for children at no expense to government, in the past funds from internal revenue were not provided to individual women who found themselves pregnant and unsupported (Ansiewicz 1997:348). Even today the funds that are available are provided
sparingly and often grudgingly (Selman 1996:119). The feminist literature suggests that far from wishing to be rid of their ‘unwanted’ pregnancies, most unwed mothers, given a choice, will not part with their babies (Ansiewicz 1997:348). Since even very young mothers want to keep their babies, adequate social supports need to be put in place to help them. In *The Youngest Mothers: the experience of pregnancy and motherhood among young women of school age*, Schofield (1994) looks at the experiences of very young mothers in the United States of America where the birth rate to young unmarried women under sixteen is comparatively high. The book was largely a response to *The Health of a Nation*, the official document put out by the United States government, as part of an attempt to reduce the rate of conception in this age group by 50 per cent by the year 2000. In referring to women in general, the document uses the words ‘unwanted or unintended pregnancies’ and the concession is made that not all of these pregnancies result in unwanted babies. Referring to younger women, however, only the words ‘unwanted pregnancies’ are used and there is no mention of the possibility that by the time of the birth, even very young mothers may want their babies. Such tensions and contradictions to which very young mothers are exposed form the centre of this book. The author argues that given appropriate social supports and opportunities, very young mothers can also be very good mothers. According to this report, one ought not automatically assume that an unmarried mother is not able to provide emotional support to her child. Given sufficient support, many unmarried mothers and their children thrive (Schofield 1994:106-112; Musick 1993:158; Young 1994:41,42).

Research within Australia provides further evidence of this. For instance, in Australia today, young women who find themselves pregnant and unsupported are not automatically expected to leave school, disappear and then re-emerge, minus the baby. On the contrary, unmarried mothers today are being encouraged to complete secondary school. Many go on to complete higher degrees, while still assuming the parental role (Burns et al. 1989:32,34; Hele 1999:1; Towers 1996:6; Vanstone 2002:17):

I was so conscious of the negative stereotypes attached to being a teenage mum….it wasn’t until someone asked me to see a photo of Dylan one day that I realised that the reason I didn’t carry a picture of him was that I didn’t feel like I was allowed to be proud of him ….I think having Dylan made me stop and evaluate where I was and what I was doing ….it sounds corny
but it was really important that I achieve something so that he could have some kind of positive role model.


Emmalene ….., 23, from Brisbane, is another young single mother. Her son, Keegan, is five and she juggles caring for him with part-time work at The Australian Association of Young People in Care, a support and advocacy group for children and young people who cannot live at home with their parents. She says society sends young single mothers a set of contradictory messages about what they should be doing. “On the one hand, you get the view that you should be at home with your children, but then people also say that you shouldn’t be on the pension …I have thought that I could just be sitting at home watching Oprah and being paid by the Government, but I don’t …I am not sure, career-wise, what I want to do but I want to make sure that I always do have enough money to live” (cited in Gunn, *The Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, 1996:6).

The establishment literature on the ‘unmarried mother’ often refers to her as neglectful and incapable of exercising restraint or taking responsibility for her actions (Young 1994:34,35; Martin 1992:118). However, as the following statement from an unmarried mother indicates, despite her young age, she is aware of the consequences of her actions upon the health of her unborn child. Since single mothers do not comprise an homogenous group, one cannot automatically lump all unmarried women together as irresponsible, selfish and/or possessing only a short-term span of attention:

Yeah, the hospital doesn’t believe anything you say when you’re a young person …..they kept me in there for five days after the birth because they were waiting for my son to detox and I’d said to them that I hadn’t been using while I was pregnant and they didn’t believe me …..just by looking at the records they knew that I’d used in the past and they said that they couldn’t trust me now …..no matter what I said, she just wouldn’t believe me …..he (my son) was fine, nothing ever went into his body, they didn’t believe me but what can you say? …..I couldn’t touch him for five days.


The same establishment literature indicates that society assumes that unmarried mothers are promiscuous (Page 1997:155,164,165). Women rather than men are leading the opposite sex astray (Simmonds 1992:212; Ranke-Heinemann 1990:178,179). Unmarried
mothers by nature are fickle, flighty and irresponsible. Feminists point out that rather than casting the female as ‘deviant’, the following cases call this familiar typology into question. Compared to women, men are the more promiscuous sex (Lees 1989:24; Luke and Luke 1997:47; McKeeganey and Barnard 1996:50-54):

Kathy was eighteen, pregnant and in love. When the child’s father left her, she was determined to keep her baby anyway. The day she was admitted to hospital everything was ready at home: the washed nappies and clothes, the crib already made up. She says the pressure from social workers and medical staff began before her little boy was born. “They would say, how can you look after the baby? You’re selfish to want to keep him when there’s a family out there with a mother and father who can give him all the things you can’t” …… “you know there’s a perception that birthmothers don’t love their babies” she says with cracks in her voice “but the opposite is often true…..we loved them too much…..we were told that if we loved them, we’d give them up……and they got us at a time when we were at our most vulnerable” …..without the emotional and financial support of a loving partner, nowhere to live, no job or prospects of a job which at female wage rates would be insufficient for a woman on her own.

(Ollson 1998:1)

When the father of Shirley’s baby refused to marry her, she worked in domestic jobs for her keep and was paid two pounds ($4) a month in child endowment. When that went wrong – the baby’s father kept visiting – she went back to live with her own father in a flat “not fit for a horse” in a Brisbane suburb. There was no electricity, no sheets and the bed was full of bugs. Her mother had died when she was 16 and there was no one to turn to for help…. “I struggled from place to place”, she says, “but I just reached breaking point” ….her little girl was nine months old …..she was depressed and as thin as a stick (she holds up a forefinger to illustrate) and under constant pressure from the baby’s father to give her up….finally, sick and in despair, she went to a government welfare agency who told her to sign some papers and then to take the baby to the …..Children’s Home at ….. “I remember it clearly….it was the day the Queen came to town….I got the tram down to ….in the ….and I was standing there on the corner holding the baby when she drove by, beautiful in a blue dress”….. “then I went down to the train and went to …..there she removed the little heart bracelet from her daughter’s wrist and handed her to the matron…. “the baby started crying straight away – well, she’d only ever known me” …..the matron said “turn around and walk away and don’t turn back”……Shirley went back to the bug-ridden rooms in ….with a box of Vincents headache powders and swallowed the lot …. “I’ve never told anyone that before” she says quietly, perhaps a little surprised at herself …. “I cried a lot …..I just wanted to backtrack, to go and get her……I always had this fantasy …..it
In the past, legislators as representatives of the state, institutions and policies have assumed that unwed mothers could just walk away from their babies and get on with their lives. However, the current studies as well as those of the past two decades indicate that this is far from the truth. Women who lost babies to adoption in the past experienced much grief. It is a profound grief and one which lasts forever. In *Bad/Good, Good/Bad: Birth Mothers and Adoptive Mothers*, Betty Jean Lifton (1998) provides some insight into the grief experienced by both natural mothers and their children:

I’ve known many birth mothers over the years. Some of my best friends are birth mothers. My own mother was a birth mother. “You will never know my pain,” my mother said in our first meeting after I’d found her. At the time, I was just learning my own pain, which until then I had effectively split off from consciousness. How could I possibly have the emotional strength to know and hold hers, too? She did not struggle to articulate her pain. She had become the pain. It was as much a part of her as any vital organ. I was to learn years later, after her death, that she had tried to keep me against her mother’s wishes. My twenty-year-old father was out of there when he learned of her pregnancy, and, having just turned seventeen, she couldn’t raise me on her own. She went temporarily blind after signing my relinquishment paper. Fell onto the subway tracks one day. Fell or jumped, who is to say? Someone pulled her out in time. When she could see again, she, like so many birth mothers, split me off in order to survive: shut me out of her conscious mind. Went psychologically blind. Dissociated. Left me to fester in her unconscious. She kept me a secret from both her husbands, and from the one child she had after me – her only child, in society’s eyes. I saw her just twice. I was the one who disappeared this time. I could not handle my guilt toward my adoptive parents. I could not handle the chaos I felt inside. I did not contact her again for many years. We were never to meet again. Toward the end of her life, we spoke on the telephone, its wires reuniting mother and daughter like an electrified umbilical cord. She was widowed, living with my unmarried half-brother, dependent on him for everything because she had Meniere’s disease, which affected her middle ear. It made her dizzy, unable to venture out alone. Mother and son, inseparable. She was determined
Millen and Roll (1985) argue in *Solomon’s Mothers: A Special Case of Pathological Bereavement*, that giving up a child for adoption presents a serious emotional and psychological challenge for the mother. One generally assumes that the woman who has relinquished a child has severed any emotional bond that has developed and has gladly resumed her uninterrupted life. Millen and Roll contradict this view. The maternal experience does not end with the signing of surrender papers. The woman returns to living her life, without the child, but with much pain and anguish. Because the pain is compounded when the grief is denied by a society which withholds the mechanisms for grieving, these authors offer a number of recommendations for facilitating a healthy mourning process in the relinquishing mother (Millen and Roll 1985:411-412).

The harsh reality that we will look at will show that many unmarried mothers have inadequate financial resources, strained relationships, serious psychiatric disability in a partner or one’s own parents. These women might also experience family violence, rejection by her family of origin, rejection by her boyfriend, homelessness (Pierson 1999:180-191). Feminists are concerned with the circumstances that contribute to family separation and ask how permanent separations might be prevented. For instance in *To Have and to Share: Culturally Constituted Fostering in Familial Settings*, Kilbride and Kilbride (1994) urge readers to rethink the meaning of ‘home’ and ‘family’. Which alternative living environments best promote the wellbeing of children and their families? What constitutes the family? Is the family necessarily the nuclear family? Or is it more diverse? These authors urge the United States Government to look at informal foster care arrangements already operating successfully in other cultures (for example, Africa). They also suggest
that there is much to be gained by looking at sub-cultures within the United States (Kilbride and Kilbride in Blacher 1994:301-326; Chandler 1993:106; Kitzinger 1993:24).

In *Emotional Impact of Surrender*, Butterfield (1996) argues that it is the professionals involved in the adoption and family members who put pressure on birthmothers to surrender. Birthmothers, themselves, were not asked what they wanted to do. The author also points out that although most people in the community would be alarmed to learn that preventable losses to adoption are not being stopped, current public policy in Australia, in fact, promotes loss to adoption, advocating it as the preferred option for a young unmarried woman who is facing an unplanned pregnancy (Butterfield 1996:3).

Else (1991) in *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*, provides a very interesting and informative account of the ideology and practice of closed stranger adoption in New Zealand from the end of World War II to the mid-1970s. Richly documented and immensely readable, it follows the entire process from pregnancy through to the issuing of the final adoption order and its aftermath. It explores both social and moral attitudes towards unmarried mothers, ‘unwanted children’ and childless couples during the 1950s and 1960s and examines how the system based on these attitudes worked or failed to work depending on one’s perspective. In a social milieu which actively promoted adoption, the author argues that birthmothers were rendered powerless (Else:1991:1-214).

In her qualitative study *Birthmothers: The Forgotten Link of the Adoption Triangle*, McAdoo (1992) examines the social and economic reasons underlying relinquishment. She explores the processes and power dynamics in relinquishment decision-making and examines the impact of such decisions on a group of 41 women who lost babies to adoption in America between 1929 and 1990. The author argues that the women relinquished their babies because of a lack of social and economic supports (McAdoo 1992:v,1-6,145,146).

While the central ideas I wish to test in this thesis are gleaned from the studies undertaken by McAdoo and Else – that is, both works rely heavily on qualitative data to argue that unmarried mothers were coerced by family and society; both evaluate the negative impact of adoption on birthmothers – my work, *Silent Violence*, does differ. This study is concerned with the coercive measures employed by stage agents once the young women were ‘incarcerated’ in the homes/hospitals to have their babies. Furthermore, unlike McAdoo who is concerned with adoption in America between 1929 and 1990, the historical time frame under investigation in this thesis comprises the 1950s through to the early
1970s. Whilst McAdoo’s thesis examines adoption in America, my thesis draws out the similarities and differences in state policies directed at both black and white Australians. Hence my work not only engages with class and gender, it also engages with race in that most of the cases dealt with here refer to the removal of white children for negative reasons.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the different ways of viewing love, marriage and the family as these institutions have existed in time and across cultures. The influence of orthodox religion was also investigated and in turn discussed. I have argued that heterosexual monogamy, with the family comprising mum, dad and 2.2 children, was prioritised in mid-twentieth century Australia. Consequently, the chapter set the parameters for the much lengthier discussion on coercion in Chapters 4 and 5. In the final section of this chapter I reviewed the literature on unmarried mothers. In the first part of this section I described the male views on unmarried mothers – some of which are negative. I then countered these claims with a more analytical, humanist, feminist alternative perspective. One of the main points to be gleaned from the literature review is that one’s class and gender location ultimately influences how one perceives others and how one then writes about them (Berger 1972:129; Bessant 1994:39). Knowledge creation is never a ‘disinterested’ endeavour (Webb 1996:142; Highwater 1997:233; Schwartz and Jacobs 1979:203). It is always produced for a purpose. In the case of single mothers, it is often highly political. The final section of the chapter discussed the different ways of ‘seeing’ and thereby conceptualising single mothers. As such it was concerned with how these different attitudes towards single mothers are translated into state policy and thus generate the written word. In the next chapter I detail how knowledge is gained, referring to the different research techniques involved in gathering information. I also look at the different values, aims and political purposes underpinning the research project.
3. Chapter 2

Methodology

Birthmothers have not been asked….they are the persons who have lived the experience that the statistics partially represent in their dry and abstract form and from which we might speculate but cannot know…..living the experience is to know it.

(Inglis 1984:18)

3.1 Introduction

Methodologically, this thesis uses both qualitative\(^1\) and quantitative\(^2\) research techniques and triangulates with interviews as case studies. While the qualitative approach draws attention to issues of validity, the quantitative approach enhances reliability. While both methods are used, however, the research definitely leans towards the qualitative in relation to both data collection and analysis (Reinharz 1992:199). In this chapter the advantages of a triangulated approach are explained, whilst emphasising that it is the former qualitative method which has the greater potential to shed light on the social reality of women as an oppressed group (Harding 1991:121-4; Duelli Klein 1983:88-91; Denzin in Denzin and Lincoln 1994:575).

Although there is triangulation of data, collecting methods can clearly be delineated as original research and secondary research. The original research comprises 30 personal interviews. Added to this is material from 68 questionnaires. These research instruments are justified and described in detail in this chapter and the findings are in the next chapter.

The secondary research is from a number of different sources. Some mothers provided copies of claims made to Royal Commissions. Others, such as Hammond, produced individual writings. Information was also gathered from statements made by mothers during the recent New South Wales parliamentary inquiries into adoption practices. These inquiries were called for by birthmothers and their advocates who felt that their previously

\(^1\) Qualitative research is undertaken in the field. The researcher is interested in reporting the thoughts, feelings and actions of persons as they occur and are experienced (Cuff et al. 1990:151)

\(^2\) Quantitative research methods triangulate with statistical data, a method favoured in traditional sociology (Reinharz 1992:18).
under-represented opinions should finally have a forum. The internet, books, magazines and other archival materials were also used throughout the thesis. To begin I will introduce feminist experiential analysis.

3.1.1 An introduction to feminist experiential analysis

Reinharz (1992) argues that historically, white, male, middle-class knowledge creators and scientific ‘experts’, with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, have relied upon conventional research methods (that is, observations, official records, statistics and surveys, as designed and implemented by men) (Reinharz 1992:18; Code 1995:108). When applied to the study of ‘unmarried mothers’, unwed women (as seen through male, middle-class eyes) are often cast as irresponsible, young and indolent women who do not really care to keep their own babies. The inference here is that unmarried mothers prefer to let go of their children so that they can ‘get on with their lives’ [and]....pursue other men (Sevenhuijsen 1992:169). In complete contrast to the conventional records and the values, aims and research methods underpinning them, feminists insist that under patriarchy and capitalism, women have experiences of social relations whose content is different from those of men (Dant 1991:173-176; Harding 1995:122; Bernard in Bacchi 1990:108). Because of this, research methods have to be designed which reflect more adequately their social reality (Tanesini 1999:143; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2001:7; Delany 1997:128). Whilst feminist theorists are never in complete agreement over what is the best way to proceed with the design and implementation of their research methods, this thesis draws heavily on those techniques which involve observing and recording the feelings, thoughts and behaviour of women as witnessed and/or experienced (Fernandes 2003:83-99; Tanesini 1999:144,145; Reinharz 1992:13,14; Harding 1995:121; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2001:8) (see Table 1: Research models in contemporary sociology). This method, in turn, is then reaffirmed by survey data which is informed by what the women themselves have to say about their situation (Reinharz 1992:19).

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3 For a discussion of the stakeholders in adoption see pages 67,68; see also page 221. For copies of these statements write to: The Director, Standing Committee on Social Issues, Legislative Council, Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia 2000, telephone 61-2-9230-3078 or email: socialissues@parliament.nsw.gov.au (see also page 266 of bibliography).
Feminists argue that when this alternative or multi-method research approach is taken, one can usually see an entirely new and more positive image of women emerge, one which is often diametrically opposed to the preceding accounts made by men (Fernandes 2003:79-85; Mies 1983:128; Duelli Klein 1983:94; Denzin and Lincoln 2001:9). Where existing discourses tend towards viewing unmarried motherhood as an individual pathology – that is, the ‘unmarried mother’ as a non-conformist is dangerous and as such must be controlled and/or censured – feminist methodology has the potential to dislodge as ‘perverse’ these earlier paradigms in which the ‘unmarried mother’ is specifically targeted as ‘deviant’ (Duelli Klein 1983:92; Plummer 2001:79). In doing so, feminist methodology, unlike earlier mainstream sociological methods, has the potential to not only enhance the status of women who are under investigation, but it attempts at the same time to bring about changes in the wider society. It strives to do this by disseminating knowledge not only in the scholarly community, which historically has been the dominant practice with research conducted and carried out by the disciplines. The feminist perspective strives to bring about change by disseminating knowledge within the ‘user’ community as well as the wider society as a whole (Reinharz 1992:1) (see Table 1 Research models in contemporary sociology).

Table 1  Research models in contemporary sociology (adapted from Reinharz in Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983:170-172)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conventional or patriarchal</th>
<th>Alternative or feminist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Units of study</td>
<td>Predefined, operationalized concepts stated as hypotheses.</td>
<td>Natural events encased in their ongoing contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharpness of focus</td>
<td>Limited, specialized, specific, exclusive.</td>
<td>Broad, inclusive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data type</td>
<td>Reports of attitudes and actions as in questionnaires, interviews and archives.</td>
<td>Feelings, behavior, thoughts, insights, actions as witnessed or experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic of study</td>
<td>Manageable issue derived from scholarly literature,</td>
<td>Socially significant problem sometimes related to issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the researcher:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In relation to environment</td>
<td>Control of environment is desired, attempt to manage research conditions.</td>
<td>Openness to environment, immersion, being subject to and shaped by it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In relation to subjects</td>
<td>Detached.</td>
<td>Involved, sense of commitment, participation, sharing of fate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a person</td>
<td>Irrelevant.</td>
<td>Relevant, expected to change during process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on researcher</td>
<td>Irrelevant.</td>
<td>Anticipated, recorded, reported, valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of method</td>
<td>As per design, decided a priori.</td>
<td>Method determined by unique characteristics of field setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity criteria</td>
<td>Proof, evidence, statistical significance; study must be replicable and yield same results to have valid findings.</td>
<td>Completeness, plausibility, illustrativeness, understanding, responsiveness to readers’ or subjects’ experience; study cannot, however, be replicated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of theory</td>
<td>Crucial as determinant of research design.</td>
<td>Emerges from research implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Arranged in advance relying on deductive logic, done when all data are ‘in’.</td>
<td>Done during the study, relying on inductive logic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation of data</td>
<td>Utilization of statistical analyses.</td>
<td>Creation of gestalts and meaningful patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research objectives</td>
<td>Testing hypotheses.</td>
<td>Development of understanding through grounded concepts and descriptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Research report form; report</td>
<td>Story, description with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>of conclusions with regard to hypotheses stated in advance, or presentation of data obtained from instruments.</td>
<td>emergent concepts; including documentation of process of discovery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Statistically insignificant variance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Researchers’ attitudes not revealed, recognized or analyzed, attempts to be value-free, objective.</td>
<td>Researchers’ attitudes described and discussed, values acknowledged, revealed, labelled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of reader</td>
<td>Scholarly community addressed; evaluation of research design, management, and findings.</td>
<td>Scholarly and user community addressed and engaged; evaluate usefulness and responsiveness to perceived needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table indicates that the methods developed by 1970s and 1980s feminist researchers are better equipped to produce data on the realities of women’s lives. Feminist qualitative methods (feminist field work and the personal interview) are better able to capture personal experiences, nuances of meaning and the actual nature of social relationships between people (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2001:8,9). Furthermore, using ‘sociology of knowledge’\(^4\) epistemology points to questions such as ‘what cultural/social values does this analysis reflect?’, ‘what are the socio-political ideas and conditions illuminated here?’, ‘how can this research enhance society's understanding of what happened to these women?’, this investigation is not only concerned with improving society's perception of women, who, historically, have existed on its periphery, the study is

\(^4\) Critical theorists who support a ‘sociology of knowledge’ position suggest that information is always produced for a purpose. Knowledge is produced because people want to know something. Knowledge is not produced from the ‘disinterested’ inquiry of minds, it is produced because of the basic needs or interests of humankind. Because one’s position in the social hierarchy ultimately affects the sorts of knowledge that is produced, oppressed groups have the capacity to generate more knowledge – more truthful accounts (Fernandes 2003:83-99; Webb 1996:142) (see also standpoint theory – Jurgen Habermas, Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock).
also committed to implementing a change in social policy so that future women who find themselves pregnant, unmarried and unsupported are better able to access avenues of support (De Vault 1999:225; Plummer 2001:42,43). This in turn will impact on the degree to which these women are able to maintain a sense of dignity and self worth which is so important to their continuing sense of ‘wholeness’ as women (Reinharz 1992:6,7,191,192).

Reading, writing, observation and interviewing alone did not produce ‘Silent Violence’. This thesis has its genesis in concrete situations and as such describes and reflects the ‘lived experience’ of a large group of white Australian women who until very recently have been – to use Sheila Rowbotham’s expression – ‘hidden from history’ (Rowbotham 1999:22; Plummer 2001:14,15). This thesis is a test of the mainstream ideology and the discourse that unmarried mothers do not wish to keep their babies. As such this study recounts the experiences of those women who, until very recently, have been rendered largely invisible and/or insignificant by those in the position to speak5. This thesis provides the opportunity for the women themselves to discuss what happened to them.

Before proceeding on to a detailed coverage of the methods used and particularly those pertaining to experiential analysis, I think it is incumbent on me to disclose why I chose this topic and what has kept me motivated – indeed what motivated my initial interest in this issue. For most of my adult life I have been an ‘unmarried mother’ and it is this status and this experience which began the journey. There will be some readers who will question my distance and objectivity in this thesis. There may be some who will question my right6 to discuss an issue of which I myself have no personal experience. In response I should like to add here that although I have not actually lost a child to adoption, my hospital experience

5 Unlike today there was a huge social stigma attached to ‘illegitimate’ pregnancy in mid-twentieth century Australia. Whilst this stigma has effectively silenced many mothers from speaking of their experiences, others are now more wary of the uses to which the research will be put (Ansiewicz 1997:347).

6 Anthropologists and sociologists often come in for criticism from those who argue that due to differences between researcher and the researched it is unethical to make a study of other people since misrepresentations are bound to occur. In response to these criticisms this researcher argues that it would be very unethical and indeed irresponsible of me as a feminist academic and unmarried mother not to write about women who have been made so marginal many are unable or rather are not in the position to be able to write about themselves (Johnson 1995:100; Phelan 1997:86).
at the time of giving birth, is such that I almost did\(^7\). Within hours of giving birth to my daughter in 1978 in a small country hospital in Queensland, I was visited by a social worker who proceeded to ask questions similar to the questions described by the mothers in this study (see Chapter 5). The questions asked, as well as the manner in which they were asked, made me suspicious and in turn cautious. While these suspicions later became the basis for starting this thesis, within this emotional context I have sought to be as objective as possible with analysing the data and presenting the stories of other women.

Before proceeding to a description of the research methods used, it also needs to be mentioned here that because of the intense degree of trauma and loss experienced by the mothers in this study (see Chapter 3) and the lack of trust of those in authority arising from this, gathering information for this study has not always been easy (Wolf 1996:18). Where information has been forthcoming it is more likely to have come from those women who have met me, than from those who have not (hence the importance of qualitative or non-positivist methods) (Wolf 1996:18; Reinhart 1992:204,205; Little 1999:3). Furthermore, differences in status or positionality between the researcher and the researched influence the extent to which some mothers are willing to divulge information (Wolf 1996:13,14). Although I am an unmarried mother, I am not a mother whose baby was adopted, thus causing many, many women to question my ability to relate to them (Code 1995:1; Wolf 1996:18).

3.2 Elements of an experiential analysis and the interviewer as ‘coaxer’

**Assumptions** underlying an experiential method overlap with those of symbolic interactionism, social construction of reality theories and humanistic philosophy. Qualitative social scientists working within this ethnographic-inductive format\(^8\) have strong

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\(^7\) Unlike many of the mothers who were not given any options (see Chapters 4 and 5), in 1978 the researcher was able to return to her parents’ rural home with her new baby. Although the single parent pension was available at this time, I recall enormous difficulty trying to get the payment. Through sheer persistence I managed eventually to get the benefit for myself and baby daughter. However, welfare providers at the time did not appear to want to dispense the benefit. Ten years later when as a young mother I became aware of public housing (low cost housing provided by the state) I was able to access this facility. (See also Chapter 1)

\(^8\) As a research method, ethnography is closely associated with participant observation – a form of observation in which the observer (the researcher) is known to be an outside investigator by those being studied. When
reservations about imposing a pre-structured theory onto the world. Human beings are not physical objects but, rather, conscious, decision-making and at times irrational beings. Order is often unstable and changeable. Cause and effect, while important concepts, have the tendency to oversimplify complex, continuous processes of metamorphosis and ambiguity. Social scientists should go out into the world with a desire to listen and participate but be ready to bracket one’s former understanding about particular social phenomena and attempt to understand these processes from the point of view of those who have experienced it. This concern with the insider’s point of view is called phenomenology, whilst a concern for the way in which people interpret and make sense of their world is called symbolic interaction (Craib 1984:83-95). The world ‘out there’ is several ‘worlds’ (Plummer 2001:12). There is less concern for the objective and more concern for how people make and understand their world. Worlds are ‘lived in’ places and the ethnographer must, socially or at least psychologically, try to enter that world. The world is not entirely objective but also subjective (Reinharz, in Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983:174; Kellehear 1993:26,27; Plummer 2001: 8,14).

**Personal preparation** for ‘experiential analysis’ borrows from phenomenology in the sense that phenomenologists attempt to suspend preconceptions about the matter they are to study. Among phenomenologists this is called an ‘epoche’ which means that experiential researchers will not do an extensive literature search before an investigation, but rather after it (Bruyn 1966:272-273). In this way the researcher attempts to avoid bringing a priori categories to the project. In this way she/he attempts to avoid or eliminate ‘front-end instrumentation’. In experiential fieldwork many of the researcher’s predispositions, when known, can be questions put to the persons one is studying – they need not be discarded (Plummer 2001:34). They are only ‘biases’ if they are not acknowledged or explored, as is almost always the case in positivist research (Reinharz in Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983:175). Furthermore, the questions asked are deliberately designed to accommodate diversity of opinion: ‘what was your reaction to such and such?’, ‘what is it like to have?’ ‘what do you think about this?’ In feminist experiential fieldwork the questions asked of interviewees are open-ended and often unstructured and are designed to elicit as much done well this research technique can provide data that is more authentic than the more common survey approach. It is far more time-consuming, however, and makes greater demands on the researcher’s skill and personality (Fernandes 2003:83-99; Tanesini 1999:139; Abercrombie et al. 1984:90,179).
information as the interviewee(s) wish to disclose. Many of the questions focus on ‘what’ rather than ‘why’, although ‘why’ is also important and is used (Reinharz in Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983:177). The intention here is to enable women to speak more freely and at length about their experiences (Webb in Zuber-Skerritt 1996:143).

As the research questions are the central concern to the researcher as well as those who are to be researched, this often involves the adoption of a ‘participatory model’. By this is meant that group leaders and members (not just the researcher) are involved in discussions about what is important for a research topic. The researched not only have a say in what is researched and how it is conducted, they can be actively involved in interpretations of the data. In my own experience, for example, at numerous points when gathering data, I would ask a group leader (a birthmother) at Jigsaw Brisbane for her input into how the data might be interpreted from her perspective (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2001:10). Experiential analysis strives for a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian, non-manipulative, humble relation to the ‘subject’ or perhaps best described as the attitude of student rather than expert. Wolff (1971) uses the term ‘surrender’ to characterise the researcher’s stance of receptivity to anything the subject offers. Vaughte (1976) describes the relation as one of ‘equality, sharing and trust’ (Reinharz in Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983:181). Correctly practised ethnographic research takes an enormous amount of time, energy and personal commitment. If the research topic is of genuine concern to those who are being studied (group leaders and members), such members (interviewees) are more likely to work through problem formulations with the researcher. From the researcher’s (outsider’s9) point of view, this can only enhance the research outcome/findings (Reinharz in Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983:176,177). However, the researched also stand to benefit (Plummer 2001:137). Not only might the research provide real answers to pressing problems, the research process itself provides an opportunity for catharsis or self-discovery. The research

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9 Societies can be divided into groups, and groups are in turn collectives of people who share similar interests, beliefs, attitudes, group goals and language. Sociologists use terms such as ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ to describe who belongs to a group and who does not. As I am an unmarried mother who has not lost a child to adoption I am automatically perceived by the ‘in-group’ (for example, Jigsaw, Brisbane) as an ‘outsider’ or member of an ‘out-group’. Whilst aware that I am sympathetic to this ‘in-group’s’ goals, I can never claim similarity of experience. These differences make it harder for me, the researcher (as ‘outsider’) to penetrate the ‘in-group’ (Gardener et al. 1983:52-77). See also S. Young on Identity Politics in S. Phelan 1997:54,55.
can provide a much-needed forum for personal growth or similarly put the person (in this case the mother) in contact with those networks/support agencies that can help. Furthermore, in this collaborative mode the researcher and the researched not only minimise energy output, they are more able to command high quality research (Reinharz in Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983:176).

**Gathering data in natural settings** allows the researcher to play a background rather than foreground role – one is not manipulating the environment but is part of it. One can observe how people speak and act with each other and not just rely on how they respond to you, the researcher (Craib 1984:88,89; Plummer 2001:144). Whilst experiential analysis does not utilise instruments such as psychological tests, checklists or coded questionnaires, which do not allow for personal thought and action, it can be aided by technologies such as the tape recorder. This is an extremely useful means of gaining information (Reinharz in Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983:178,179). However, because of the discomfort some interviewees felt as a result of taped interviews, I decided not to carry a tape recorder (Selby 1992:35; O’Hair et al. 1981:433). Precisely because of issues surrounding stigma, secrecy and ongoing trauma (see Chapter 3) and the difficulty associated with drawing out information from mothers, I had to weigh up what was more important – using this form of interview and possibly risk recruiting any mothers for an interview at all, or approaching the mothers informally and hoping that this would elicit the information required\(^\text{10}\) (Plummer 2001:42). As it turned out the latter proved very successful and it is to this approach that I now turn.

In 1996 via the visual and print media unmarried mothers were represented and placed on the public agenda. At the time there was quite extensive public exposure to the idea that unmarried mothers in Australia might have been coerced or even tricked into signing away their babies at birth and that this has occurred over a 30-year time span. For instance, on page 1 of the Brisbane Courier-Mail, 11 June, 1996, there was a headline *Stolen babies scandal hits Qld.* (Courier-Mail 1996:1). On page 3 of The Australian, 17 September 1996, a headline ran *State made me give up baby, says teen mum* (Scott 1996:3). On page 37 of

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\(^{10}\) Plummer (2001) refers to the personal interviewer as ‘coaxer’. Coaxers are listeners and questioners. They probe, interview and interrogate. They gather in groups or on an individual basis to hear others tell their stories. They are the oral historians, the life story interviewers, the researchers (Cooke 1999:45-48). ‘Coaxers’ play a crucial role in shifting the nature of the stories that are told (Plummer 2001:42).
the West Australian newspaper, 17 September, 1996, a headline ran Woman tells of forced adoption (West Australian 1996:37). It was articles such as these and my own personal experiences as an unmarried mother which first fuelled my desire to find out if there was any truth to the allegations that young, white, unmarried women in Australia were pressured into relinquishing their babies for adoption. Remembering my own experience of having a social worker approach me in the hospital when I gave birth to my daughter in 1978 (see above) and fully aware of the controversy surrounding indigenous stolen children, my interest increased considerably. On reporting my concerns to my supervisor, it was suggested I seek out Jigsaw in Brisbane in order to gauge the extent of the problem. Jigsaw is the grassroots organisation in Queensland and Australia-wide which serves as a contact register for anyone touched by adoption. It also provides much needed emotional support for its members, many of whom are natural mothers who have given up their babies for adoption. Due to the number of women who use the service I felt that if anyone could provide any answers, surely this organisation could. Since I had learned through a 1996 newspaper article the name of its president, I telephoned and introduced myself as a postgraduate student and unmarried mother, who, on hearing about the experiences of natural mothers via the media, was interested in pursuing research into what happened to them. I stressed that I was interested in hearing what mothers themselves had to say. I wished to document what the mothers told me. I will never forget the response I received from this woman, herself a natural mother. She was very cordial and by her very manner appeared very pleased to have someone take an interest in this issue. She set a date to meet with me personally. Then about a week later I was able to meet other natural mothers to hear their experiences. This encounter took place one morning in July 1996 in a southern suburb of Brisbane. The meeting was a group meeting. All the mothers were sitting around in a circle, coffee in hand, speaking spontaneously to one another about their own experiences. My entrance did not seem to deter them. Quite the contrary, these mothers invited me to join them, offered me a cup of coffee and continued talking openly of their experiences. My first impression was that these women were very happy to have someone (particularly an ‘outsider’) listen to them. This was confirmed when it was said:

We want to tell our story so that future generations of women don’t have to go through the pain we have been through.......the common assumption held by many, many people in the community is that we were unfit to mother and that we gladly gave our babies away......out of sight......out of mind......unfortunately, society still sees the adoptive parents as having saved the
“abandoned child”........adoptive parents are cast as the “goody goodies” and birthmothers are the “villains” ........the reality, however, is that we did not and had no intention of relinquishing our babies......this was forced upon us by our families, by the church, the medical and social work professions and society in general.....

(Interviewee 2, Brisbane, 1996)

At this and subsequent group meetings with natural mothers in Brisbane, I have been able to take copious notes and form crucial contacts and friendships thus enabling me to make further appointments for personal interviews (Plummer 2001:42-43). Thus, to add to the data gathered from the 68 questionnaires which were returned to me by mail from around Australia (see next section), I was able to include data from 30 interviews which were undertaken in and around Brisbane, as well as interstate. Whilst some of these interviews took place by telephone (Toowoomba, Sunshine Coast, Sydney, Hobart, Perth), others were face-to-face and took place in a variety of settings. For instance, in Sydney I was able to meet with two mothers in the privacy of one of their homes. This interview was very informal in that I just let the mothers direct the occasion (Plummer 2001:142; Cooke 1999:47,48). In the three hours I spent with these mothers I learned so much. Hence I can’t thank these two mothers enough for the time and hospitality accorded me – reliving their experiences was clearly traumatic for them (see Chapter 3).

On other occasions the interviews conducted were more formal. I still allowed the mothers considerable choice as to what issues would be covered in the interview, however, some of the questions were directed towards their perceived support or lack of support from boyfriends, family and society at the time. As in the case of the collection of data which was conducted more informally, at all times the guiding principle underlying my endeavour was “(1) to document the lives and activities of women who had lost a child/children to adoption, (2) to understand the experience of these women from their own point of view, and (3) to conceptualise women’s behaviour [sic] as an expression of social contexts” (Reinharz 1992:51).

Experiential data is not just confined to talk. It can and should include the meaningful actions in which persons engage, in their day-to-day lives. As the researcher observes human interaction/living in ordinary settings it is possible to uncover new kinds of data – new knowledges (Reinharz in Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983:179; Harding 1995:124; Cooke 1999:47,48). Anthropologically, the researcher’s focus is always on questions of behaviour and especially questions of meaning/motives (Wolcott in Jaeger 1988:202,203).
It is the meanings actors give to their circumstances which are central to any explanation of why people act as they do. These meanings may seem puzzling, arbitrary or biased if viewed from the ‘outside’. However symbolic interactionists propose that such meanings, if looked at in relation to the particular circumstances in which actors find themselves, can often be seen to fit with those circumstances in previously unsuspected ways (Cuff et al. 1990:152). Furthermore, how any aspect of social life is perceived and understood depends upon the standpoint from which it is viewed (Harding 1991:234). There is no one ‘ultimately correct’ description to be given of any social situation (Cuff et al. 1990:151; Harding 1991:234). Rather, knowledge is a process by which experiences are represented and objectified. Whilst human experiences are always situational insofar as they emerge out of one’s relations with others (Haraway 1988:583; Harding 1991:131; Plummer 2001:262-263), at the heart of experiential analysis is the assumption that social life is characterised by a multiplicity of viewpoints (Harding 1991:123,124; Cuff et al. 1990:151; Plummer 2001:93). This highlights the advantage of this methodology over more traditional survey questionnaires that do not always cater for this and it is to these dilemmas that I now turn.

Thus far in this chapter I have been concerned with highlighting the main advantages of attempting a research project utilising an experiential approach to the production of knowledge. In her Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork, Wolf (1996) argues that the level of trust between researcher and the researched is vital to the research outcome. Since trust is more likely to be cultivated where the researcher is known to her subjects, she advocates that researchers attempt to enter the world of their research subjects; she advocates complete immersion in the field (Wolf 1996:10; Plummer 2001:42,136). In the above discussion I have articulated my main methods of acquiring information in the field. I have also suggested that trust was vital to this process. Whilst it was quite easy to develop trust with the mothers who I interviewed in Brisbane, this was more difficult with women at a distance. The level of rapport required of women at a distance – although vital to the research process – was unfortunately not to be repeated on implementation of the survey questionnaire.

In the remaining section I provide the rationale for undertaking a survey questionnaire at a time when many sociologists, and feminist sociologists in particular, are really quite sceptical of the benefits to be derived from this research method (Mies 1983:117-138). They argue instead for the personal interview (Sargent 1983:39-41). I will then proceed to a
discussion of the problems associated with gathering sufficient data by way of the survey. As already mentioned, trust is less likely to develop where the mothers have not met the researcher. Differences in status and positionality between the researcher and the researched also impact on the extent to which the mothers are likely to divulge their stories.

3.3 Advantages of the survey questionnaire

There are numerous and well-proven advantages to be gained by triangulating with or just using survey questionnaires. Perhaps their greatest advantage is that they are capable of reaching a very wide population of interviewees living at a distance. Because they can reach a wide population they can actually put a problem on the map by showing that it is more widespread than previously thought. Because of constraints on time, costs and the travel associated with researching, the mail questionnaire allows the researcher to reach an otherwise unreachable population of interviewees. For instance, this research relies on interviews from women from all around Australia. The research is dependent on the perceptions and memories of women as they experienced institutional practices at the time of losing their children to adoption. Because it was simply not possible to travel to all states, including Tasmania, to carry out time-consuming interviews, the formatting of a section of the questionnaire was specifically designed to gauge the birthmothers’ perceptions about this. For instance in section 3 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1:4-9), I ask important questions to gather the mothers’ perceptions of social and institutional practices at the time. Similarly, in section 4, I ask questions which seek information about the long-term effects of adoption on these women (see Appendix 1:10). Without this information from the mailed questionnaire I would be unable to draw the conclusions I have (Reinharz 1992:201). Without the mail questionnaire I could not possibly reach the many mothers living at a distance.

Whilst survey questionnaires are advantageous in indicating the prevalence of a phenomenon/problem, they also allow for anonymity if one so desires (Rogers 1983:39). This is obviously an important consideration for many interviewees who are being asked to disclose what for them is highly sensitive:

I am happy to talk over the phone while my husband is out, but I do not think it will be possible to fill out the questionnaire because he does not want me to.
In some ways survey questionnaires can be less problematic. For instance, for those who are not confident, survey questionnaires can be presented in pictorial form. This draws interest and has the capacity to break down any apprehension interviewees may have about filling in the questionnaire. The data from survey questionnaires can be used to make important changes to policy (Reinharz 1992:84). Whilst the brevity of data to be gleaned from the statistical survey makes it more easily communicated to lawmakers/policymakers who seek the information, statistical surveys have legal force and are important in lawsuits concerning sex bias and other injustices of concern to women (Maynard 1994:13). Survey data still holds a certain prestige over other forms of research. Because it is associated with governmental departments/bureaucracies, it is often accorded priority or importance by those in the position to make changes. Because of its long history, this form of research is still highly valued (Reinharz 1992:80-84).

3.4 Limitations of the survey questionnaire

Surveys are an important aid to social research as a basis for evidentiary claims. Without a sense of commonality it is not possible to discover a sense of connection between people and without that connection the changes necessary to bring about more enlightened attitudes on an issue (in this study, a change in perception of the ‘unmarried mother’) are less likely (Rogers 1983:40,41). However, this research method does have its limitations. Perhaps one of the strongest criticisms to be made of the survey questionnaire is to do with ‘front end instrumentation’. It is often argued that the questions asked are biased in that they deliberately set out to elicit what the researcher wants to elicit. The validity of findings in the survey questionnaire is dependent on respondents interpreting the questions as the researcher intended. Survey questionnaires produce the desired outcome for the researcher if the questions are understood by the respondents and if they are willing to respond. Most respondents are willing participants and this is assessed as such through their overt cooperation. However in the case of highly sensitive/controversial research, as in this thesis, their ability to participate is not so easily assessed and is certainly not guaranteed (see discussion below). Furthermore, because survey questionnaires (by their very nature) are geared to uniformity, they do not always allow for freedom of expression on matters of importance to individual women. Personal differences/idiosyncracies are
3.4.1 Lack of literacy among working-class mothers

Women from working-class backgrounds may not possess good written skills (Wiesner 1993:123). This can and often does affect their level of confidence, which will in turn lower the response rate (DeVault and Ingraham 1999:178-180). For example, two mothers (one of whom I spoke to by phone) were frightened of ‘stuffing up’ the questionnaire. Consequently they were never posted back. This fear of ‘messing’ up the questionnaire was confirmed by a group leader in Brisbane who made a point of this to me in general conversation: “Some of them I’m sure would like you to actually sit down with them and help them fill it out” (Interviewee 2, Brisbane 1999).

3.4.2 Perceived deficiencies in the formatting of the questions

The researcher’s use of language or wording of questions can be intimidating for some (Reinharz 1992:244; Wardhaugh 1992:218-222,239). For example, a mother from Perth rang me to ask if it was permissible to answer some of the questions in the questionnaire only. She stated that many of the mothers were intimidated by it. I responded by saying “I am very sorry if they found it intimidating but it certainly was not intended that way”. Our telephone conversation ended cordially and, ultimately of all the states which were invited to participate in my survey, Western Australia provided the most responses. Having said this I am aware that my research could have been seriously hampered if our telephone conversation did not end positively. My survey findings (Australia wide) indicate that a

overlooked. The complexities of women’s lives are not adequately explored (Plummer 2001:250). Lifetime experiences can be ignored (Reinharz 1992:213,244; Maynard 1994:11; Plummer 2001:250). This can leave interviewees feeling irritated and frustrated to the point where they are less likely to respond. This researcher tried to circumvent such problems by inserting some questions which were open-ended (see Appendix 1 at Q43). Answers to these questions made it possible to draw important conclusions. Having done this, however, there were obviously things that I didn’t do or should have done. On implementation of my survey questionnaire I discovered that there was a whole range of factors/circumstances/personal feelings which impacted on the extent to which mothers were willing to respond (Reinharz 1992:244; Plummer 2001: 153). It is to a discussion of some of these factors that I now turn.
number of mothers did not like the questions, the language base and/or terminology, while others were concerned with what could have been added to the questionnaire:

Adoption has life-long consequences......what has been the long-term effects of adoption to all involved?....how has this event affected your life, the child’s life, the natural father’s life, future relationships etc. !!!!!
(a mother from regional Queensland in response to ‘Is there anything I have overlooked in this questionnaire?’; see Appendix 1)

I do not see the adopted person in this schema.
(a Brisbane mother in response to the questionnaire at page 11; see Appendix 1)

You haven’t looked at the way we were physically treated by the medical staff......I am now a registered nurse and would dearly love to sue my doctors....I recall clearly many hours of labour alone followed by an epidural, then seeing both doctors having turns with a foot on the end of the bed and high forceps, trying to pull a 10lb baby out of a 5ft tall young girl ......consequently my son was very distressed at birth and I had no bowel control for 6 months after the birth until I had bowel surgery and was in hospital for a month (at age 16) ......I then had to have caesarian section for fear of ruining the previous work......also I had an amniocentesis at 39 weeks (which I was not warned of the risks) with many medical students standing around the bed watching.
(a Queensland mother in response to the questionnaire at page 11; see Appendix 1)

3.4.3 Differences in status or positionality of participants

Differences in status or positionality influence the extent to which mothers are likely to respond. For example, I have noticed that rapid and often more informative replies come from those women who are already empowered or are on the way to being more empowered (either by way of occupational status and/or satisfaction, marital status or a good relationship with the child who was lost to adoption). For example, two very open replies came from very well-educated mothers. Perhaps knowing the difficulties associated with researching hastened their willingness to assist me:

I am happy to provide further advice by phone. I was a leader of a support group in New South Wales for ten years and a prime mover in getting New South Wales adoption law amended.
(a Sydney mother in response to the question at page 11 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
I am completing my research this year on this topic.....I would be happy to give extra feedback if you want it.....academic to academic......mother to mother......I am happy you are doing this and hope many more mums also do it.....good luck and my best wishes.

(a Sydney mother in response to the question at page 11 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

On the other hand, the disempowered are less likely to respond and this is compounded where loyalty to a group or group leader is marked, or where the mother is experiencing family difficulties or is socially isolated in comparison to other mothers. For example, often the mothers will have difficulties with their husbands, whether or not he is the natural father of the child lost to adoption (Stiffler 1991:252). One rural Queensland mother informed me of this trouble not only with her husband but their two other children as well:

My other daughter who is now 36 criticises me all the time saying “why did you give away my sister?”......we have had a reunion with our daughter but it was not that successful......and so now we are both receiving counselling.......my husband doesn’t really like people knowing about this.....he doesn’t really like talking about it at all.

(Interviewee 9, Sunshine Coast, 1999)

Whilst this Queensland mother (from a relatively isolated community) confided this and a great deal of other information to me over the phone, she failed to return the questionnaire.

3.4.4 A non-conducive social climate

The social climate is different now from what it was 20 years ago when Winkler and van Keppel released their findings (1984:35-73). Twenty years ago some mothers found that for the first time they could actually open up and talk about what previously was in many instances a secret. Now with the completion of two inquiries, many mothers are now much more wary as to why questions are being asked. They want to know “Who is doing this?” (Wolf 1996:5,6). “What is this research for?” “How is this going to affect me personally as a mother who had my baby adopted?” “How is this going to affect mothers collectively?” “Is this research going to help contemporary women who find themselves in the same situation, that is, pregnant and without support, or is it further ammunition for those groups (sectional interests) who, historically, have sought to denigrate dissident or marginal groups such as single mothers?” (Kellehear 1993:12; Wardhaugh 1992:241). The mothers in this study, individually and collectively, report themselves as now very much more politically aware. Many are organised and some are militant.
3.4.5 Mistrust of academics

In a similar vein, mistrust of academics can inhibit the response rate (Mies 1983:137; Holland and Ramazanoglu 1983:136). This was indicated to me when a mother from Sydney rang after receiving a questionnaire from a Queensland colleague. Her express purpose in ringing me was to ‘find out a little about me before filling out the questionnaire’ (Interviewee 23, Sydney, 1999). Experiential researchers have the advantage of being exposed to their interviewees, thus enabling them to develop trust, which is so crucial to the research outcome (Wolf 1996:10; Reinharz 1992:259). Confronted by distance, feminists reliant on the survey questionnaire are at a distinct disadvantage. In this situation the survey response rate can be very much dependent on a third party. For instance, initially my questionnaires were not well received in Sydney. This did improve. However, only because of the intervention of my Queensland colleague who is well known to and therefore better able to gain the trust of the women in Sydney. My colleague is a social activist in the area of adoption reform; she is not an academic.

3.4.6 Very withdrawn mothers are not likely to reply

Sites (1973) maintains that withdrawal strategies are used by people in situations where continued involvement is not paying off, in terms of anticipated rewards or where their safety is threatened. While he points out that many religious groups, for example, Jews, have used this withdrawal tactic under conditions of persecution, his ideas can also be applied to the mothers under investigation in this study. For instance, by withdrawing or completely avoiding places, situations and people who have been largely unsympathetic, uncaring and unhelpful, it could be argued that the mothers in this study are in a sense protecting themselves from the hostile social environment that they have come to expect (Sites 1973:164; Wardhaugh 1992:241). Under severe stress where the individual is unable to control by other means what she/he has come to anticipate, withdrawal may be the only possible means of escape, as these statements indicate:

Carolyn [name fictitious] is housebound......the trauma of losing her son has taken every last bit of her confidence so that if she goes anywhere she has to be taken by either her husband or someone else......she does not have the confidence to go by herself........she can’t just catch a train and meet you somewhere......her mind, her creativity, her capacity for doing things has been robbed by her adoption experience........she has been completely immobilised.
My sister had a baby at a time when it was completely unacceptable to have a baby outside of marriage......the father of her baby (who was good to her and whom she later married and is still married to) was a seaman and so of necessity was away a lot......the authorities took the baby from her......said she couldn’t manage......due to the shame and stigma she has never confided any of this to her own sister.....I know about this because of other sources within the family......anyway with each passing year my sister grows more and more reclusive.......she will not go out, not even to get the groceries......she will not mix......she won’t talk now to anyone, not even family......there is just her and her husband (the father of her lost baby), an absolutely beautiful home and this HUGE brick fence.

(Interviewee 18, 10 October 1999)

3.4.7 Trauma has its impact

The pain and grief associated with losing one’s child to adoption is something which until comparatively recently has been overlooked by the authorities and those responsible for the ‘care’ of unmarried mothers. In the last decades publications such as *The Primal Wound* (1993) by Nancy Verrier and *Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief* (2000) by Evelyn Robinson (a birthmother), have made explicit the very real pain experienced by unmarried mothers and it is beginning to be recognised (Verrier 1993:108,109; Robinson 2000:170) (see also Chapter 3). Before embarking on this research I had considered that adoption could cause such acute grief in some mothers that they might become totally alienated in many ways from their environment. Consequently, when seeking permission to interview the mothers and when drawing up the questionnaire, I did take this into consideration. I made a point of suggesting to mothers that they do not have to respond, or, if they do, it need only be a partial response. My intuitive judgement on this matter turned out to be correct. On receiving the questionnaire, one of the mothers from Perth (who did return it) rang me and in the course of the conversation let it be known that “there are thousands upon thousands of women in this country who are so traumatised by what happened to them that they can’t even attempt to think about filling out the questionnaire let alone put actual pen to paper” (Interviewee 17, Perth, 1999). The following statements here (and in Chapter 3) provide further insight into this trauma:
There has been an awful amount of crying........it is very traumatic for them.....the information that has come through to me is that the women have found it extremely difficult to fill out the questionnaire because they have had to bring back memories......things which are just too traumatic to want to deal with.....you have to realise that these are women who have had their trust in those who they thought they could trust completely and utterly shattered.......if you were brought up in an environment which says that the priests, the nuns, the doctors, the nurses, your very parents are the most wonderful, kind, good and loving people who would never do anything to hurt you, how can you ever possibly trust anyone again when the very people you were led to believe you could trust abandoned you?

(Interviewee 2, Brisbane, 1999)

What we are dealing with here is women who have had their babies taken from them, not temporarily, not for just a little while, but permanently, that is, forever, never to be seen again.....while some mothers after perhaps twenty or thirty years do find their children, many, many women are never able to do this......it takes enormous effort, time, money and other resources to locate your child/children......due to the shame and social stigma associated with 'illegitimate' pregnancy, most women are not helped by family to do this.

(Interviewee 2, Jigsaw, Brisbane, 1999)

I know of a birth mum who I wish would fill in the questionnaire for you......she has been through so much...she has just so much to tell...but she never will...I concede that...she is simply too traumatised!.

(Interviewee 17, Sunshine Coast, 5 August 1999)

3.5 The sample

The sample was selected through organisations and distributed snowball fashion (Babbie in Cooke 1999:52). It is self-selectivism and therefore not random. It can be said to be representational of those women who responded. However, as indicated in the previous section, there are birth mothers who are not represented. Consequently, this research, while limited by this parameter in its generalisations, is rich in the voices of the birth mothers who did respond.

Two hundred questionnaires were distributed Australia-wide in July 1999. Whilst the first batch of 70 went to Sydney with a mother who is also a social activist on the issue of adoption reform, the remaining 130 were mailed out to contact groups in every capital city in the country, excluding Darwin and Canberra. Further questionnaires were distributed in
regional Queensland. As a Queensland researcher working closely with natural mothers in Brisbane, it was relatively easy to make contact with organisations in country Queensland. Whilst successful in accessing these regional organisations, however, it was not necessarily the case that regional Queensland mothers were willing to participate. As in other states, the response rate from country Queensland was not at all high. Initially, there was no response from Tasmania, though this did change. Not only was the feedback I received from administrators in Hobart very encouraging, but the response rate from mothers was as well.

In order to make contact with mothers in all states I wrote to (and in some cases telephoned) administrators of organisations such as Jigsaw and Origins. Often colleagues from here in Queensland would be meeting with mothers and administrators of these organisations for conferences and other meetings. Hence in some instances these colleagues/associates would inform the people concerned of my interests and my intentions. On other occasions my attempts at making contact were left completely up to me. I must admit that as an ‘outsider’, there were numerous occasions during the research process when I was very anxious that I might not receive a large enough response. In the final analysis, however, these fears proved to be unfounded. From the 200 questionnaires which were distributed nationally, I received a total of 68. For a state-by-state breakdown of this return rate see Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian state/territory</th>
<th>Number of questionnaires returned</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>South Australia</td>
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<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For some purposes the sample size can be argued to be inadequate (Smart 1976:83; DeVault and Ingraham 1999:177). The sample also is non-representative because it is too reliant on birth parents involved in adoption and parental rights organisations such as Jigsaw and Origins. These individuals comprise a selective, possibly non-representational sample because they either have decided to involve themselves in these organisations and/or have personal adjustment problems anyway (Glidden 1994:197; Jordan 1997:303). I attempted to reach a broader cross-section of interviewees but this proved untenable. For instance, I suggested to an associate (a birthmother) that I place advertisements in the major newspapers and women’s magazines interstate. She quickly informed me of the dangers of doing so: “You cannot be sure that the person/s responding will be bona fide women. They could be anyone making contact for want of something better to do – be alert to malicious intent” (Interviewee 5, Brisbane, 1999).

Others may suggest that this research is non-representative because I have only interviewed birthmothers – not officialdom (DeVault and Ingraham 1999:177). Social workers, members of the medical profession, clergy and others who played an administrative role at the time have not been interviewed. These people have not been given a forum in this thesis (Tannen 2000:41; Duffy 2000:6). I would like to stress that administrative personnel (state agents) have already had their forum and that is precisely the reason for writing my thesis. Compared to adoptive parents and the administrative staff (state agents) catering to them, birthmothers have been neglected. In the past, birthparents, and particularly birthmothers, were completely shut out of any discussion as to what was to happen to them and their babies (McAdoo 1992:19,20) (see Chapter 5). This thesis is but one attempt to give severely marginalised women a voice (Spender in Mitchell and Oakley 1986:216; De Vault 1999: 47,161,162; Johnston and Pihama 1994:91; Plummer 2001: 13,90,91; Babst 1997:152,153).

3.6 Confidentiality and ethical clearance

Because of the highly sensitive and controversial nature of my research topic, research ethics were assiduously adhered to at all times. I sought permission from the President of Jigsaw Brisbane and from leaders of similarly affiliated organisations throughout Australia and was granted access to the women for interviews. I insisted that the women were free to
choose whether or not they wished to be interviewed. Those who chose to fill out the mailed questionnaire could cease doing so at any time. They were free to change their mind.

The need to observe the confidentiality of all respondents was ever present in my mind (Wolf 1996:1). The numerous quotes that I have included throughout this thesis and any related publications have been carefully vetted in such a way that the respondents are assured of anonymity and thus assured of protection (Marshall 1983:113). Because this thesis is heavily reliant on qualitative data, I was bound by the necessary research protocols which insist that the interviewees freely give their consent to be interviewed and that their personal rights to privacy are protected at all times. As this study is to be presented for my PhD thesis, these protocols were followed; consequently I give my guarantee that this work has met the highest standards of accuracy and confidentiality.

3.7 Conclusion

In this study of the perceptions, memories and lived experience of a sample of birth mothers about birthing, adoption and the ensuing consequences, a number of important methodological decisions were made. Whilst not wishing to negate the importance of earlier research methods, most notably, the survey questionnaire (Pahl in Bell and Newby 1977:146), in this chapter I emphasise the importance of feminist experiential analysis. Hence this chapter has argued the case for the use of multi-method research. Techniques employed in combination have much to add to our stocks of knowledge (Reinharz 1992:213; Maynard and Purvis 1994:3). There are those who argue that the more innovative feminist research methods are not rigorous, not academic and therefore ought not be given credibility (Smart 1976:83; DeVault and Ingraham 1992:177; Holland and Ramazanoglu 1983:126; Nussbaum 1999:214; Cheung 1994:63; Denzin and Lincoln 2001:8). In this chapter I have shown that, on the contrary, qualitative in-depth interviewing and observation can show up the sterility and uni-dimensionality of social statistics. In this way feminist experiential analysis has much to add to the knowledge base.

Although when used alone feminist experiential methods can have as many problems as any other method used on its own, this form of analysis can also make a rich contribution. Perhaps its greatest strength is that feminist experiential analysis offers the unique
opportunity to make the silent past accessible to researchers of the present. The experiential researcher is able to enter places, see and listen to people, experience events, happenings and interactions as they occur/unfold – something that the more conventional research methods have not been concerned with and/or have not wished to do (Harding 1995:124,125; Stone 2000:4; Fernandes 2003:79-99). In this chapter I have sought to explain the triangulation research techniques involved in gathering data. The next chapter reports the findings obtained from the research. The hypotheses are tested against the evidence and arguments are made from these.
4. Chapter 3

Results of the survey questionnaire and personal interviews

4.1 Introduction

Historically, social researchers, social workers, mental health professionals and members of the federal and state legislatures (most of whom are drawn from the middle class) have had a profound influence on social policy initiatives (Reiger 1985:211,212; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980:494-495). Because these people hold powerful mainstream positions as creators and arbiters of knowledge, their understanding of adoption has had a particular influence on the way in which it is presented and represented, both theoretically and in practice (Delany 1997:129; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980:494-495). Utilising different concepts and methods, this thesis tests the traditional or mainstream view that adoption is a benign and benevolent institution – a service provided for women who wish to be free of their ‘encumbrance’. This thesis asks whether mothers wanted to keep their babies. Was the separation forced and, if so, what was/is the human impact of this removal? Much of the mainstream literature refers to unmarried mothers as either irresponsible and feckless or not really ‘deserving’ of their children (see Chapter 1). A common perception, held by many people, is that unmarried mothers willingly placed their babies for adoption in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in Australia. This thesis explores the possibility that this was not the case and it effectively expands the stolen children debate to look at the plight of working class, white women and their claim that coercive methods were used against them and their babies.

In the previous chapter I referred to the research methods used to gauge this. There I argued that the survey questionnaire, in combination with personal interviews as case studies, was an important means of exploring the perceptions and memories of a sample of birthmothers about their personal experiences of adoption and its aftermath. There I also argued that although personal interviewing conducted during feminist fieldwork can provide an innovative and far more comprehensive coverage of what actually happened to the women under investigation in this thesis, the thesis also borrows from the more traditional methods which rely on deductive logic. In order to arrive at some conclusions
one needs to have tested data as proposed by previous literature. In this chapter I test several sub-hypotheses in order to draw some conclusions.

The chapter is divided into four sections: the first section questions the mothers as to whether or not they were pressured by family and society into relinquishing their babies; in the second section I explore whether the removals represent a class redistribution (that is, a class-based disregard for ‘unworthy’, working-class mothers); in the third section I compare my findings with some of those of the indigenous stolen generation in Australia; and the fourth section is concerned with the universal effects of past adoption practices – this section enables the reader to glimpse a hidden chapter in Australian history and culture: the personal pain and vulnerability experienced by white unwed mothers (Croft 1997:538; Rosebrock 2000:30).

The four hypotheses are:

- White unmarried mothers wanted to keep their babies but were coerced into surrendering them by state and society intent on upholding nuclear family values.

- White babies were taken from their working-class mothers and placed in middle-class families because it was less costly for the Australian state if the children taken from unmarried mothers were given to adoptive couples who were well-established and therefore unlikely to call on funds for housing, income and other social assistance; white babies were taken from their working-class mothers and placed in middle-class families because of the commonly held belief that they would be more likely to be well adjusted if placed in ‘nicer homes’.

- The removal of white babies is comparable with the indigenous stolen children in that both shared to some extent a working-class background; also the unwed, dependent status of both black and white mothers provided a rationale for removal by the state.

- Most mothers, irrespective of race or geographic location (urban and rural) were adversely affected emotionally as a result of the forced adoption of their babies; white unwed mothers felt betrayed and humiliated by their partners, families and trusted institutional representatives.
4.2 Hypothesis 1: Coercion involved with decision-making

A fundamental question of this thesis is whether unmarried mothers in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s wanted to keep their babies but were not allowed to. The data from the samples suggest that parents, professional ‘experts’ and society at large left the mothers no options but adoption. Natural mothers had no power or control over what was to happen to them or their babies. They had little or no voice in the decision-making process. They had none of the crucial social and economic supports that would enable them to keep their babies. (For a detailed discussion of the coercion experienced by these women in mid-twentieth century Australia, see Chapters 4 and 5.) In order to test this hypothesis, in the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) I asked:

*Did you want to keep your baby?*

Of the 68 mothers who responded to my questionnaire, 58 stated unequivocally that they wanted to keep their baby, and four stated that they did not want to keep their baby. Six of the mothers were at the time of this study ‘not sure’ whether they had wanted to keep their babies. Of the 58 who responded with a ‘yes’, one stated, “quite an irrelevant question I think.....all mothers wanted to keep their babies” (see Table 3).

*Table 3 Did you want to keep your baby?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>‘not sure’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(68 mothers responded to Question 4)

Another, although ticking the ‘yes’ box, indicated “I was not sure what to do – I did not have many options”; another ticked both the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ boxes, thus indicating lack of social and familial support, lack of options, the economic and emotional stress surrounding ‘out-of-wedlock’ pregnancy. Of the four who responded with a ‘no’, one stated, “I was so frightened I didn't know what to do” (a Brisbane mother); another placed “???” alongside the ‘no’ box (a Western Australian mother; the natural father was not an Australian citizen); the remaining two revealed the extent of social influence upon their decision in
their comments: “because I had decided that adoption was best for my child after strong family and counsellor pressure” and “my situation and location was hush hush” (a Victorian mother at Questions 19, 33 and 39 of the questionnaire); and “at the time of adoption I believed that my child was better off without me.....I now know that the biggest mistake of my life was believing that someone else should raise my son” (a Queensland mother at Questions 16 and 43).

Of the six mothers who indicated they were ‘not sure’, one did not place a tick in either box, and nothing was written (a Sydney mother at Question 4); one did not place a tick in either box, however a question mark was placed on each (a Queensland mother at Question 4); one did not place a tick in either box; the natural father was in jail (a Queensland mother at Questions 4 and 16); one did not place a tick in either box, nothing was written and the natural father was under 21 (a Western Australian mother at Questions 4 and 9); one did not place a tick in either box but remarked “unable to answer....issues very complex” (South Australian mother at Question 4; see Appendix 1); one did not place a tick in either box but instead placed a question mark in between the two – this mother was very young, the natural father was much older than most of the other fathers, that is, he was older than 49, retired and in jail (presumably on a charge of indecent dealings with a minor) (a Queensland mother at Questions 4, 8, 9 and 16; see Appendix 1).

According to the data provided by the sample of interviewees, the mothers were influenced by, although some would say coerced, by state and society into relinquishing their babies. To reiterate, of the 68 mothers who returned the questionnaire, 58 responded in the affirmative that they did want to keep their babies. Only four indicated that they did not wish to do so. Six of the mothers were ‘not sure’ what to do. According to the evidence provided by these mothers, they did not willingly place their babies for adoption. They felt they had no other choices at the time. Whether or not the coercion experienced by these women was deliberate policy from the adoption agency perspective remains debatable. This was not addressed in this thesis. The researcher was only interested in the perceptions and memories of birthmothers. This section has sought to ask whether coercion did occur and it is confirmed. In the next section I test whether or not this coercion represents a class redistribution.
4.3 Hypothesis 2: A class redistribution?

A major question posed by this thesis is whether babies were taken from the poor and allocated to more wealthy, middle-class parents. Were white working-class babies taken from their families of origin and placed in the homes of the white middle class where there were two parents and a sizeable income, thus saving the Australian state from providing financial outlays to otherwise destitute and dependent unwed women? In order to gauge this, at Question 7 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) I asked the mothers:

*At the time your baby was relinquished to adoption which class background did you identify with?* (see Table 2)

At Questions 40 and 41 of the questionnaire I ask the mothers:

*Please tick relevant box for adoptive mother’s occupation*

and

*Please tick relevant box for adoptive father’s occupation* (see Appendix 1).

Of the 68 mothers who responded to the questionnaire, 47 indicated at Question 7 that they identified with the working class; 21 indicated that they were from the middle class (see Table 4). Furthermore, of the 68 who responded, 43 indicated at Questions 40 and 41 that the adoptive family was middle class; only 16 indicated that the adoptive family belonged to the working class; nine did not indicate either way (see Table 5). For instance, of the nine who did not provide a definite answer, five wrote ‘don’t know’ at these questions indicating perhaps that they have not been able to find out because they have yet to have a reunion; one did not know the adoptive parents’ occupations but was aware of her child’s professional status; one stated that she did not know because her son does not want contact; one did not know about the adoptive parents but her child is now a tradesperson/labourer; one indicated that the adoptive father is retired and was unaware of his previous professional/work status.

*Table 4  Class background reported by mothers at the time of giving birth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working class</th>
<th>Middle class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(68 mothers responded to Question 7)
Table 5  Reported class background of adoptive parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working class</th>
<th>Middle class</th>
<th>‘don’t know’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(68 mothers responded to Questions 40 and 41)

These figures confirm the contention that the removals represent a class redistribution. One could argue that this evidence is flawed because it is dependent on birthmothers’ memories about their class position at the time of giving birth, and that it is dependent on adequate reporting. For instance, adoptive parents were not interviewed as to which social class they identified with at that time. Again this thesis is a test of birthmothers’ perceptions and memories of adoption as experience, process and life consequence. This thesis tests primary evidence provided by birthmothers. These mothers took part in personal interviews and/or responded to the survey questionnaire. One could do an analysis of records provided by administrators and others who worked in the adoption agencies, the homes and/or hospitals at the time. However these records are secondary sources and much of this evidence indicates that adoption was an option for those with the resources, that is, adoptive parents (Delany 1997:132-135).

In this section I have sought to confirm that the removals represent a class redistribution. In the following section I compare my findings on the white stolen generation with those of the indigenous stolen children. This will involve an examination of the impact of state policies on both populations, as well as the financial and other reasons underlying the removals.

11 The issue of recovered memories is a highly controversial one. Based on clinical and research evidence it can be argued that memory is to some degree socially constructed over time. These constructions are formed on information coming from within (recalled material, flashbacks etc.) and without (accounts shared in conversation, suggested by an authority, read in a magazine or diary etc.). Memories are ongoing constructions of past events. Hence, there is room for both accurate and inaccurate reporting (Crowley 2000:85,86).
4.4 Hypothesis 3: Black/white similarities; black/white differences

A third hypothesis of this thesis is that the removal of white children is comparable in small part with the removals which occurred within the indigenous community. I have established above that the removal of white children represents a class redistribution. According to my sample of white interviewees (birthmothers), white working-class babies were taken and placed in the homes of the white middle-class. The data from this source also confirms that these removals were forced. Whilst Chapter 5 scrutinises the coercive measures employed by state agents to complete this removal, at the end of this chapter I document (by way of further primary evidence) the negative impact of such practices on white women. Hence what remains to be examined in this section is just how similar or different the policies of removal were.

There is still little literature asserting that indigenous children in Australia were stolen (for instance, the 1997 National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, Bringing Them Home; Anna Haebich’s 2000 publication Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000). Whilst this literature provides some parallels to my study – for instance, the pain of separation for both the indigenous and white populations – it is not the purpose of my thesis (or indeed my area of expertise) to document that which has already been researched and written about by indigenous and other scholars.

In the section which follows I compare, in a limited fashion, my findings on the white stolen generation with those of the indigenous population. Whilst this involves an examination of the main motivations and assumptions underlying the removals, it also involves an assessment of the human impact of past policies – an assessment made possible because of the answers provided by the mothers in this thesis as well as information from other academic sources. As will be seen, just as there are considerable points of difference, there are also several points of similarity.

Indigenous children have been forcibly removed from their families and communities since the very first days of the European occupation of Australia. The separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families began as early as 1885 in Victoria and New South Wales and continued in some Australian states into the 1970s. In the 1980s indigenous children's institutions were still operating (Jopson 1999:5). Children were taken
under government policies of protection and assimilation, with the objective of having indigenous people adopt European culture and behaviour, to the exclusion of their family and traditional background. The assimilation policy presumed that, over time, indigenous people would die out, or be so mixed with the European population that they would become indistinguishable. For indigenous children, the assimilation policy meant that “you will know, you will become educated, and you will be accelerated in the virtues of becoming a white person. You will be denied your aboriginal culture, your heritage, your language, and you will live, and you will act, and you will do as white people do in this country”. Aboriginal children were put into dormitories from a very early age and trained for work as domestics or stockmen to be farmed out to the pastoralists, police officers and other government officials who requested the services of a maid or someone to help them with their stockwork (Huggins 1997:48,49; Holden 1996:22; Montgomery 1997:6). The dormitories where the children were housed served as agencies for such recruitment. In the process, traditional family relationships within the indigenous community were totally severed and many indigenous people have suffered as a consequence (Huggins 1997:48,49).

Huggins (1998) argues that this separation of indigenous children from their families was allowed to happen because of a basic disrespect and dislike for indigenous women who from the earliest days of white settlement were positioned as inferiors to be despised and feared (1998:132-135; see also Stevens 1980:57; Ruddick 1989-1990:8-11; Bhattacharyya 1998:139). Like their white counterparts, indigenous women were not taken seriously by the rest of society (Gare 2000:20; McGregor 2000:19; Laurie 1999:22; France 2001:89; Thekaekara 1997:35; Seitz 2000:91). Moreton-Robinson (1998) argues that like white unmarried mothers who were deemed promiscuous and therefore ‘unfit’ to mother, indigenous women were typecast as ‘whores’ whose promiscuity was assumed (1998:106; see also Morrison et al. 1999:89,90; Stevens 1980:52; Maushart 1993:343; Smith 1999:6; Harkness 1991:15; Beresford and Omaji 1998:35). They were seen as sexually available and alluring (Broome 1994:25; Evans 1999: 206; Tonkinson 1990:132,134). This then condemned them to maltreatment by others who saw them as non-persons who were expendable (Sykes in Caine et al. 1998:152; Hunt 1986:104,117; Evans 1999:206,207,209; Elder 1988:111,112). Because it was assumed that indigenous mothers had no feelings for their children, this enabled the white colonisers to justify the stealing of their children
(Moreton-Robinson 1998:10; Ruddick 1989-1990:11) and enabled the white middle-class legislators to deny indigenous women the right to protect, rear and take part in any of the decisions affecting their children (Evans 1999:165,179). As in the case of the white stolen generation, custodial decisions were made by those in high places who thought (or rather assumed) they knew what was ‘in the child’s best interest’ (Huggins 1998:103; Brunton 1997:13; Pearson 1996:13; Tonkinson 1990:143). Male, middle-class legislators were loath to consider anything beyond the white two parent nuclear family as the norm (Wellfare 1997:356).

Aboriginal family structure – where the child already had a mother and father and was often nurtured in a warm environment by various kin – was given no formal recognition (McGrath 1987:93; Lewis and Slade 1994:156). This non-recognition by the white authorities paved the way for the theft and exploitation of indigenous children (Evans 1999:192). Race and the need to contain or control black female sexuality whilst simultaneously acculturating her children in the ‘virtues’ of white ways were the primary motivations underlying the removal of indigenous children (Beresford and Omaji 1998:34,35). However, class was the determining factor in the removal of white babies, as well as the need to punish and control the sexuality of young, white working-class women (Vincent 1961:199; Barbalet 1983:219; Craig 1997:230,231; Wellfare 1997:360; Harkness 1991:20).

As in the case of indigenous women it was assumed that the children of white unwed mothers would be better off away from their natural mothers (Gunn and Windsor 1996:3; Brown 1996:7; Neill 1997:15; The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Task Force on Violence Report 1999:78). Instead of looking at and trying to implement changes which would enhance the young unwed woman’s material circumstances, it was much easier for the authorities to just “ignore, overlook...... separate” (Interviewee 16, Brisbane 1996; Sweetman 1997:1; Guillatt 1999:23; Morrison et al. 1999:71; Montgomery 1999:5; Gaita 1997:24; Stevens 1980:64; Barbalet 1983:220; Haebich 2000:335).

In turn this separation (of both black and white children) often amounted to coercion by stealth (Moriarty and McHugh 2000:19; Olsson 2002:17; Lindsay 1997:241; see Chapter 5 for a lengthy discussion of the coercion experienced by white unmarried mothers in mid-twentieth century Australia). For example, in one instance a young indigenous mother of a three-week-old baby was told by the authorities that her baby and hut were ‘dirty’ and had
to be cleaned up and that she must get a cot instead of lying with the baby on a mattress on the floor. No more was heard until the mother was informed by the mission superintendent and local police that the Chief Protector had ordered that she take her baby to hospital in Adelaide as he was ‘dirty and neglected’ and sick. Despite the family’s protests, mother and baby were put on the train to Adelaide where on arrival the baby was declared a ward of the state. Prior to this occurring there was only one visit by those in authority. The bed had been purchased as requested. No one ever came to see that, but they did come to drag the baby away (Haebich 2000:320; Sutherland 1997:1; Montgomery1999:5; Broome 1994:35; Scutt 1990:329).

Indigenous children were not only taken as babies; they were often taken from their parents when they were older and could be put to work or put into institutions to be educated in white ways. For example, at the age of ten, all Yarrabah children were transferred from the camp to the dormitory to ensure regular school attendance and to “prevent the camp natives taking them off at all hours for corroborees” (Haebich 2000:375). To ensure compliance, those indigenous parents who resisted were denied rations. They were at the mercy of the authorities, who could and did remove their children on any pretext (Haebich 2000:375; Armitage 1994:4; Guilliatt 1999:18; Scutt 1990:261,262). No judicial process was required for removal, and no mechanism for appeal was available (Beresford and Omaji 1996:34; Kidd 2000:9).

Many of the indigenous stolen generation were removed as children for reasons related to race and culture rather than the children’s wellbeing (as is often supposed) (Kidd 2000:5,7). Although the indigenous child’s mother’s unmarried status was problematic to white authorities, in indigenous culture, illegitimacy was not the issue that it was in white society (see further discussion of this point below) (Cowan 1992: 96-99; Rawady 1997:398). The parallel removal of white children involved taking babies at birth or very soon after when their mothers were still heavily sedated and in no fit state to sign a consent to adoption (Wellfare 1997:17). Most white unmarried mothers were placed under extreme pressure to sign this consent (see Chapter 5). Unlike indigenous culture, where illegitimacy in the European sense is practically impossible since the child is always welcome and not shunned, in white society in the mid-twentieth century up until the early 1970s, unwed motherhood was heavily sanctioned (Edgar 1998:29; Saunders 1998:3; Gittins 1993:106). Illegitimacy was a major issue which the authorities wished to keep “hidden and hush
hush” (a Tasmanian mother at Question 43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1; see also Chapter 5). In fact one could argue that when compared to mothers in other highly industrialised nations at the time, white unwed mothers in Australia were subject to some of the harshest legislative and policy responses towards ex-nuptial pregnancy to be seen anywhere in the western world.

This becomes more readily apparent if one compares adoption statistics in Australia with those of other English speaking countries during the same period. To illustrate this point, in England following World War II, the adoption rate never rose above 25 per cent of illegitimate births, but in Australia the post-war rate rarely fell below 60 per cent. Furthermore, Swain and Howe’s study of white Australian children separated from their mothers in the years 1940-1975 showed that of these, 76.7 per cent were separated by adoption; 97 per cent of these before three months of age (Swain and Howe 1995:152,146; Rawady 1997:399).

Reverting to the comparison between the treatment of indigenous and non-indigenous stolen children in Australia, although governmental aims were the same (that is, the contemptuous disregard for the mental and social health of marginalised working class and ethnic minority or non-white women), indigenous women were not made to feel the social shame or stigma from their own people that non-indigenous women in Australia were made to feel about their unwed status. In indigenous culture, which emphasises collective care rather than self-help, attitudes to paternity, pregnancy and childbirth are markedly different from those of white society (where paternal inheritance is a major driving force behind adoption). In indigenous culture the young, indigenous unwed mother and child is automatically cared for by the kinship group. Her sisters, her own mother, aunties and male relatives assist in childcare and associated responsibilities (Moreton-Robinson 1998:17; Berndt and Tonkinson 1988:56). In indigenous culture, women and particularly mothers (all mothers) can expect a degree of respect not found in white society (Moriarty and McHugh 2000:88; Keen 1988:80,95,105,107; Cowan 1992:53; Lewis and Slade 1994:154; Brock 1989:xxii; Cowan 1992:98,102; Cosic 1999:11; Wynhausen 1998:20; Brock 1989:xxi; Field 1992:235; Bassnett 1986:49; Lester 1996:151-154; Jordan 1997:296; Kitzinger 1993:5).

Whilst both black and white women had their babies stolen, in white society the unmarried woman’s family was often (but by no means always) instrumental in the removal
process, acting out of social shame, embarrassment and anxiety about ‘what will the neighbours say?’ (Harkness 1991:41; see Chapter 5). By comparison, in indigenous culture where the term ‘illegitimate’ does not actually exist in their vocabulary, this category and the status attached to it did not attract the same disfavour, stigmatisation and social ostracism from group members that it did in the West (Haebich 2000:549; Tatz 2001:127).

Having said this, it is not my intention to deny in any way the seriousness of removing indigenous children from their mothers and families of origin. The removals had deleterious consequences for both populations (black and white). Pain and grief are human emotions which are as intense as they are universal (Morgan 1987:249; Wells 1993:30-32; Winkler and van Keppel 1984:10-13; Bloch Jones 1993:74,104,105; Seitz 2000:275). They can never be quantified in terms of one’s race, ethnicity or culture (Winkler and van Keppel 1984:10-13; Sweetman 1997:1; Riben 1988:40; see discussion below; see also documentary, anecdotal and other evidence from white Australian birthmothers at the end of this chapter).

Illegitimacy in the indigenous population (in which black female-headed households sometimes predominated) was seen as problematic only to white administrators (Kitzinger 1993:24). As in the case of white unwed motherhood, the perceived lack of a male head was seen as justification for the removal of many indigenous children by white authorities who failed to recognise the unique and often complex circumstances in which indigenous mothers were mothering (Haebich 2000:487; Tatz 2001:132,133). Natural fathers might be forced to work away from the local campsite or reside under other domestic arrangements (Haebich 2000:513). In the past (and as still occurs today), many indigenous women were exposed to rape by white men (often married) who abused their position (Morgan 1999:22; Sykes in Caine et al. 1998:152; Ruddick 1990:8; Evans 1999:181,207; Haebich 2000:473). Furthermore, indigenous mothers, particularly the parents of half-castes, were routinely declared unsuitable to bring up their children merely because of their Aboriginality, and because their living conditions were not westernised, they were in extended families, they were poor, ill, too young or they spoke languages other than English (Brown 1996:7; Haebich 2000:551; Beresford and Omaji 1998:41,62,63; Read 1983:8,9).

As has been already ascertained, many indigenous children were removed as toddlers or at an older age from local campsites and reserves and placed in white institutions and/or on stations to be trained in readiness for future work as menial labourers – domestics, farm
labourers and the like (Sweetman 1997:1; Beresford and Omaji 1998:263). By comparison, many white working-class babies were transferred within days (or weeks) of birth to the homes of the white middle class where there were two parents, who had a sizeable income, but no children. Moreton-Robinson (1998) states that there are also numerous instances where indigenous children were removed as babies and placed in the homes of the white middle class (1998:17). As in the case of white unmarried mothers who did not wish to part with their babies, consent taking was often an extremely difficult task for administrators seeking consent from indigenous mothers; both black and white women would heavily resist this (Haebich 2000:549; Lindsay 1997:248). Hence indigenous mothers were vulnerable to manipulation and trickery by state agents in much the same way as the white unwed women (Haebich 2000:549-551; Cole 1997:522,523; Laurie 2000:15; see Chapter 5). The risk of manipulation increased where the women were very young, were unaware of their parental rights and were without any other means of social and economic support (Haebich 2000:549-551).

Some commentators are of the opinion that the removals were beneficial for both black and white children and in many instances this cannot be denied (Price 2000:24; Sutherland 1997:7; Hajal and Rosenberg 1991:84). Nevertheless there is by now a considerable weight of evidence to suggest that this was not always the case and sometimes the opposite was happening (Beresford and Omaji 1996:25,35; Robinson 2000:46; Riben 1988:48). Whilst many indigenous children suffered physical, sexual and/or psychological abuse as a result of the separation from their natural mothers, extended families and culture, there is also evidence that white children suffered similar abuses (The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Task Force on Violence Report 1999:203,238,239; Haebich 2000:211,431; Huggins 1997:49; Tatz 2001:135; Jopson 1997:38; Sutherland 1997:7; Wenham 2002:27; Riben 1988:48). This in turn is not unrelated to some of the more complex but often misunderstood reasons for procuring the child in the first place (McWhinnie 1967:259-269; Miles 1994:32,33).

For instance, both Toussieng (1962) and Rickarby (1978) infer in their writings that in the past many white babies were taken on the pretext that they would help cement a shaky marriage. Since it was mostly wives who initiated the adoption and not their husbands, many of these marriages disintegrated anyway (1962:59,62,65; see also Rickarby 1978:24; Riben 1988:49). If they did not disintegrate, the family which was left intact was a very
dysfunctional family, and one in which the child (adoptive) could become the target of emotional, physical and sexual abuse by one or both parents and/or other siblings (see evidence from an adoptee, who is also a birthmother, below; Interviewee 16, Brisbane, 1999; Hajal and Rosenberg 1991:82,83; Riben 1988:49; Miles 1994:73; Wiehe 1997:33-85). Adoption was promoted in the media and elsewhere at the time as providing the ‘unwanted’ child with the opportunity for an ideal life (Wellfare in Benson et al. 1997:365). Ensconced amid material bliss, the adopted child would be given a head start in life, would take up opportunities otherwise not provided......would move on to become a model citizen, mother, father, wife, husband (Adams 2002:97). What is often overlooked is that there are no real guarantees on anything anywhere in life (Riben 1988:41). The marriages involving adoptive couples could be as fragile as any other marriages. Consequently the children raised in these marriages were just as vulnerable as the children reared elsewhere (McWhinnie 1967:259-269). Rather than addressing the real issues causing conflict between couples (in many instances, infertility), it was so much easier to just place an order (via adoption agencies) for a baby from a mother (that is, birthmother) who was penniless but fertile (a Brisbane mother at Q43 of the questionnaire, see Appendix 1; Sweet 1999:26-29; Hajal and Rosenberg 1991:78,79; Riben 1988:41).

Adoption was and continues to be promoted as a service for children. However, the issue of who really benefits from closed stranger adoptions is still in question. In a society which at the time was largely unsympathetic to couples who were married but did not have children, children as babies were procured so that the adoptive couples could live out a created reality (Rabuzzi 1994:44; Riben 1988:50). Whilst the babies afforded many infertile couples the opportunity to present to society a veneer of social respectability, social prestige, honour and ‘normality’ (Sweet 1999:26-28; Ribben 1988:51), in so doing the babies themselves were divested of their real personas, their real identities, something which as they grew older would become so very vital to their sense of self and real place in the world (Rickarby and Egan 1980:470-472; Klapp 1969:16,23; Reite et al. 1978:370,371). We often hear about the young people on the streets, the drug takers, those who abuse alcohol, those who have suicided, those who seem to drift aimlessly and with no direction (Schaffner 1999:72-74; Wynhausen 1998:21; Toohey 2000:27). It is so easy for those who are not touched by adoption to judge such persons as moral bankrupts who are personally deficient in some way, troublemakers (Schaffner 1999:80,81; Bessant 1994:38;
Probert 2000:12; Verrier 1997:187). Is it not possible, however, that such persons (young and old) are the lost souls...... the casualties of past adoption practices who are forced to the periphery to live out a non-existence so that others (the married, wealthy and childless) might fulfil theirs? (Interviewee 11, Brisbane, 1998; Genocchio 2000:16,17; Toohey 2000:4; Stewart 1997:13).

In the past children and babies were treated as chattels, commodities, things, to be procured, used and if necessary discarded (McNicoll 1997:6; Dunbar 1998:7; Coles 1999:29; Riben 1988:50-53). However people are not things. People are human beings with strong feelings, emotions, the capacity to give love and receive it (Jackman 1996:9). Where this basic human need to give and receive love is blocked or stifled, many adoptees like their natural mothers feel that they are unable to move forward, unable to participate in and enjoy life as they feel they have a right to (Verrier 1997:186; Adams 2002:18; Riben 1988:58; Humphrey and Ounsted 1964:549; Cole 1997:523). As in the case of many of our indigenous stolen children, many white adoptees (male and female) also come to a point in their lives where they feel they ‘do not belong anywhere’ (a male adoptee, Brisbane, 2002; personal memoirs Interviewee 11; an anonymous letter from an adoptive mother in Origins newsletter 1997:46; Adams 2002:19; Riben 1988:54; Koch 1999:23; Jopson 2000:4; Wilson 1996:17; Beresford and Omaji 1996:41; McCulloch-Uehlin 2001:14; Waria 1997:531; Barbalet 1983:173; Kraus 1982:5,6).

Approximately 40,000 Aboriginal children were removed from their parents and communities from the turn of the twentieth century until the early 1970s (Rawady 1997:398; Sutherland 1997:1). Most indigenous families have been affected in one or more generations by the forced removal of one or more children. Nationally, between one in three and one in ten indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970 (Tatz 2001:33,34). In New South Wales alone, 5,625 children were removed between 1883 and 1969. Of 600 indigenous people surveyed in the Kimberley region of Western Australia during the late 1980s, 25 per cent of elderly people reported having been removed in childhood. One in three of 320 adults surveyed in Bourke in New South Wales reported having been separated from their families in childhood for five or more years. A children’s home in South Australia had records of more than 350 Aboriginal children in the 54 years to 1981 (Australian Bureau of Statistics National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey 1994, cited in Records of Separation 1997:7).
By comparison, since the early years of the twentieth century, almost 300,000 white children have been taken for adoption in Australia. In the ten years from 1963 to 1972 (inclusive) nearly 20,000 adoptions took place in the Australian state of Victoria. This means 20,000 children, 20,000 mothers, 20,000 fathers, 40,000 paternal grandparents and 40,000 maternal grandparents and numerous brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles were affected by adoption in this ten-year period alone (a birthmother’s submission to the Bishops Commission for Justice 1997:3).

In carrying out the removals (black and white), the Australian state at the time argued and indeed mounted a very effective propaganda campaign propagating the view that adoption is in ‘the best interests of the child’ (Haebich 2000:551,552; Wellfare 1997:359). Children (black and white) would be better placed for a better life if taken from their natural mothers and placed elsewhere. Whilst the children would be less likely to turn out delinquent and in turn socially disruptive, it was assumed that their natural mothers would also soon forget and ‘get on with their lives’ (Verrier 1997:182; Beresford and Omaji 1998:67). Whilst the pain associated with the separation of indigenous children from their mothers and families of origin has been documented, there has been little documentation of the pain experienced by white unwed mothers. Towards the end of this chapter I provide evidence of this pain, proving that the ideas implemented by the white, male, middle-class establishment at the time were just that – ideas without any basis in reality. Rather than caring for or looking out for the interests of both natural mother and child, adoption (in theory and in practice) was not concerned with their feelings or their emotions (Croft 1997:538; Luke 1997:537). It was more concerned with the needs of infertile couples who were financially secure (Cole 1997:523; Lindsay 1997:252). Privacy, protection and fulfilling the needs and interests of the adoptive couple, while purporting to care for the unmarried mother and her child were the main reasons behind closed stranger adoption (Seitz 2000:111-113). In a society which valued (and continues to value) fertility within monogamous marriage, adoption provided the married and childless with the opportunity to assume a facade of normality to society as well as their peers (Riben 1988:50). Furthermore, by providing childless couples with children, adoption not only saw the creation of families where there were none, it successfully deflected fear of further costs to the state (Lindsay 1997:252; Read 1983:8,9). In this way adoption not only helped to

This completes the section on black and white similarities and differences. In the next section I provide the primary evidence which confirms the hypothesis that most white unmarried mothers who lost their babies to adoption were adversely affected emotionally. I look at where the mothers gave birth. I also ask the mothers how they felt at the time about the events surrounding the loss of their children to adoption. Did they feel betrayed and/or humiliated by those responsible for taking their babies? Did these feelings arise because of a lack of support from immediate family members (for instance, the birthmother’s parents) and/or her boyfriend and his family?

4.5 Hypothesis 4: A universal practice with universal effects?

It is my contention that all mothers, irrespective of race and geographic location (urban and rural) within Australia, were likely to experience trauma as the result of forced separations from their babies; and white unwed women felt betrayed and humiliated by their boyfriends, families and trusted institutional representatives.

The previous section has already confirmed the negative impact of the removals on indigenous mothers, their children, and their extended families; in this section I am interested in the impact of the removals on white mothers. Is the impact also negative? If so, does this in part reflect feelings of social betrayal and humiliation at not being able to control events surrounding the loss of their children at the time? Did manipulation by state agents occur irrespective of one’s geographic location within Australia?

4.5.1 Place of birth

In order to establish that mothers were vulnerable to manipulation by state agents and that this manipulation could occur Australia wide, at Question 6 of the questionnaire I ask the mothers: Where did you give birth? Of the 68 mothers who responded to my questionnaire, all answered this question. Table 6 provides a breakdown of the urban and rural locations throughout Australia to which the mothers were sent. Whilst these figures confirm that the Australian-born white unwed women were vulnerable to manipulation, irrespective of their location within Australia, note also that some mothers gave birth in locations such as the United Kingdom, Scotland, South Africa and New Zealand. For some
white unwed women, giving birth at ‘secret’ locations in overseas countries was the only option when no support was forthcoming from immediate family, boyfriends or the Australian state. Being forced by family and the fabric of society to hide overseas whilst awaiting the births of their ‘illegitimate’ babies became quite standard practice for some white families (middle class and working class) in an era exhibiting extremely high levels of social shame/stigma (Swain and Howe 1995:69,72; Selman 1996:117-120).

Table 6 Location of birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand (Hastings)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toowoomba</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackay</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Townsville</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launceston</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>68 responses from mothers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses of 68 mothers at Question 6 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) confirm the hypothesis that manipulation/coercion could occur irrespective of one’s
location within Australia (or overseas). The coercion felt by the women in the sample appear to indicate the universal nature of adoption policies and practices at the time. These also seem to suggest that the practices employed by state agents were a western response and one which went across national borders in the period from 1950 to early 1970. These responses seem to confirm the nature of adoption policies and practices at that time.

4.5.2 Extent of humiliation and betrayal

It is my contention that if the mothers were coerced by state and society into relinquishing their babies for adoption, then most who were rendered absolutely powerless would then go on to feel betrayed by state agents as well as those close to them (boyfriends, family of origin); similarly feelings of humiliation at not being able to control the events/outcome (that is, the adoption) would also emerge. In order to gauge whether or not this is the case I ask at Question 39 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1): How do you feel about the events surrounding the relinquishment of your child to adoption? Of the 68 mothers who responded to the questionnaire, 45 indicated that they did feel betrayed, 12 indicated that they did not feel betrayed, 11 did not indicate either way; furthermore, 37 indicated that they felt humiliated, 18 indicated that they did not, 13 did not indicate either way.

These findings point to commonality of experience in both urban and rural locations within Australia, thus confirming the universal nature of adoption practices at the time. Most mothers relinquished their children because they were powerless to do otherwise. As proposed at Hypotheses 1 and 2 (and elaborated in Chapters 4 and 5), most mothers were not informed by state agents of the crucial housing, monetary and other material benefits that they were entitled to. This left the mothers vulnerable to the wishes of state agents who sought the separation of mothers and babies.

Thus far in this section I have found that the mothers were powerless. Feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability were common. According to my sample, most mothers expressed feelings of humiliation and betrayal at not being able to control events surrounding the loss of their children to adoption. Whilst this section has sought to test and confirm my hypothesis that widespread vulnerability occurred because of the universal nature of past policies and practices, the following section examines the human impact.
4.5.3 Pain and suffering as experienced by the mothers

In Australia as in other highly advanced industrialised economies, adoption as an institution is socially sanctioned. Those who possess the resources to create and in turn disseminate knowledge (including the stakeholders involved) have tended towards an overly positive view of adoption (Delany 1997:135). According to this view, most adoptions are highly successful. Adoption provides the opportunity for otherwise ‘unwanted’ children to be reared in ‘harmonious’ circumstances within the two-parent nuclear family unit. Whilst it provides the natural mother with a means to hide ‘her shame’ and ‘get on with her life’, it enables childless couples to assume the emotional and financial costs of rearing a family, thus saving the state any financial obligation. According to this view, if there are any deleterious consequences then these inevitably lie within the individual. She/he is over-reacting to a subjective personal experience. Her/his reaction/behaviour has nothing to do with adoption, rather any problems involved are the result of personal inadequacies/failures/maladjustments (Delany 1997:132,133). According to this view, only a small minority of persons (mostly adoptees) might experience adoption as negative. This is usually due to ‘unwanted’ and ‘unwarranted’ interference from the natural mother. Nowhere in this scenario are the personal feelings of the natural mothers given consideration. Completely shut out of the adoption process, natural mothers were just supposed to forget their babies and then resume their lives (Cole 1998:99; Delany 1997:134).

In this section I show how many mothers who have lost children to adoption have been unable to forget as easily as they were told they would by state agents. They have continued to grieve the loss of their children. Many have ultimately paid with their lives through suicide or death via substance abuse (Arthur 1999:1). Of the 68 questionnaires returned to me from around Australia only four mothers provided any positive feedback about their personal experience with adoption. On the other hand, 64 replied that the impact was totally negative, thus confirming my original hypothesis. Before proceeding to some of the personal accounts provided by the mothers, in order to deal more readily with and/or understand the depth of feeling, I think it is necessary to provide the reader with a definition of, and/or insight into the concept which is pain. Although many would rightly argue that pain is self-explanatory, others could equally (and quite rightly) argue that pain and grief are not adequately dealt with in a society which, via the media, tends to distort or

4.5.4 Pain

Bakan (cited in Golden 1998) regards pain as a manifestation of the breakdown of a harmoniously functioning whole, be it an individual body or social organism. When a part succumbs to disease of some sort, it falls out of harmony and pain is the signal of this separation. Pain is, in fact, the characterising experience of the human organism torn out of a larger (whole). When pain afflicts the individual body, restoring harmony requires the self to perceive the affected part as ‘not me’ so that part can, if necessary, be sacrificed to enable the rest (or what is left) to be made whole. That which is ‘me’ is made into something which is ‘not me’ and that ‘not me’ is sacrificed in order that ‘I’ might continue to live. On the social level when there is a disease within the social body – anxiety, conflict, economic insecurity – the ancient mechanisms kick in and the ‘goat’ (so to speak) is sacrificed in order to protect the overall soundness of the whole community. The scapegoat becomes ‘not us’ and is driven out and placed on the margins – in the case of the unmarried mother she assumes a ‘pariah’ status (Golden 1998:237-243).

Whilst a number of mothers during the course of my research referred to this splitting off from consciousness, reality and dissociation in order to remain sane and continue on in life (see Chapter 5), a Sydney birthmother and researcher speaks for many other natural mothers when she states: “It is understood that when a person is subjected to an unnatural trauma, the sound mind protects itself by manifesting a false self, essentially in order to remain sane. Although it is correct that we were encouraged to get on with our lives and to forget what had been done to us, our silence has not necessarily been a voluntary response, but an involuntary reaction, where it becomes impossible to speak about it because it has become unspeakable and it is an unspeakable act. The loss of a living part of oneself creates in the mother a level of trauma and anxiety so great that the mother must manifest a false self in order to survive. The experience essentially becomes ‘something that happened to someone I used to be’. The mother blocks the experience. The mother dissociates as soon
as the baby is taken at birth. She remains suspended and, therefore, silent unless a trigger event occurs and forces her mind to face her loss” (Wellfare 1998:98).

Some natural mothers are being diagnosed today with severe dissociative disorders, pathogenic grief, learned helplessness dysfunctions, psychogenic amnesia, severe post-traumatic stress disorders, chronic depression and anxiety disorders. Many use alcohol and antidepressants as a coping mechanism and have done so for decades. Many attempt suicide as a response to trauma. A mother may lose her fear of death, a common consequence of a post-traumatic experience. Because mothers were told to go away and forget their experience, they do not attribute their emotional problems to the loss of their babies, and their condition leads to continual misdiagnosis by the health profession. The same applies to adopted children (Wellfare 1998:98,99).

Consulting psychiatrist, Geoff Rickarby (1998) provides further evidence to this effect in his definition of severe dissociative disorder. He argues that although this serious disorder takes a number of forms, in essence it occurs when consciousness is so overwhelmed by shock and unbearable loss that splits or discontinuity of consciousness occur. It is characterised by a total splitting off of the stream of consciousness associated with the untenable events. The result is the formation of a false self who continues every day amnesic to the events which are split off (Rickarby 1998:19,20). Other indicators of severe pain which Rickarby (1998) and others refer to (yet will not be dealt with at length here) include post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression and pathological grief reactions, all of which can be traced to, and indeed are exacerbated by, the young woman’s ‘pariah’ status within a culture which withholds the appropriate rituals for mourning (Rickarby, in Benson et al. 1997:57; Fitzgerald et al 1998: 15-21).

4.5.5 The mourning process

Every culture establishes techniques for helping people survive traumatic loss or grief. These techniques include formal rituals and structured practices that allow people to face their losses, grieve and heal. Through these practices, victims of trauma and loss receive support and acknowledgment, opportunities to express their grief openly and time to understand and integrate their losses. Further, society defines the duration of grieving periods, encouraging mourners to limit their isolation and rejoin the community.
In western societies, for example, the death of a loved one is recognised by bereavement periods, ceremonies, and symbols to guide survivors through crisis, loss and grieving. Wakes, viewings, funerals, memorial services and visitations at home provide social acknowledgement, opportunities to express open grief and time to begin to integrate the impact of what has been lost. Formal mourning, with symbolic behaviours like wearing black is limited to definite time periods, so that mourners condense their bereavement and prepare, even as they grieve, to move on (Bloch Jones 1993:74,75).

Although the most universal, death is not the only loss recognised by our society. Methods for dealing with other personal losses are often less public, structured, and consistent, but they involve the same basic elements that pave the way for healing: social support and acknowledgement, opportunities to express emotion, and methods to help integrate loss. When losses are socially acceptable, occurring within the basic guidelines of social structure, they evoke emotional support that assists the process of grief and, thus, the progress of affected individuals. However, when losses occur outside its norms, society withholds its mechanisms of comfort from those who grieve. Having broken society's rules regarding pregnancy and motherhood, most birthmothers found little support in grieving and healing. Ironically, many who endured the losses of their children in order to regain social acceptance found that society turned its back on them, denying them the very rituals and tools that might have helped them recover (Bloch Jones 1993:75; Monk 1998:5).

Pregnant women are hallowed beings for whom crowds part, cars stop, strangers smile. But just as a pregnant, married woman is a sacred object, so a pregnant and unmarried one is not. Losing a baby can be very different from other kinds of deaths. It is a physical mourning, a bodily grief for some. One carries about oneself a constant, palpable absence, like wearing an empty knapsack. It is a diminishing experience. It can make one weak, depressive and slightly agoraphobic....and it is very, very lonely (Fink 1999:8).

4.5.6 The pain associated with the loss of a child to adoption

The following statements by mothers were in response to the question: *Adoption policy here in Australia is based on the premise that it is in ‘the best interest of both natural mother and child’. What do you think about this?* (Question 43; see Appendix 1); also included are submissions made by mothers at the recent New South Wales
Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices and statements made by mothers during personal interviews. Although there were numerous, varied and often quite lengthy responses to my questionnaire at this question, only some of the responses are able to be included here. Having said this, all responses confirm my hypothesis that natural mothers are adversely affected by closed stranger adoption:

As an event, the birth of my first child coloured the births of my subsequent children and changed the course of my life – I went from a middle-class over-achiever and state champion actress to becoming withdrawn for 16 years, to becoming a rabid social justice advocate and adoption law reformer for the last 20 years.......I will continue in this mode until adoption is abolished.

(a Brisbane mother at Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Separating a child from its natural mother is evil…..it causes lifelong emotional damage to both parties....it was and still is a disgrace that so-called religious organisations continue to promote this unchristian practice.....I would appreciate a public acknowledgement by both State and Church for past misconceptions and wrongdoings and an apology for the enormous amount of harm and grief caused by their misguided adoption policy.

(a response to Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss in depth the numerous social factors inhibiting a young mother’s ability to retain custody of her baby. In mid-twentieth century Australia there was an enormous social stigma attached to white unwed motherhood. Whilst the quotation immediately following provides insight into this stigma, both quotations reveal that many natural fathers (where they wanted to assist) were powerless to influence decisions concerning the adoption of their children. Many fathers (though not all natural fathers) were constrained (by family and society) in their efforts to assist the mothers of their children:

I made contact by letter in 1995 with my son.....I have not seen him in over a year as the adoptive mother has found out and she gave him $20,000 that he doesn’t have to pay back.....in the last year she rings him every day and drops around their place – something she has never done till one year ago......my mother is in her glory going around telling my three brothers and their wives about the baby I gave away......taking control again and I am 53 years of age!!.....I bet she never told them she tried to kill my baby (abortion) or about the one baby of her own she killed.....no.....when I had my baby I was not to discuss or talk about it at all with anyone but now she tells all!!!........I started my search for my son because one day my mother’s sister said to me “what did I call my baby that was adopted out?” .....I said “I called him Wayne as it
was the closest name to pain as I could get” ......I will carry the pain of losing my son all my life as will his natural father.....he had no say and lost his son.

(a Brisbane mother at Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

My daughter was adopted at 16 months....she was placed with a family where the father has now been convicted and found guilty of being a paedophile.....I feel my life and my daughter's life has been partly destroyed......I think this may also apply to my daughter's natural father.

(a response to Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Adoption was and still is promoted as being ‘in the best interest of both natural mother and child’. As the following quotations make clear this is an assumption expounded by the stakeholders (infertile couples, male politicians and policy-makers). In the past, birth mothers (natural mothers) could not influence the decisions impacting on them:

How can ripping a baby from a mother's womb, cutting the umbilical cord, taking the baby away to a nursery with strangers be ‘in the best interest of both natural mother and child?’ ......my son stated that he felt abandoned and I never got over wondering where or how he was......I had to wait 26 years to find out he was alive, well and happy....if a child goes missing, do we tell the mother ‘its in your best interest?’ ......adoption needs to be outlawed.....I have yet to hear a positive story from both mother or child.....even the adoptive parents had no idea and have had difficulties....I feel strongly it was an experiment gone wrong.....the ‘neat package’ created by the church, government leaders, doctors etc. to solve the moral issues of unmarried mothers and infertile couples did not work.....we are human beings with strong emotions and genetic links......for the adopted person, their identity was changed and it has created difficulty in their lives......adoptive mothers had to pretend to raise children that were not their own and their issues of infertility were never addressed......the natural mother lost her child, a huge wound that will never heal.

(a response to Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I believe the statement in 'the best interests of your child' was devised by a nefarious adoption system to prey on the minds of uninformed, vulnerable young women in order to obtain their babies......a mother will always want the best for her child, will die for her child, loves her child......the adoption system knew this and used this ploy for their own ends.....my son had the best, me his mother.......I love him.......although all church’s were involved in adoptions I have first hand experience at the hand of the Catholic Church nuns, particularly the Josephite nuns....they should be held accountable for their part in arranging adoptions.....I used to go and visit my son at the baby home during the 30 day period after the consent was signed.....I
used to hold him and love him.....I was very upset each time I left but never did anyone there offer me any help.....I was distraught....couldn’t think straight.....I just needed some help and a little compassion....all I got was coldness and indifference.....today their continuing silence, knowing the pain they have caused to so many still compounds their hypocrisy of promoting love and forgiveness whilst not expecting to do the same themselves.

(a response to Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I do not think it was in my best interest to lose my first born child for 22 years.....nor was it in her best interest to feel abandoned by her mother and grow up away from her family background and heritage.....I am amazed that my parents and all the other adults around me could not see the ENORMITY of the loss I and my daughter would suffer and have made some suggestion as to keeping her, but NO ONE did.

(a response to Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

To this day it all still hurts, especially the damage done to me, my child and his father, who still also hurts.....I feel today that I gave away a ‘gift’ that cost me more than I was ever able to manage.....I suffered dreadful treatment by the medical staff in the hospital......I was told to sign and that the ‘people’ who wanted my baby were there to take him home.....I had to sign, then stand at the window to watch them leave with him......today when I see my daughter with her children I see love.....she did not suffer what I did....she has supported me in the search for my son who I have just found and reunited with after 34 years......this year was the first Mother’s Day for me knowing where all my children are......adoption has life-long consequences......my son's natural father has a genetic condition which required surgery after birth and my son was the same.....he is disabled today because of not receiving the medical treatment to give him quality of life.....if I and my fiancé were able to keep our son he would not be permanently disabled today as his father and grandmother knew what to do in ‘the child’s best interest’.

(a Toowoomba mother at Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

As in the case of the indigenous stolen children, the impact of past adoption policies on many of the white children has not been as positive as was once thought. The following quotations provide insight into some of the interpersonal difficulties felt by both adoptees and their natural mothers:

I had carried this baby for nine months and loved her from the moment I knew I was pregnant and then, to come out of hospital with nothing, your self-esteem is in tatters. You are left with a sense of unreality. It really is as if it never happened. I fantasised that I still had Lisa with me. I told people that I had a baby but she was sick in Camperdown Children’s Hospital so whenever I needed to I could say I was going to see her when in fact I was going to sit by the pond at Sydney University or any other quiet spot and cry. I did that so often, just
crying......these days I feel as though I walk around with a hole in my stomach, like a cannonball has shot through my stomach, there is such a huge part of me missing. I am sort of living a parallel life where it is as if I am split down the middle, on the one hand feeling that you do have to get on with life. I have a beautiful six year old and wonderful husband. We have a future, although I find it difficult to think very far ahead. I have to put on the facade of coping and looking confident because I am in business as well. There is also this part of me which is stuck back in 1973 where I have no self-worth and I am that 18 year old girl still waiting to love and nurture my baby and, of course, my baby is just not there any more. I would truly love to get on with my life, get past this and move forward, but I cannot unless there is acknowledgment. I need that acknowledgment for myself and my daughters. I want accountability for what was done and, please, never allow this to happen again. I might add that I am very thankful for this inquiry because since it began I have sent copies of the transcripts of evidence to my daughter. She has come to understand fully, after nearly nine years of contact, that I did not want to give her up, so she no longer directs her anger at me and pity help the person who is now getting the anger actually. For a long time it was definitely directed at me. Now I am spoken to as a human being, although I will never be called Mum and I will never be called Grandma by her son. I have noted that my six year old is allowed to be called her sister and she is allowed to be an aunty but I will never be Mum or Grandma and that really, really hurts.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:146,147)

Why should I be grateful? People say I must be grateful, but no, I am not grateful. Why should I be grateful to have my son back after 21 years, after being raised by strangers in a different culture? Why should I be grateful that I would never get to know the baby, the child or the teenager, my son, just the man he has been moulded into by strangers, not by his mother. He has three sisters who are also trying to come to terms with the loss of their brother. I must say that I now do soak up every precious moment that I spend with him because the lost years can never ever be replaced and the pain never ceases. My wish is to hear him call me “Mum”, but he has told me he can never call me “Mum”. As far as he is concerned the woman who raised him is his mother. However, he doesn’t call me anything. He doesn’t refer to me as any particular person or any name, and I just hope that in his heart this means that he knows I am his mum.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:136)

The problems created by adoption have caused such indescribable heartache for both mother and child and to hear social workers state that, in hindsight, they would have gone about things
differently is totally unacceptable. Surely anyone could see what a cruel sentence, lasting a lifetime, these actions would cause, with no rituals to honour our children at birth, no rituals surrounding the loss soon after, as in a normal bereavement, with the words ‘run along now and get on with your life’ the most common advice from social workers in the past. This would have to be the most unreal expectation ever to be uttered, showing no human kindness. I left hospital on Christmas Day in 1970 without my son and he has always been in my heart and in my thoughts every day for the past 29 years. As for the past eight years, they have been extremely difficult. I still grieve the loss of my son. For 20 years we were apart and the awful prospect of possibly losing him again is something ever present in my mind.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:153)

…it is in the best interests of both natural mother and child to remain together.....the unique bond between mother and child is severed by adoption and brings lifelong grief to both mother and child.......this grief will impact on all areas of both mother and child’s life.......it will affect all ensuing relationships.....the mother will live a half-life, existing in a fog to deal with the enormous grief she is living with.....post reunion, the mother will still carry the grief for the trauma of the separation and loss of the child.....this state of the mother will then affect all people that she relates to on a deeper level......the effect of the adoption will reverberate throughout the mother’s family, the father’s family and it will have ongoing devastating consequences for the child.....the child will have an unconscious wound that the child will try over and over again to heal, and will suffer deep on-going trauma as a result of the separation and loss of the mother......in no way is adoption in the best interest of the natural mother and child.....it has always been in the best interest of the adoptive parents.....I was an 18-year-old university student when I became pregnant with my son.....I feel from the moment that I entered the service sector for care, my son was targeted for adoption.....I did not have any support from my family, and this then made me vulnerable to the wishes and practices of the medical care workers.....I had no option but to do as they suggested.....I received no support from my family and my son's father was only able to provide limited emotional support to me.....I have paid a life-long price for being unsupported in this situation.

(a response to Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Other quotations indicate that suicide or death by substance abuse are very likely outcomes for some mothers:

I was married ten years after my daughter’s birth and I am sure that my ex-husband and my two sons are also victims. I chose not to tell them as I had only ever told two people previously and I later regretted confiding in them. Living with such a deep dark secret for so many years causes immense pain and the only way I could deal with it was to push it down so far, as if it was a bad dream. At the age of 21 I had taken a bottle of sleeping pills. I felt that this was a cry
for help. I had heard a song at a party. The song was called ‘A Little Ray of Sunshine Has Come Into My Life’. This had been released when my daughter was born and I was overwhelmed with grief and just wanted to end the pain. I returned home and took the pills and collapsed on the couch and when my father found me I was barely breathing. The nurse that looked after me in the intensive care ward told me that all I did was call out for my baby. My mother never spoke of my daughter to me and I could not deal with what happened to me any more.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:167)

I was reunited with my daughter eight years ago and within a few hours of this my mother, who had been the driving force behind the adoption, died. I became very ill and severely depressed which was to last for seven and a half years. During this period, I sought every avenue of help that I could, to no benefit. I struggled daily with suicidal urges. All this time well-meaning friends and health care practitioners exhorted me to pull up my socks and recognise how blessed I was. They, as did I, seemed to think that the very act of reunion would somehow erase the trauma of the past. I fervently wish that was the case, but it isn’t. With the onset of this inquiry, my symptoms became unbearable and I became very close to suicide again. I couldn't bear to spend the rest of my life in such mental, emotional and spiritual agony. Then in January of this year, I had a breakdown and was subsequently diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Since then I have been receiving ongoing counselling and have joined a support group for women who were also victims of the unethical and illegal adoption practices of the time. Daily I face the pain and guilt of the adoption and have been put in touch with the feelings of shame and self-loathing that were engendered in me at the time. My health is improving rapidly and my depression has lifted. I am not on antidepressant medication, although I have to be constantly vigilant because as soon as I attempt to suppress my feelings the symptoms return. I spend a lot of my time crying....................This forum is my only opportunity for redress and I suggest to you that not only was my child stolen from me, but also my life and my youth. I want my baby and my life returned to me intact, but I know that isn't possible. The best that I can hope for is that you, as representatives of the current government and policy-makers, will give us an undertaking that such destructive and subversive adoption policies will never again see the light of day in this country and that no other young woman will be abused and tortured in the way we were.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:163)

I feel adoption has robbed me of the ability to experience a fullness or richness in my life due to my fear of being so deeply rejected and hurt again......I don't trust people.....I feel I am often a young girl again and don't cope well with criticism .....I completely blocked out the
time/date/year of my son’s birth until reunion.....reunion is wonderful and we have had a great reunion but inside I still often feel I am in a thousand pieces.

(a response to Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

My son was taken from me immediately at birth and given to strangers who unbeknown to me took him out of the country illegally to America where at the age of five he was fatherless....at the time of birth I wanted to know if ‘the married couple’s’ marriage was stable...I was told “any father is better than none” .....the nurse persuaded me to deny my instincts which were very strong, consequently both my son and I have suffered irreparable damage because of the separation....I was told to “go away and get on with life and have a baby of your own” which I never did ....my son now 29 and an alcoholic was brought up by a single mother anyway....the adoptive mother made contact with me recently because she said he was in pain – “he lived with a lot of pain” ....I also have lived with extreme pain.....although in recent years I was fortunate to meet and live with a wonderful man who was so supportive in our relationship (he died recently).... I have constant memories of losing my son and can recall very clearly the first 12 months after losing him ...I used to live very close to the Sydney Harbour Bridge....at night I used to look out constantly at the lights and the bridge.

(Interviewee 23, Sydney, 1999)

I was very, very sick.......dying of a broken heart....I wanted so much to talk to my son......my doctor told me I had to....

(Interviewee 11, Sunshine Coast, 1999)

The remaining quotations provide further evidence of the emotional pain of separation for mothers. However the quotations also reveal the wider human impact. Whilst the grief is profound for both mother and child, grief due to loss is often experienced by other family members as well – brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents. More than one generation of family can be affected:

I am not able to say if my child had stayed with me he would have been better off. I am able to state that the relinquishment of my child has affected my life in the following ways: I still feel rejected and abandoned by my parents; until my reunion I suffered feelings of never being a good enough person or mother to my other children; to express emotion such as great joy or great grief was impossible because in doing so I released overwhelming feelings too hard to deal with; the secrecy was a huge burden and only after finding that I could see my child again was I able to tell my subsequent children, friends and even found that my younger sisters were never aware of my son’s existence; my next child, a daughter, grew up in the shadow of my grief
and I believe it affected her life greatly.....she also was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 28.

(a Toowoomba mother at Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I want to state that it is very clear to me that I was stolen from my mother and my son was stolen from me. I want adoption as it is to stop immediately. I realise some children do need permanent care. However, secrecy and identity imposition are unethical and criminal. I want a written apology and public acknowledgement of responsibility from all parties involved in the theft of myself and the theft of my eldest son, that is social workers, doctors, relevant hospital staff, consent-takers, adoption agency staff, health department officials, State Government, registrar, lawyers and magistrates. These acknowledgements are to be given to myself, my eldest son, my mother and father and both sets of adoptive parents.............I also want the Statute of Limitations set aside...I want all these parties to be legally, criminally charged where appropriate, the costs to be covered by the government. These people colluded with each other for their own gain, rather than follow the best interest of the child and they failed in their duty of care which was a legal obligation. I want my eldest son’s and my order of adoption discharged and legal status granted to our original birth certificate. I want the legal use of my original birth certificate. I have legally changed my name from the adopted name to my birth name............ Adoptees are discriminated against in our society. Any other person in Australia can change their name on their birth certificates. Adoptees need their mother's permission to do it, or their mothers have to do it for them. I am a 41-year-old woman and it is an insult to me to ask my mother to change my name on my birth certificate, and I don’t have contact with her at this time. I also want my father’s name on my birth certificate. While I recognise the rights of my adoptive parents, I am affronted that they are named as my mother and father on my adoption birth certificate. That is a lie. I want stringent guidelines as to who can take on the care of children, either fostering, adoption or whatever. I want research into adoptive parents and also foster parents. From my experience adoptive parents generally have deep psychological and sometimes psycho-sexual problems. I want reparations for myself and my eldest son and my subsequent children and my grandchildren. My adoption has affected five generations of my family at this time. I want compensation to cover the costs of the thousands of dollars and many hours I have spent in therapy and counselling and identity and family research.............I want to bring to light how few adoptees have been represented during this inquiry and ask why...my belief is that they have been brainwashed in placement to believe lies imposed upon them and are living under hostage conditions. I have covered this in my first submission. You have probably read it. Adoption is a market-driven business, and I ask when will child slavery stop in this country? ....to clarify that, by child slavery I mean the use of children to fulfil the needs of adults.............if you wouldn't clap, okay....we are all here supporting each other and I don’t really need it. I know it is a strong statement and sometimes the truth is harsh. Many adoptees would disagree with my views, which I think reinforces them...............finally, I want to
mention that when I was a child I just wanted my mother to come and rescue me......in my deepest being I still feel this way........it is very painful and it is something that will always be with me........no amount of assistance measures will remove my experience.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:165,166)

4.6 Conclusion

The cumulative evidence as reported by the birthmothers in this chapter indicates that most women did not willingly place their babies for adoption. Their babies were taken for adoption because the mothers were not provided with alternatives. Most women did not have crucial support from either boyfriends/partners and/or their families of origin. This left the women vulnerable to state agents who wittingly or unwittingly sought the separations. Patriarchal and middle-class notions that unmarried mothers willingly place their babies for adoption have proved erroneous. The evidence has shown that most women who relinquished their babies in mid-twentieth century Australia would have preferred not to.

Whilst it is wrong to assume that women can easily forget about their babies, the evidence also shows the adverse consequences on both natural mothers and their children.

Whilst it has been my intention in this chapter to show that the removals were forced and class based, I have also engaged with issues of race. I have argued that the stealing of white babies compares in some small way with the indigenous stolen generation in Australia. Whilst this chapter has sought to confirm the notion that coercion did occur by asking for birthmothers’ perceptions and memories of what happened in the past, the last two chapters explore the weight of evidence supporting the main hypotheses.
5. Chapter 4

Boundaries precluding legitimate marriages and births

This was a time when you had no rights especially as a woman.....I was 16….I only had me on my side and I was stripped bare of any self worth….the vultures made sure of that….they weren’t going to help me keep my son.

(a Western Australian mother at Q34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

All HELL broke loose.....how could I do this to her and the family?........my mother had to be ‘socially acceptable’.

(a Tasmanian mother at Q13 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

No, there was never a question.....they had no ability to keep their children....they had no means of support....they had no family support....there was no way that they could keep the child and keep themselves as well.....it was always understood that they had left their homes and they would stay away until after they had the child and then they would be accepted back into the home......what their parents told the neighbours or families, I have no idea, but it was certainly not mentioned to other family members and so on what happened to them.

(Weisberg 2000:239,240)

5.1 Introduction

Berryman (1998) argues that it is a common perception that unmarried mothers willingly place their babies for adoption. They signed the consent form and, therefore, they chose to give away their child/ren. That can be the public perception (Berryman in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:52). In the following chapter I document the finding that once ‘incarcerated’ in the homes and hospitals, many unwed women found themselves with no options but to have their babies adopted. In this chapter I refer to the pressure from families and boyfriends which led to the women being placed in these homes and hospitals in the first place. According to their
evidentiary claims in personal interviews, the survey questionnaires and government inquiries, many birthmothers indicated that they were abandoned by their boyfriends and rejected by their families of origin. Young, vulnerable and without the monetary resources to be able to look after themselves and their babies, most birthmothers indicated that they were forced to give away their babies to adoption. The mothers were very restricted in the choices open to them (Farrar 1997:116-127; Linday 1997:239-253).

Other institutional influences affecting adoption as outcome are introduced in this chapter and dealt with in more detail in Chapter 5. For instance, at the time (the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s) doctors were often the first point of contact for parents concerned about their daughter’s pregnancy, and also concerned about family shame/honour (Siedlecky 2000:238; Roberts 1984:73). The medical profession and the newly emerging social work profession (particularly the medical profession) at the time were male dominated. Furthermore, this medical and social work fraternity had far greater influence in affecting decisions than did their young, unmarried, female clientele (Rickarby 1998:6; Bates et al. 1995:187). For instance, medical staff not only set the parameters as to what would be discussed at the consultations with the unwed women and their parents, they had the power to restrict access to anyone with opposing views (Farrar 1997:116-127). See also Chapter 5.

In the last section of this chapter I examine the role of pornography in promoting negative images and attitudes towards women. Pornography helps to justify the sexually callous treatment of women and girls. However, it also trivialises women and serves to ensure that women remain unequal with men. Pornography is a male medium, made for men to be consumed by men. Much pornography, and particularly the more violent pornography, is kept hidden. Some men like to watch and applaud the debasement in pornography but they do not like to admit to watching it. When confronted, many deny watching and/or enjoying it. In this way many men present a façade of social respectability and decency in contrast to pornography’s brutality. Because many young women and girls are unaware of pornography’s existence, many more are unaware of its negative impact (MacKinnon 1998:43-56). This was particularly so in the mid-twentieth century in Australia when sex and sexuality were taboo subjects (Bates et al. 1995:268-270).
5.2 Complicating factors inhibiting legitimate marriages and births

If her father told her to do it she did it…..and that was the sole reason that baby was adopted out….because if it was left to her and myself and my parents I would not be sitting here today.
(a natural father in a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1999:18)

Chapter 1 referred to the different ways in which love, marriage and the family are viewed in history and across cultures. There I argued that for many centuries and in many cultures, marriages were often arranged. Who could or could not be included as family was very much dependent on one’s racial, ethnic and social class origins (Yuval-Davis 1993:621-32). Parents, and particularly fathers, had the final say as to who their sons and daughters would marry. In most societies, including Australian society, there were and still are clear customary, religious and legal boundaries as to who will be recognised as legitimate members of a family (Yuval-Davis 1993:621-32). Whilst some of these sanctions or boundaries did not affect all women who fell pregnant outside of marriage in Australia in the mid-twentieth century (for instance, many unmarried mothers were abandoned by their boyfriends, not the boyfriend’s family), this section looks at the numerous complicating factors which could and often did affect marriages and births. At the time and for some still today, there were strong ethnic, religious, cultural and legal prohibitions influencing who one could or could not marry (Bates et al. 1995:185,187). For instance, many families (migrant families as well as those already well established in Australia) would not approve marriages where their children were not of the same race, ethnicity or culture (Spensky 1992:113; Rasool 2002:90,115). Whilst class conflict/differences/rivalry were more pronounced than they are today (Spensky 1992:113; Goulding 2000:177), interpersonal, interfamily and/or interneighbourhood rivalries/jealousies were commonplace. Whilst orthodox religion had a divisive influence (Spensky 1992:114), couples had to be 21 years of age to marry without their parents’ consent (Taylor 2000:21). Up until 1973 the marriageable age under the Commonwealth Marriage Act was 21 and this applied to both the bride and the groom. Hence if either person could not get the consent of her or his parents, they could not marry. Certainly people had the unenviable option to go off to court, but frequently they did not want to take it to the local magistrate who would then know their business (there was a huge stigma attached to illegitimate pregnancy at this time).
Furthermore, many of the expectant mothers could not be expected to act on this because of their very young age and the emotional stress in which they found themselves (Taylor 2000:21; Witness D in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:35).

5.2.1 Age as a precipitating factor for marriage

In mid-twentieth century Australia, young couples wishing to marry had to have parental approval if under the age of 21 (Taylor 2000:21). My research indicates that this factor alone would have presented a problem for many of the natural mothers. For instance, of the 68 mothers Australia-wide who responded to my questionnaire, only 17 were over the age of 21 at the time of their pregnancies; 51 were under that age:

My fiance's mother signed our ‘permission to marry’ papers after I had signed the adoption papers.....then 3 weeks later we married on the 8 June 1963 at the Auburn Registry office .......two strangers witnessed our signatures....I rang the matron to let her know - as if to say “see, my fiance did return.....you were wrong on at least four counts”......but she wasn't interested in me or my life or that my friend Coralie was about to kill herself and I wasn't feeling much better.....

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:20)

I was then told by my parents that there was no question of getting married because I had to have their permission.....we did discuss it.....he was three years older than I and had a decent job......

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:163)

5.2.2 Ethnic, racial and class-based prohibitions inhibiting marriage

Because families have such an important social role in all societies and across cultures, the nuclear family unit is universally promoted as harmonious – a safe haven where the interests of all members are adequately catered for. Whilst the nuclear family unit is the advertised ideal (and particularly in mid-twentieth century Australia), research does indicate that far from being harmonious and non-conflictive, the nuclear family is often characterised by divisions and conflict.....divisions which reflect internal power dynamics (Scutt 1994:99; Tomison 2000:4,7; Worchel et al. 1989:583,584). Furthermore, families often compete with other families for social prestige, honour and social acceptability (Scutt
Because of the huge social stigma associated with ‘illegitimate pregnancy’ in mid-twentieth century Australia, most families were very careful to hide/cover up that which was deemed socially unacceptable (that is, their daughter’s pregnancy). While middle-class families were horrified that their middle-class daughters could become pregnant without a husband, working-class families also felt shame because they were aspiring to the middle-class ideal:

I found out in recent years that several of my aunts on my mother’s side were pregnant outside marriage – one as young as 11! ....my mother was always competing with my father’s family, neighbours and other family and friends for the ‘family name’ ....my pregnancy upset the image she wanted to portray to anyone around her and so I was sent away to a ‘home for unmarried mothers’ in Brisbane....this occurred despite the fact that I was engaged to be married to the natural father of my son.....for my mother it was like “ok, my husband is an alcoholic and we don’t have much, but at least we are clean living, decent and don't have illegitimate pregnancies”.

(Interviewee 9, Toowoomba 1999)

She wrote a family name on my belly that she wanted me to be named ......but her mother told her to “think of your father’s career”, and she had to give me up for adoption.....she said she had no choice but to obey her parents......she was so badly affected by the loss that her parents came back to look at me in the nursery again to see if they had made the right decision......but it was too late.....I had been taken.

(extracts of a personal submission presented to the Inquiry, Origins Newsletter, Issue No 15, February 1999:18)

Some parents were more accepting of their daughter’s ‘transgression’ than others (Furstenberg 1976:77; Roberts 1984:77). However, due to situational and other personal factors, the supportive parent could be co-opted by the dominant parent thus rendering the young mother vulnerable to the wishes of the more dominant parent acting against the woman’s interests (Stephenson 1995:343; Andersen et al. 1990:294,295). For instance, one mother recalls support from her mother but not from her father:

Compounding my position was a feeling of responsibility for causing problems in my parents’ relationship......Mum began to feel attached to the idea of having another baby in the family......she said I could live at home and offered support however the strict and sometimes volatile regime imposed by my dad meant the news of my pregnancy reached earth-shattering
proportions.......he asked me to have an abortion.......I must have been 14 weeks pregnant and I was horrified at this considering his faith......it was antithetical to everything he stood for......he took me to a Macquarie Street specialist who said that he could do an operation.......in my emotional state I perceived the luxuriousness of the doctor’s waiting-room as the proceeds of blood money and decided that he was a criminal........from then on my resolve hardened.......I would not commit murder.......my mother was supportive of the decision and it was never mentioned again however the tension was palpable.......to preserve their relationship I began to lean towards adoption.

(Witness 5 in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1999:14,15)

For numerous reasons others had support from their fathers but not from their mothers:

When I was 18 (the age I had my baby) I was very pretty.......my counsellor recently told me that my mother was unsympathetic and unhelpful because she was jealous.......her relationship with her husband (my father) was not a good one and she was jealous of the support that he showed me.

I had enormous pressure from my mother who is a very small woman with a very domineering manner.....she dominated everyone including my father who was an alcoholic.

(Interviewee 9, Toowoomba, 1999)

Furthermore, families often intervened to separate couples wishing to marry where the prospective bride/groom came from outside the ethnic group (Swain and Howe 1995:95; Evans 1999:43; Rasool 2002:90,115). Very often the partner’s family intervened strongly to prevent any contact (and unfortunately, many young women yesterday and still today are unaware of such forthcoming intervention on meeting their boyfriends/prospective husbands) (Furstenberg 1976:89; Witness D in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:37). Parents, and particularly fathers, would go to great lengths to disallow contact; and would enlist the help of extended kin or friends where necessary. As in the case of coercion experienced by the young women in the homes and hospitals (see Chapter 5), separation was often brought about by violence or the threat of violence. Ground rules were laid down as to who one could look at, talk to and take out. Ground rules were enacted stating where one could or could not walk (Rowbotham 1975:188). Anyone unhappy with such rules was likely to be dismissed,
laughed at, ostracised (Rowbotham 1975:184,204). Anyone disregarding the rules was setting herself/himself up for violent confrontation (Rasool 2002:90,115; Bates et al. 1995:182-195; Rowbotham 1975:185,204). Opposition to marriage could originate in the birthmothers’ family of origin:

I have a friend who was sent overseas by her parents so she would forget the father of her child.....he was Aboriginal......she was made to have an abortion which was botched........she married an English man who was very nice and had 2 deformed children........caused by the botched abortion.

(Interviewee 16, Brisbane, 1999)

My father told me to meet someone of my own kind.

(Interviewee 3, Sydney, 1999)

My parents did not want me to marry the father of my child because he was a white Russian.

(Interviewee 9, Brisbane,1999)

Opposition could and often did come from both families:

His family offered to pay for an abortion.....I might say they were Jewish and were opposed to him having a relationship with a non-Jewish girl.....her parents were European....central European and they were opposed to her having anything to do with a Jewish boy....so the young couple broke up......she went ahead and the teachers helped her to do her higher school......she left school a few weeks before the exam and she attended the exam in a tunic without a belt because by that time she was looking fairly pregnant......that was October....she had the baby just after Christmas...by that time she had toxaemia of pregnancy and she had to have a caesarean section and the baby died.

(Siedlecky 2000:238)

While some parents were concerned that marriage would interfere with the boy’s career, other families were cautious that their sons/daughters marry into the same class (Siedlecky 1999:237-238; Steiner 1963:5,6):

My mother and I went to the father of my child’s family to try and talk to them......the mother ran down the back stairs and hid behind the incinerator and the others ushered us out of the house.

(a Queensland mother in a submission to the Commissioner for Children 1999:3; see Appendix 6)
In some cases parents would forewarn their daughters about going out with guys from ‘the wrong side of the tracks’ (Wacquant 1996:240; Roberts 1984:79):

My mother’s reaction was much as I had expected: very negative, although I do not remember what she said.....I feel that I have blocked that out.....at some stage I was allowed to meet my boyfriend in a local park with my parents nearby in a car, to basically tell him it was finished – that was my parents’ view, not mine.....I was very upset when he turned up drunk....I had not seen him in this state before.....I do not judge him on that.....he was only 18 and he had a lot on his shoulders too.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:50)

On the other hand, other well-to-do families would warn their sons that “the girlfriend is really a ‘gold-digger’/status seeker” (Wiesner 1993:20):

His family, well, they couldn’t get rid of me fast enough.....I thought they’d understand, after all they treated me as one of the family......I went on holidays with them and even when my sweetheart left on that ‘short’ job overseas they asked me to accompany them to dances on Fridays (so that I wouldn’t miss him too much they said)... they really seemed to care, until the day I told them of my predicament.....I can still hear them..... “You’ll have to sort it out for yourself dear, we can’t have our friends or relations find out about this, very embarrassing that would be.....Are you sure it is his?.After all, he was engaged once and she never got herself pregnant”........they gave me my bus fare home and I never heard from them again......they had a large empty home and my sweetheart was their only child.......it is 5.3.91.....today I find out that the father of my adopted child is dead.....committed suicide by drinking himself to death.

(McCabe 1995:93-95)

While the more wealthy middle-class men are often influenced in their decisions by parents and/or grandparents who demand that their sons not marry beneath them (Harkness 1991:41; Dalrymple 2001:40; Turner 1984:118) already conflict-laden relationships are destined to become more so in economically depressed areas of the working class, characterised by high unemployment, fragmented communities and a concomitant fragmentation of families within those communities (Wacquant 1996:240,241). As Segal (1994) and Schnitzer (1998) point out, even those natural fathers with the best of intentions are up against it in such communities, producing in them a sense of failure, irresponsibility and often violence (Wacquant 1996:242; Musick 1993:16; Schnitzer 1998:169).
Whilst economic hardship is the most basic and universal ingredient contributing to male/female conflict, this is often compounded in areas where there is ethnic or racial conflict/discrimination (Hatty 2000:179; Furstenberg 1976:73; Wacquant 1996:261-265). Furthermore, for some men, traumatic histories (such as child sexual abuse and other violence) are important causative factors (Segal 1994:276,277; Havemann 1997:1; Hutchings 1998:23; Healey 1993:2; Cockburn 1998:215; Rein 1970:80-81,307; Roberts 2002:11; Anderson 1994:1; Wacquant 1996:253):

On learning I was pregnant my parents sent me away to a home for unmarried mothers.......on learning where I was the father of my child came to visit........at the time of my daughter’s birth he created such a scene it was unbelievable..... he rang the hospital where I was to demand that I not sign anything.......although I loved my daughter’s father very much and wanted him and our daughter, I was also forced to stare reality in the face........we had no income, no jobs and no prospects of a job......nowhere to live, no help from either his family, mine or from the authorities and the father of my child was presenting (not for the first time) as extremely unstable.......the father of my child is schizophrenic.

(Interviewee 6, Sunshine Coast, Queensland, 1999)

5.2.3 Religious and cultural prohibitions inhibiting marriage

In the past, one’s religious affiliation was an important factor determining who one could or could not marry (a submission by a birthmother to the Bishops Commission for Justice 1997:1). Catholics were expected to meet and marry Catholics. Protestants could be expected to meet and marry members of their own religious faiths (Roberts 1984:73-74). Consequently couples from opposing faiths wishing to marry presented enormous turmoil/conflict for some (although not all) families. Religious differences drove a wedge between lovers, ensuring non-marriage and in turn the adopting out of one’s baby (Harkness 1991:41):

So what words do Catholic Adoption Agency officers use to describe individual cases? Try these words: “there was a problem with this adoption”; “there was a problem with this family”; “the birth mother’s parents are very unhappy with this pregnancy”. These were among the words used by [social worker 1], the Principal Officer of the Catholic Adoption Agency as she handed my daughter over to the adoptive parents. So what was the problem? Perhaps it was that at no stage did we, as natural parents of the child, ever express an independent, uncoerced desire to have our child adopted. Perhaps the problem was that I had repeatedly asked the
Catholic Adoption Agency worker, [social worker 2], how I could stop this adoption, but she refused to give me any advice. Perhaps the problem was that I had twice been threatened with grievous bodily harm, and possibly murder, by my girlfriend’s father should I pursue any alternative other than adoption. Perhaps the problem was that I had the temerity to resource all the necessary baby paraphernalia and baby-sitting among my family, ready for when I brought my baby home. Perhaps the problem was that my girlfriend was locked in her room and isolated in a private hospital room. At seven months pregnant she and her mother were thrown around their kitchen by her father as they tried to stop him coming at me with deadly intent as I tried to get out of the house.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:141)

When I suspected that I was pregnant I went to a doctor not attended by my family and he confirmed that I was indeed pregnant......my parents were very strict Catholics and the thought of telling them was very frightening to me....so I did not tell them at that point......I told my boyfriend and we talked about getting married.

(evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:50)

We are Catholics.......my parents did not want me to keep my baby.

(Interviewee 6, Brisbane, 1999)

Many parents rejected their children, or one parent would issue a decree leaving no support for the child at all (evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:145). Other parents would collude with agency staff without giving their pregnant daughter any idea of what was actually going to happen. On the other hand, some parents took active steps to support the keeping of their grandchild, only to be subjected to the same advice, exhortations and other pressures being placed on their daughters. In this regard many of the grandparents were victims of the rhetoric and the same misinformation that their daughters experienced. Not only were the young mothers not told of pensions and other entitlements (discussed in Chapter 5) but also their parents were not told of this either. This and an already overstrained budget would have precluded many of the parents exploring the option of raising the child in their own home. For instance, one mother alludes to serious psychiatric disability in the family which would
have prevented her and her baby from accessing adequate emotional and financial assistance:

My mother was not able to help me (she has nervous problems) and my father wanted to help but realised his limitations.....he was only himself on a pension, we lived in a small house and my father was just plain worn out actually, from looking after my brother, who, like my mother, also suffered from nervous problems

(Interviewee 12, Sydney, 1999)

Others refer to insufficient space in the family home:

My parents either couldn’t or didn’t want to help me.......they had four children and rented a flat in Sydney above some shops....there was only one income.......the youngest child was ten and I was the oldest......they were opposed to me keeping my baby and yet they themselves were not married until 1971, one year before I lost my daughter.

(Interviewee 15, Sunshine Coast, Queensland, 26 August 1999)

There were already six of us living in a two bedroom house and my mother said she did not have any money to support us......

(Interviewee 10, Sunshine Coast, Queensland, 1999)

Karen (name fictitious) had a daughter in 1969, aged 21.....her father was a barman who had a drinking problem and could be violent......her mother had seventeen children in twenty years......her parents (who were Catholic) were never told of her pregnancy because she did not think it was fair to ask for help under the circumstances.

(Interviewee 11, Brisbane, 8 December 1998)

As in the case of the mothers, the grandparents’ attitudes and decisions were shaped by the promulgated myths which focused on the advantages of adoption. Whilst these cultural myths and stereotypes made a huge contribution to the number of babies given up for adoption, it is also important to remember that those parents, who acted purely out of the pressures of social respectability/social shame/maintaining their cultural traditions, ought in any case take some responsibility for this huge ‘stolen generation’ (Rickarby 1998:6; Knox in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1999:8; letter from a grandfather to the matron of a home).
This section has documented the numerous and varied family circumstances impacting on the birthmother’s ability to keep her baby. Where the natural mother’s family of origin was either too poor or could not assist her for the reasons referred to above, obtaining consent for adoption was a simple matter for state agents. Unsupported at home and unsupported by the Australian state, most mothers had no option but to let go of their babies (for a detailed analysis of the coercion experienced by Australian mothers in the mid-twentieth century see Chapter 5).

In the next section I introduce the boundaries (territorial and discursive) imposed by the medical and allied health professions at the time (this is referred to in Chapter 5). Medical and allied health professionals were often the first point of contact for parents concerned about their daughter’s future; they were concerned also about family shame/honour (Siedlecky 2000:238; Roberts 1984:73). As will be seen doctors were operating in a social milieu which actively promoted adoption as the solution to illegitimate pregnancy (Weisberg 2000:241; Rickarby 1998:2).

5.3 Doctors as gods: pressure from the medical profession

The doctor was God as far as I was concerned and my baby’s future was in his hands....he arranged everything... sometime during the pregnancy he told me two different sets of prospective adoptive parents he had in mind....he always promoted adoption.....if I looked sad or worried he brushed my concerns away.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:152)

In this section I give a brief description of the rise in status of doctors as ‘experts’ (Ehrenreich and English 1979:69-76). I refer to the power of doctors as opposed to their clients – birthmothers (Rickarby 1998:8,13). I also allude to the fact that in many instances doctors/medical officers were just one of many in a long chain which saw nothing wrong with the exploitation of the ‘unmarried mother’ (Walsh and Palmer in Benson 1997:434).

5.3.1 The rise in status of the ‘scientific expert’ in the mid-twentieth century

The experience of giving birth is a process over which pregnant women in the western world have little control. The reproductive technologies employed are determined by a male-dominated medical profession in line with criteria which place the smooth functioning of the hospital administration foremost (McDaniel 1988:187,188). By comparison, the
needs, interests and requests of their female patients are accorded secondary importance (Oakley 1993:151). This has not always been the case, however. In the nineteenth century and before, childbirth and child-rearing methods were largely in the hands of midwives and wet nurses who acted in a communal spirit in concert with their clientele. There was no clear demarcation between those with the knowledge to heal and those without (Oakley 1979:15; Oakley 1992:23).

By the middle of the twentieth century with the rise in status of the scientific ‘expert’, medicine, as a sub-branch within science, came to monopolise almost all knowledge of pregnancy and childbirth, and through a variety of restrictive practices ensured that a hierarchical distribution of competence and knowledge necessary for assisting in childbirth was maintained (Ehrenreich and English 1979:71; Oakley 1992:19). Under this regime, pregnant women were to defer unquestioningly to the authority of (mostly male) doctors and to acquiesce or cede to the organisational requirements of hospital care (Doyal and Pennell 1991:76,77). Consequently, women’s knowledge of and control over their own bodies has diminished, whilst concomitantly the stock of (male) medical knowledge has increased and the control of the medical profession has been extended (Oakley 1979:15; Kitzinger 1994:192-193; Reiger 1985:90-93). This is nowhere more noticeable than in the treatment of unmarried mothers, who, because of their unwed status, were increasingly singled out for differential treatment in the hospitals and homes where the common mantra was, “trust us, we know what is best for you” (Chick 1997:220).

5.3.2 The powerful and the powerless

One couple in retracing the events surrounding the loss of their child to adoption in 1965 spoke of their absolute powerlessness (despite family support) in comparison with the mostly male, middle-class medical profession whose members at the time not only enjoyed high status, social standing and support but often had a vested interest in seeking adoption

1 There was a very heavy demand for healthy, white, newborn babies by infertile couples post-World War II. This period of increased capitalist expansion in Australian history also saw the quick rise and growth of adoption as an industry. While the Australian churches in line with churches elsewhere have pocketed huge amounts of money by procuring babies for their parishioners (McCabe1995:57; Gage1985:263), at the time, adoption also came to be seen as an area of specialist ‘expertise’ for medical and other allied health professionals/social workers embarking on a new career (Shawyer1979:13,14). A mother depicts well the
as a choice for the young mother. Whilst the first of the next two quotes relates how the natural father was not consulted at all with regard to his girlfriend’s situation, the second quote is from the girlfriend herself. Here she referred to the way in which the doctor actually used his privileged position and expert status to talk the young woman’s parents into believing that he knew what was best when in effect what was best was procuring a baby for a wealthy, migrant Jewish couple who could not have their own children and were willing to pay handsomely:

The pregnancy obviously was not planned, but nor was it an absolute surprise to us.....at the ripe old age of 17 at the time I just assumed we would get married....I felt I could persuade my parents that was the way forward.....in terms of being able to discuss the pregnancy with the medical profession, no......I have a recollection of visiting the doctor's surgery once with Diane but I did not get past the waiting room.....I was not consulted......the decision to adopt was being well and truly driven by Dr X.....he was just calling the shots all the way.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:153)

Whilst the above quotation from the natural father provides some indication of how he was completely shut out of the consultation process, the following quotation from his girlfriend also indicates this. However on learning more about the adoption on reunion with their son years later, the mother also shed light on other important extenuating factors obviously impacting on her so-called ‘decision’ to adopt:

He told me my parents would not pay any of my medical or hospital fees....it would all be taken care of and it was...he was a gynaecologist and I was looked after medically right through to delivery......even though Dad had medical benefits fund coverage, we never received any bill for any of it......my father is dead now, but Mum can confirm it......solicitors acted under his instructions to prepare and witness my consent, and the adoptive parents were named on that consent......however, that was covered up when I signed, that part of the document.....my doctor was a member of Sydney’s eastern suburbs Jewish community.....he had many wealthy clients......the adoptive parents turned out to be Jewish also, recently arrived from South Africa as migrants......they had one older child about eighteen months old.....I am certain they approached him directly to arrange an adoption.......the mother was also in the medical

socially driven agenda behind the adoption industry when she states that “it was as if all these people had their orders in and it was like filling their orders” (Queensland Independent 1998:21).
profession...they probably were unable to adopt any other way but privately, as they were not citizens and the father was well over forty years old....they also had a special requirement, a Jewish child, preferably a boy......the adoptive mother confirmed that fact with me when we first made contact with the family after searching in 1984.....she was very upset....they had been lied to by the doctor and told that I was Jewish....my son horrified me two or three years ago by asking if I received money for him and how much....I was astounded as I had been naive enough to think that could not happen.....he feels very strongly that his parents paid money for him, and he is willing to sign something to say that......so in summing up, my doctor played a very large role, and I have no doubt that he sold my son as a Jewish baby to Jewish adoptive parents......he lied to them and I was kept totally in the dark.


Another natural father recalled the circumstances surrounding the loss of his and his girlfriend’s child to adoption and the role of the medical profession in this. In this case the young father had a great deal of support from his own father but faced enormous hostility and opposition to marriage from the girlfriend’s father, the medical profession and society in general:

So I went up with the young lady and saw her father....I am not discriminating but her father was English and very straightlaced in his views, and the fact that his daughter was pregnant with my baby did not endear me to him at all...in fact, he got pretty angry....he ordered me from the house and as it was his house I had to go.....until the baby was born I was able to see her on various occasions but just after the baby was born she left hospital and that was the end...I was not able to see her again because her parents kept her at home from that day on.....as far as the treatment she received, she was virtually told she had to adopt the baby.....she told me that the baby had to be adopted out and the reasons why: her father had said so and also the people in the hospital had said so.....my father did try to see what could be done......he approached different agencies......he contacted adoption agencies and he contacted his local member to try to find out what my rights were and what his rights were as a parent and a grandparent.....basically what it came down to was that it was all too hard for everybody and we got fobbed off.....one thing that sticks in my mind is that he sat me down one day and he said, it appears, son, that you have no rights whatsoever.....I do not know where we go from here......my father has since died.....her father has since died.....I feel very sad for my father.....he just loved his children.......I still class that boy, if he is still alive, as one of his children.....he is out there somewhere and my father never knew him.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:15-18)
Irrespective of whether or not the women who lost their children to adoption had support from their partners (natural fathers), many of these women speak also about their lack of consultation, of not being made aware of their rights, their invisibility when confronted with the power of medical and allied health professionals at the time (Weitz 1996:248). For instance, whilst one mother described her experience with the medical establishment as being “herded around.....you did not have any individuality” (Witness D in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:32), most would testify that their personal thoughts, feelings, needs and desires were never addressed by those in authority (Oakley 1992:23). Rather, the authorities (that is, medical and social work staff) thought they knew what was best as the following statements by some mothers indicate (Weitz 1996:252; Oakley 1992:19; Smyth in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:38,39):

The social worker at Crown Street in fact gave me standard and biased counselling which did not consider me as an individual about to take a disastrous step......she said (and I can almost quote verbatim) we always say that adoption is the best thing.....she also told me that it was selfish to want to keep one’s child.

(a Western Australian mother at Q13.8 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

They treated me as if I was a stupid, young girl.

(a Tasmanian mother at Q26.6 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

The adoption was taken out of my hands.....everyone around me seemed to know the procedures but my husband and I, and subsequently we lost our son.....we were never informed or helped about other options even though in our file it states “they are a loving couple and will marry in a couple of years.”.....we did go on to marry two years later, had two more sons and they lost twenty years without their older brother......an appalling situation!!!!!

(a response to Q39 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

This section has looked at the coercion experienced by birthmothers when confronted with the power of the medical profession. It was shown that coercion occurred even where mothers were supported by boyfriends. This section has shown that some men stood by their girlfriends. They tried to do the right thing. They, like their girlfriends, also wanted their babies. In the next section I reveal that not all men behave in such an honourable
fashion – indeed the opposite. Because many men experience sex as a physical need, distinct from emotional expression (Isensee 1990:78), many men (though not all men) are threatened by female intimacy (Isensee 1990:176,177; Shibley Hyde 1991:299). Many will go to great lengths to avoid entering into a commitment with a woman (Cox 2002:149,155,160). Unfortunately, many young, inexperienced women are unaware of this until it is too late.

5.4 Abandonment by boyfriends

A woman must have to love a man with all her heart to have his child.....I mean, especially when she's not married to him.....and when a man leaves a woman when she tells him she’s going to have his baby when he doesn’t marry her, that must hurt a woman very much, deep down inside.

(Summers 1985:284)

Love is a danger of a different kind.....it takes you away and leaves you far behind.

(The Eurythmics Love is a Stranger words and music by A. Lennox and D. Stewart, Sweet Dreams are Made of This RCA AFL1-4681,1983)

This whole thesis is concerned with the Australian state’s severe sanctions against illegitimate pregnancy in order to maintain social order and the status quo. Unmarried women made pregnant in the past were abandoned not only by individual men but by state agents acting in the interests of the patriarchy and capitalist class who set out to accumulate personal wealth, not redistribute it (Scutt 1990:274; Lindsay 1997:252). In Chapter 5 I refer to the medical professionals, religious leaders, social workers and others who under state directives resorted to trickery and manipulation in order to “strip out-of-line mothers of their babies” (Robinson 2000:97; Wellfare 1994:1-5; Fife-Yeomans 1993:1). This section is really just a microcosm of the larger picture. Here I argue that many men (not all men) in their individual dealings with women also resort to trickery, manipulation and deception. Many adopt false fronts in order to obtain sex and will try anything in the pursuit of pleasure, sexual seduction and sexual versatility (Hoigard and Finstad 1996:358-361). When things go wrong, a young woman, pregnant and unmarried, can be dismissed (Roberts 1984:75). Compared to women who enter into relationships seeking love, commitment and the intimacy associated with permanency in a relationship, many men (not all men) use sex more often as a means to an end than spontaneous communication of
desire and love – the motivation being the will to show power, the wish to conquer......sexploits (Wolff 1977:95; Hatty 2000:120; Stanley 2001:3-5; Furstenberg 1976:44-45; Zillmann and Weaver 1989:96,101,102).

In this section I examine the various subterfuges reported by the sample of interviewees as well as from other (secondary) sources (Swain and Howe 1995:118; Zillmann and Weaver 1989:98,99). These subterfuges/deceptions involve false declarations of love and marriage; withholding information about wives/girlfriends/lovers; withholding information about a planned career change and/or move of address (Rowbotham 1975:99-102).

5.4.1 Trickery

It is commonly assumed by many men (and women) that the ‘unmarried mother’ deliberately falls pregnant in order to ‘trap her man’ (Furstenberg 1976:65). What is not so well understood is that many men (married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, wealthy or not) erect impenetrable boundaries. They promise marriage, a family and stability in order to have sexual intercourse, but renege on their promises (Goulding 2000:138; Shoham 1983:23; Hite 1987:261). The woman can be dismissed. She has little recourse, since there is nothing in writing; merely a verbal agreement from her male lover. Many unmarried mothers (yesterday and today) have fallen victim to false promises of love and marriage (Scutt 1994:205; Rush 1988:65; Golden 1998:248; Crawford 1997:33,36; Russell 1980:219; Swain and Howe 1995:21,23,53,54; Ward 1984:145). The male literature insists that unmarried mothers deliberately fall pregnant. However, pregnancies happen easily and particularly at a time when contraceptions were not allowed to the unwed:

From when I first met the ‘putative’ father of my daughter I was in a loving stable relationship with him, my family was acceptable to his family......I was and continued to be a virgin......as our relationship grew and ‘trust’ he began to pressure and pursue more intimacy......he made promises of permanent arrangements, marriage and safety, a future together and lots of children......I believe the terminology for this today is ‘rape by fraud’ because on falling pregnant we did not marry and my only option was adoption.

(a Queensland mother in her submission to the Commissioner for Children 1999:1-8)

While the following mother refers to the isolation imposed on her by the father of her child:
At first my boyfriend (now my husband) said he would marry me then he said he wouldn’t so I was sent away to an unmarried mothers home......I was put in a room by myself in the upstairs quarters.

(Interviewee 18, Sunshine Coast, Queensland, 26 August 1999)

Others recall how their boyfriends fled on learning of their pregnancies:

When I told my boyfriend that I was pregnant he told me to get an abortion. I said I didn’t want an abortion. I want this child....it is my first child and you said that if I were to become pregnant you would marry me. He contemplated for a while and then said to wait while he went to make arrangements about getting married. He told me he would be back by 1pm...1pm came and he didn't show. By 2pm he still didn't show. After about a week and he still didn’t show I went looking for him at his place of work. His boss said he gave notice a week ago and didn’t know where he was. I have not seen or heard of him since and that was almost 32 years ago...my son (my only child) is now 31

(Interviewee 30, Brisbane, April 2003)

I haven’t heard from him for a month now, although I have written about four letters to him......my mother is getting suspicious and she remarked yesterday that I would be put out on the streets if there was anything like that wrong...the last time I saw the young man he said we could get married......I think the world of him and agreed.....but he went up the country and that was the last I heard of him.

(Swain and Howe 1995:54)

I was silly enough to believe that another man wanted to marry me but all he wanted was sex which is the only thing that all men want, as I see it.

(Shawyer 1979:165)

Still other mothers have been and continue to be ‘tricked’ by men who by their facial expressions/appearance, speech, behaviours, actions, mannerisms and personal charm, feign sympathy, respect, love, even liking. In reality, however, these behaviours are merely a mask (Goffman 1969:80; Golden 1998:186; Ward 1984:38; Hatty 2000:58; Shoham 1983:193; Lantz and Snyder 1969:181; Steiner 1963:151; Rowland 1985:285). It is not always possible to gather and interpret information about persons from non-verbal cues. The external appearance of a person does not always reveal actual moods, emotions and expectations (Shoham 1983:193; Bulbeck 1998:210). How one looks, that is, how one
presents oneself to others is often not the reality (Goffman 1972:121,122) (for a further discussion on the donning of masks see ‘Physical constraints’ in Chapter 5):

It’s lousy being single.....a single woman has no status.....she is prey to every creep who comes along.....she has no way of knowing if a man is ‘just shopping’ until she has begun to like him and then finds out it was ‘just sex’ or another conquest for him.....or that he has a terminal fear of commitments and forgot to mention it.....there are no social sanctions or social judgements that the man has to face when he ‘acts’ loving and pushes for sex and then walks out.

(Hite 1987:297)

I was on the beach one Saturday afternoon, towards the end of my stay there, when I heard someone call my name. I looked around to see a tanned, handsome young man. “Do I know you?” He said that he was a friend of someone who knew me and had asked and found out my name. We walked along the beach and talked. He asked why I never saw me with a boyfriend. I replied that I wasn’t interested in boyfriends. “Aha”, he said perpectively, “someone has hurt you badly.” He encouraged me to tell him the sad story of my doomed love affair. He was very sympathetic, told me that I was charming and attractive and that “that guy must be crazy to treat you like that.” He begged me not to judge all men harshly because of one unhappy experience. I was flattered of course. We arranged to meet at a club that evening. In the evening he was friendly and attentive. We left the club in the early hours of the morning. He offered me a ride home on his motor bike. He wanted to stop to show me a particularly beautiful, waterfront park. We walked around the park for a while, enjoying the view. We sat down. We kissed and cuddled. Next thing I knew he was undressing.............Afterwards he didn’t even take me home. He drove me to where I could get a taxi, with the excuse that he didn’t have enough petrol. I was angry and disillusioned after our brief encounter, with him, with my first lover and with myself. I not only felt used, I felt soiled and spoiled. I didn’t talk to anyone about it. I thought that perhaps if I didn’t speak about it that I could pretend that it had never happened. I went home in a taxi, had a shower and hoped that I would never see him again....I didn’t.......four weeks later I discovered that I was pregnant.

(Robinson 2000:22,23)

Historically and according to the literature reviewed it is the unmarried mother who is ‘promiscuous’. The out-of-wedlock pregnancy is her fault – “if you play with fire you get burned” (Interviewee 16, Brisbane, 1998). Few places in the literature refer to adoption as a male institution which developed as a convenient means for promiscuous men (married or not) to hide their infidelities, evade their financial and legal responsibilities and in turn save their honour, save their reputations – save their sense of personal prestige/dignity (Hoigard
Irrespective of their class background, marital status or sexual orientation (that is, heterosexual or homosexual), men on the lookout for sex with no commitment are adept at entering into and ending relationships (Hoigard and Finstad 1996:358-365). Unfortunately, the women involved are not always aware of this and find out when it is too late (Dworkin 1982:43; Greer 1986:156,162; Dworkin 1997:150; Gare 2000:20):

I had known this man for a few months and dated him – a university professor, very distinguished and all, in his mid 40s – and had just gone to bed with him for the first time. ... after his climax, he gripped me hard and cracked “Don’t move now or you’ll be the twelfth black victim”  ... although this was supposed to be a ‘joke’ it was absolutely clear that he was getting off on this implied threat to me......we’d just had sex and now all there was was danger......I never wanted to see him again and I never did.

(Caputi 1987:47)

She was very thin and pale......I was used to seeing very pregnant girls coming in, seven or eight months pregnant......I had to examine her in the usual pre-natal routine and was curious as to why she was there so soon......as I checked her blood pressure, I asked if her boyfriend knew of her condition......she started to cry and shook her head “I started going out with him about six months ago......I didn’t know he was married....I began to suspect that he was when he started asking me if I was feeling queasy in the mornings....next, he made excuses for not meeting me after work......I was working as a civil servant in a busy tax office......most mornings I had to leave my desk and go to the ladies' to get sick...soon he kept passing my desk and asked if I had got rid of my breakfast.....I just couldn't stand the snide remarks any longer......I was devastated”.

(Goulding 2000: 82)

Many men (married and single; heterosexual and homosexual) withhold information about wives, children and girlfriends/lovers from current girlfriends (Swain and Howe 1995:20; Goulding 2000:82; Hite 1987:424):

Married men can be very devious.....they are the worst ones......they don’t tell you they are married but I knew this one was......I was disgusted with the way he was trying to latch onto me.....I thought how am I going to get rid of this bastard......so I said: “if you keep it up.....I’m going straight around to tell your wife” ......that sure shut the bastard up.

(Interviewee 28, Brisbane, 12 June 2002)
Things were very closed and secretive.....I never even knew where he lived......never met any of his friends and mine never met him.......I spent a lot of time waiting and hoping

(Hite 1987: 426)

Well, you have to wonder about the “impotency” bit......look!......I have a lot of male friends who are gay.......I know a lot of guys who are gay........whenever their partners are out of town for the weekend or on a longer vacation or whatever these guys are out there shagging everything they can.

(a male postgraduate student, Brisbane, 2001)

I was told a whole pile of lies by the father of my son.......I didn't know it at the time but apparently he was seeing someone else all along.

(Interviewee 2, Beaudesert, September 2002)

The father of the child married someone else three weeks before she was born.

(a Queensland mother at Q39 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I met my mother when I was 34........she said she did not know that he was married.......there was nothing she could do.......she had no money, no income, no place to live and her parents shunned her.......oh, she loved my father alright....on being told of her pregnancy he just up and left.........she was absolutely devastated........she is no longer alive .....I wish I could have known her longer........I have no desire to meet the predator........apparently he was someone quite high up in the police force........

(a male adoptee, Brisbane, July 2002)

On the other hand, some men (married or not) deliberately flaunt or allude to great wealth, a fine estate, etc. Such men assume that all women are gold diggers (Summers 1985:87,177; Scutt 1992:181; Pomeroy 1975:114; Wiesner1993:20; Bulbeck 1998:184; see also Chapters 1 and 2):

He was a Casanova! Always up to mischief. Always after the girls. That was his main hobby. Poor as a church mouse, but always talking big. Always showing off, yet none of it was true. Like boasting about a big factory. That kind of thing. You know: “My father owns a big factory. I live in this grand place” – both of which were simply not true. He was a good-
looking chap, though, a really handsome man. So the women chased him all right, but not half as much as he chased them.

(Josephs and Bechhofer 1996:92)

When I’m out I’ve had men offering me money in order to get sex.....pretending to want a long term relationship and saying things like “I’ve got a lot of money” .....heaps of them do this.....all they want is a root and then they’re off.

(Interviewee 28, Brisbane, 30 June 2002)

5.4.2 The non-negotiating position of women

Unbeknown to the woman, many men deliberately rearrange their affairs (including finances) so as to be in a better position to make a quick exit from a relationship (Bulbeck 1998:182; Morgan 1980:135,140,145,151). Whilst this might involve locating or planning to relocate at a geographical distance (that is, in another suburb, town, city or even state), not answering the phone or letters is a ploy common to many men, as is the tactic of using a silent number, not answering the door or not listing (in the telephone directory) one’s new (or intended) residential abode (Hatty 2000:62,68,169; Bulbeck 1998:182; Storr 1999:131). While some men resort to such ploys of their own volition, others are forced to do so by either parents (see previous section on complicating factors inhibiting legitimate marriage) or because of constraints on their actions by a third party (Rasool 2002:90,115). The man may be already married, engaged to be married or in a long-term commitment (see section on Physical Constraints in Chapter 5). Under such circumstances it is relatively easy for many men to exclude women from intimacy and indeed from their lives altogether. Whilst research indicates that many gay men actively cultivate an identity which is based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family, heterosexual men are also adept at avoiding long-term commitments: “they want sex with a woman, the passion, the excitement, the pleasure of skin upon skin but not the lumber of the world.... once the excitement is over so is the relationship” (Metcalf and Humphries 1985:80,83,105; D'Emilio 1997:174-176; Garber 2000:256; Morgan 1980:151; McMillan 1992:26,28; Young 1997:60,61; Hoigard and Finstad 1996:359). Many men, (heterosexual and homosexual, married or unmarried, wealthy or not) construct an environment where they

The social world is such that any individual who is strongly oriented to action can perceive the potentialities for chance in situations others would see as devoid of eventfulness (Cameron and Frazer 1996:331). The situation can even be structured so that these possibilities are made manifest. Chance taking with regard to sexual adventure is not merely sought out, but carved out by a lot of men (Diamond 1980:197; Mielke 1995:81; Morris 2004:5). Social space is appropriated such that only temporary liaisons with the opposite sex take place (Wilson 2004:14; Toomey 2001:29-31). Since many men seek separateness, segregation from others (Fox-Genovese 1991:96), women are deliberately excluded (Cox 2002:149-160; Pile and Kieth 1997:176; Moghaddam et al. 1993:106; Williams 2001:112; Moore 2001:69; Isensee 1990:5,176-177; Johnson et al. 1994:222; Goffman 1972:200,211; Bourke 1999:18,19; Dworkin 1997:146,109). My sample of interviewees confirms this, as does information from other sources:

Look, we just finished a research survey to see who is doing this sort of thing.....it is mostly the well heeled middle-class men, the academics, the politicians, the public servants.....those who can get away with it and have the most to lose by not covering up......what it boils down to is that they play-up and then cover-up....fuck then move, fuck then move.

(a female postgraduate law student, Brisbane, July 2001; Moore 2001:33)

Who pray tell asked natural mothers if they wanted everything hidden and hush, hush. No-one ever asked us yet politicians just said it was in the natural mothers best interest, BULL! Politicians of the time were self interested and probably didn’t want their names let out

(a Tasmanian mother at Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

They rape over and over again.

(a female academic, Brisbane, February 2002; Bart and Jozsa 1980: 215)

After the birth my mother took me to Queensland for three weeks to regain my figure (I had twins).......I discussed keeping my sons but she wouldn’t let me......when I got home to Victoria I contacted the natural father but he was still uninterested.....I wrote to his parents and received no answer to my letter......by then 30 days had passed.

(a response to Q34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
He was a man who liked women very much....but he didn’t always tell the truth.....he learned tin
smithing and finished his apprenticeship.......he moved house frequently......nobody knew of
your existence.

(Josephs and Bechhofer 1996:98)

That’s why he moved there.......so he could fuck different women.......fuck with no
responsibility!

(Interviewee 25, Brisbane, March 2002)

Men have a way of approach and avoidance (distancing) – you know, first, romance, seduction
and candlelight.....the chase......but then to live with a woman?......how?....why?....who
cares?......New York is a candy store .....and women are the candies.....treats for men......not
people.

(Hite 1987: 691)

Whilst men can simply lie to women by using the excuse that they are changing jobs or
too busy with a new career (Swain and Howe 1995:22; McCabe 1995:71):

She voiced her fears to her young friend to no avail.....he hurriedly left to pursue a career in the
Forces and Rose has neither seen nor heard of him since.

(McCabe 1995: 71)

Others simply disappear on the quiet and quickly (Havemann 1997:2; McCabe 1995:45;

My mate and I were to be married (long planned) but when my pregnancy two weeks before the
wedding date became known, he left......he was not able to talk to me about it at all......just
suddenly I was alone carrying the child......it was difficult and it took all my courage to be
strong.

(Hite 1987: 235)

I only saw the father of my child once after he knew I was pregnant.....he made no effort ever to
even find out about the baby.

(a Western Australian mother in response to Q16 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
My daughter’s father is a foreigner....on learning of my pregnancy, he immediately left the country.

(Interviewee 12, Sydney, July 1999)

The father of my child was only a year older than I was and when I told him he basically could not cope with it.....he left town and went to live with his sister somewhere else in another town.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1999:2)

She was made painfully aware that her lover’s behaviour was not as charming as she had once thought – not least because he could not even muster the courage to tell her face to face that it was all over......instead he simply packed his bags and left for pleasures new.

(Josephs and Bechhofer 1996:92)

Due to the gains won by the feminist movement in recent decades (greater entry to and better paid jobs for some women; increased state intervention for really needy women; more relaxed attitudes surrounding sexuality) many people (both men and women) falsely assume that the pregnant unmarried woman is no longer vulnerable and therefore is not in need of community support (Davidson 1986:32). She is no longer at ‘the mercy of her man’. Many people today, who have not lived through earlier decades or have no personal recollection/experience of what it was like to be young, pregnant and totally without support (economic or emotional), have no comprehension, no empathy for extremely vulnerable women who were and still are “at the mercy of men” (Dworkin 1997:110; Megalogenis 1994:3). In this section I reveal how an unmarried, unsupported and pregnant woman is always vulnerable and at the mercy of some man – the only difference is one of degree (Golden 1998:11,248; Greer 1999:12; Meulenbelt 1978:26).

Whereas today’s unmarried mothers are dependent on state-provided welfare benefits (meagre though they are) and/or are able to participate in the labour market due to improved child-care and other assistance (Dwyer 1992:29; Chesterman 1989:31-34), in the mid-twentieth century up until the early 1970s these pensions/benefits were simply unheard of, not disclosed and/or provided (see ‘Withholding information’ in Chapter 5). At a time
when women were not expected to go out to work\textsuperscript{2}, but rather to give up work on marriage, women who found themselves pregnant and unmarried were left in limbo, heavily dependent as they were on the charitable goodwill of boyfriends and where this was not forthcoming, their own fathers (Marshall and McDonald 2001:62; Swain and Howe 1995:53,54; Jeffreys 1997:134). Some partners (that is, natural fathers) could threaten their pregnant girlfriends with the poor-house, the parish, reformatory or simply cut off all further communication (Rush1988:163; Golden 1998:172; Swain and Howe 1995:53; Josephs and Bechhofer 1996:91):

> After collecting her belongings from St Mary's, Elizabeth returned to the family home but “things were never really the same”. .....her experience was never discussed and Elizabeth was distressed that her parents had “turned their backs on their first granddaughter”......twenty-four hours later she phoned her boyfriend who had failed to contact her in hospital even though he was aware of the birth.....he made it quite clear that the relationship was finished and stated that he was soon going interstate......a fortnight later, still extremely depressed, Elizabeth attempted suicide by deliberately overdosing on her barbiturates. She was admitted to the Brisbane General Hospital under emergency conditions where her stomach was pumped in an effort to save her life.

(McCabe 1995:86)

However, due to differences in sex role expectations, natural fathers would often just expect their girlfriends to “fix the problem” – that is, smooth over the emotional upheaval arising from an unplanned pregnancy (Naffine 1990:138; Golden 1998:8,913,21; Tuchman 1978:14; Harkness 1991:23):

> He demanded that I get an abortion.......he did not offer to help with expenses or help me to find an abortionist.....it was just assumed that I could cope with all of this on my own.

(Interviewee 27, Brisbane, 2003)

\textsuperscript{2}At this time many women (particularly working-class women) considered themselves fortunate to have any worthwhile employment outside the home (a career was a rarity) – the employment they would find at female wage rates was hardly sufficient for basic needs, that is, food, shelter, clothing. Female wage rates in Australia have never been on a par with those of men (Bulbeck 1993:63,100). If Australian women in 2005 still do not have equal pay how much more dire was their situation in the mid-twentieth century?
It was also common to use emotional blackmail to this same end (Golden 1998:172,173; Josephs and Bechhofer 1996:44; Hatty 2000:57,58,59):

Loving him as I did I could refuse him nothing.

(Swain and Howe 1995:22)

He must have loved me at one time, or he wouldn't have stuck with me so long......he held it over me that if I adopted out the baby we would get married and have a family, but if I didn't, if I got any ideas of keeping it, it was 'goodbye' and no maintenance......I'd be on the streets with a baby.

(Shawyer 1979:161)

Some days he called and was very attentive and loving and wanted to see me.....other times if I called him he would make fun of me or ridicule me or be noncommittal......I don't think it was that he was busy or had someone there....I think he just enjoyed displaying his power......he knew I would put up with his moods, do anything to please - just as his previous girlfriend and his mother had always done

(Hite 1987:234).

Married women in the past were not always able to negotiate their needs and interests within legal marriage. Where the woman is without financial reserves and/or no job, her vulnerability is even greater. If her husband is unloving, unsupporting and perhaps even violent, there is little she can do to either escape or change his behaviour since behaviours are ingrained and stem from differences in socialisation. In other words, a lot of men are socialised into believing that they can say and/or do what they like (Hatty 2000:112,120). Many prefer to blame others for their behaviour – never themselves (Hatty 2000:147). It is understandable that when women are disappointed in marriage they will seek its dissolution. However, the unmarried mothers of yesteryear, who were not able to marry, would argue that at least a married woman has some protection and the prospect of financial assistance with raising the child(ren). The married woman may not be able to control her husband’s bad behaviour, but in this century at least he can be forced by the courts to pay towards child-rearing costs on dissolution of the marriage. A pregnant and unmarried woman in the past had none of these advantages. She could not file for financial
support. Even if he were to be located, many natural fathers would deny paternity (Shawyer 1979:51). Similarly there was/is little or nothing she could do to control his behaviour towards her. He could simply walk out and/or take up with another woman or threaten to do so (Golden 1998:172,173; Swain and Howe 1995:53,54; Coles et al. 1997:99-105):

No, he wasn’t ashamed of himself......he never at any stage wanted a child or wanted to support it.......he wanted to make use of me......in the end he turned to drink and things got worse and he stayed out and all the time he was staying out with this other girl.

(Shawyer 1979:161)

At a time when virginity was more highly prized, some men used this as justification for letting go of the woman (Rabuzzi 1994: 45). They could look for all sorts of faults in the woman (such as unfaithfulness even where there was none) thus paving the way for increased conflict in the relationship and in turn its complete destabilisation/erosion (Dalrymple 1998: 33; Hatty 2000: 55,71; Andersen et al. 1990:297):

When I lost my virginity, he was surprised......he said he thought any woman as passionate as I must have had some previous experience.......he didn't believe passion would be natural in a virgin.......it never crossed my mind that my ‘passion’ could be held against me.

(Hite 1987:183)

He was always picking on me.......there was nothing I could do right.......then he started accusing me of playing up.....if only he knew ......I was so in love with him, I wouldn’t even look at another man.

(Interviewee 11, Brisbane, March 2001)

My daughter’s father told me later he would never marry anyone who was not a virgin.

(a Queensland submission to the Commissioner for Children 1999:1-3)
Some young women became unmarried mothers due to child incest (letter from a birthmother; Ennew 1986:45; Krieger and Robbins 1985:419; Wilson 1993:182):

I was molested when quite young.......but it doesn’t have any effect on whether or not you want your baby because it is only natural that mothers will want their babies.

(Interviewee 15, Sunshine Coast Queensland, 1999)

I made a friend while in the home........she was in for the third time........she had no idea how babies were made........when we left the home I went to her place with her for a visit........I was shocked when I met her father........he had the same thick black head of hair that her baby that was adopted had........her mother was no longer alive and she lived alone with her father.

(Interviewee 8, Brisbane, 1999)

Others are made so by unscrupulous men who, in their quest for sex with no commitment, resort to drugging a young woman or getting her drunk (a Queensland mother at Q13 of the questionnaire, see Appendix 1; Hatty 2000:69; Rush 1988:65; Bowker 1998:102; Curties 1993:42).

This concludes the discussion on abandonment by boyfriends. The section examined the various subterfuges some men have used to avoid sex with commitment (Jukes 1999:140,145; Hinds 1997:50,74). Hence the non-negotiating position of women was highlighted (Allen 1990:242; Swain and Howe 1995:118). The next section makes a brief reference to pornography as it represents and helps to embed a basic disrespect for women (Zillmann and Weaver 1989:99). Although one can argue that the pornography in circulation at mid twentieth century in Australia was not nearly as violent as the images of women currently available on the internet and other media, it was still available. It was possibly more hidden than it is today but that is surely due to prohibitions, that is, the more general social taboos surrounding sex and sexuality operative at the time. It could be argued that the symbolic meaning has not changed with time and the damaging effects remain the same – trivialisation of women and their debasement (Cameron and Frazer 1987:141; Russell 1980:84; Goldsmith 1993:2; Stanley 2001:4).
5.5 Pornography: ‘the slime under the rug’ of patriarchy?

Dad had a whole lot of people helping him to take my mum away from me. Why didn’t someone help me stay with my mum? We’d been through a lot together and survived. Then they took my mum away from me and gave me someone else they thought was better than my mum. They didn’t get to know her like I did.

(personal memoirs from a birthmother, Brisbane, 1999)

This section begins with a brief description of pornography. It then proceeds with an analysis of how and for whose benefit pornography is depicted. For instance, since the representations are made by men they largely gloss over the reality of many women’s lives leaving audiences with misrepresentations and/or under-representations. The negative images portrayed can have a twofold effect. They not only help justify the sexually callous treatment of women and girls; the trivialisation of women helps foster the notion that women should remain unequal with men (Allen 1992:7). Whilst all women (black and white) are vulnerable to serious misrepresentation and or under-representation in pornography, it could be argued in particular that a contemptuous disregard for unwed mothers is fostered.

Although some women may watch and enjoy pornography, most pornography is made by men to be consumed by men. The sex that is depicted in pornography never equates with either love, commitment, sharing or caring (Zillman 1989:140,150). On the contrary, representations typically depict graphic sex and/or rape scenes which devalue women (Allen 1992:35). These scripts also engender in men the notion that it is permissible to use and abuse women for male pleasure and profits (Adams 2003:11; Dworkin 1985:85). Women are mere playthings for male titillation and sexual excitement. The emphasis is on sex as conquest, never cohabitation. Man is preoccupied with sex for personal pleasure, gratification – adventure (Stanley 2001:4,14,15; Jeffreys 1997:239).

Pornography graphically depicts what it is that men want (Lurie 1980:159; MacKinnon in Jeffreys 1997:232). Consequently, many men become completely insensitive to women as human beings with feelings (Lederer 1980:70; Hite in Jeffreys 1997:238,239). Some men learn to ‘switch off’ or be deaf to their cries, sighs and whispers. One does not have to hear...one does not have to listen...screams and pleas are ignored...she is ignored...she has

In pornography young women and girls are the object of the male gaze and reduced to the notion that ‘you are nothing more than your sex’ (Allen 1992:35). Men with the resources and in a position to do so create images of women in order to satisfy male whims, fantasies and desires. In pornography women are always ‘the object of the artist’s gaze, never the artist’ (Allen 1992:35). In this scenario female promiscuity is presented as the norm. Alternative representations of women are overlooked. For instance, many people are unaware that many of the young women and girls who perform in pornography do so out of social and economic necessity. Many of the young women and girls recruited into this work are drawn from the most economically disadvantaged sections of society – the poor and vulnerable, the lonely, the homeless (Rush 1980:78; Altink 1995:75-77; Ellingsen 1994:3; Wonders and Michalowski 2001:545-581; Baker 2002:5). Young women and girls may be tricked/coerced/deceived into performing by men in their quest for pleasure and profits and yet they are portrayed as if they are enjoying their debasement (Lederer 1980:69; Altink 1995:75-77; Ellingsen 1994:3).

In the case of unmarried mothers, pornography allows the audience to remain distanced from their plight. One does not have to see the unmarried mother as struggling, destitute or in personal pain. That image can capture the attention. That voice says, ‘I need help’. Rather, via pornography, the generalised view that an unmarried mother is responsible for her plight is reinforced. She is promiscuous and therefore responsible for her situation. The male fantasy that all women are ‘whores’ allows the audience to close their eyes to her concerns, needs and interests (Schein 1997:6,7; Dworkin 1976:27-49). In this way stereotypical views help obfuscate social responsibility and/or collective care (Schein 1997:6,7).

5.6 Conclusion

This section has been concerned with the ways in which pornography can foster negative attitudes towards women in general and unmarried mothers in particular. In pornography women are reduced to their body parts. Since many of the male scripts focus on depersonalised sex, this can seriously compromise male respect for women as people with feelings who may value long-term relationships and commitment. The constant
exposure to pornographic images can over the long-term desensitise their audiences; graphic images of illicit sex scenes can also inhibit rates of marriageability (Zillman 1989:140,150; MacKinnon 1998:43-56).

This section has been concerned with pornography and its impact. In other sections of this chapter I have discussed the other numerous factors inhibiting legitimate marriages and births. Complicating factors such as ethnic, racial and class based prohibitions were discussed, as were religious and cultural prohibitions. This chapter has been concerned with some of the interpersonal difficulties many of the women encountered from boyfriends, the boyfriends’ families and/or their families of origin. The chapter also introduced the boundaries (territorial and discursive) imposed by the medical profession at that time. Whilst I have paid particular attention to the power of this profession to set boundaries, other professions, namely the growing social work profession, must also be held accountable. In order to arrive at some conclusions as to the extent of coercion felt by the mothers, the next chapter examines the practices employed by both professions. Religious prohibitions and attitudes, guiding some of these practices, are also referred to in this discussion.
6. Chapter 5

Institutional constraints: the waiting homes and hospitals

The surrender was inevitable... the coercion subtle... we were immobilised... incapacitated... crippled.....

(Interviewee 17, Perth, 31 August 1999)

Mine the gift... mine the shame ... I did not exist... unspeakable isolation.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight with Michelle
Rayner 15 July 1999)

From the minute I started childbirth it was somebody else’s baby and I was just going through
the process of losing it... so in a way, instead of being a birth, it was a death.

(Shawyer 1979:135)

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the numerous and varied complicating factors inhibiting
marriageability for the young expectant women. There I argued that a lack of sufficient
support from boyfriends and immediate family left many of the women with no options but
to have their babies adopted. In Chapter 1, I referred briefly to the special homes which
became operative in early twentieth century Australia. In that chapter and the introduction I
argued that by mid-twentieth century in Australia it was socially expected that unmarried,
pregnant women would enter these homes while awaiting their confinements (Spensky
1992:110-118). This chapter provides evidence of the coercion experienced by the young
women once ‘incarcerated’ in the homes and hospitals as reported in their interviews, the
survey responses and secondary materials from government enquiries. According to
birthmothers’ perceptions and memories of what happened at the time, the coercion could
be subtle or not so subtle; it was experienced in a variety of forms. For instance, there was
physical coercion such as drugging and the enforced separation from babies immediately at birth. Since the physical design and layout of the homes was conducive to this, rapid adoptions, that is, the quick replacement of a stillborn baby with an ‘illegitimate’ baby, also occurred (Graham 1997:215).

Fear, terror tactics, intimidation and threats were other forms of coercion which were both physical and ideological. Supervisory staff had the support of politicians and the wider community to enact the sanctions which would bring about their desired outcome – adoption. Where this could not be achieved via non-violent processes, involving ideological and psychological persuasion, staff could resort to physical violence – restraining the women by force or calling the police (Kirby 2001:149-152; Charles 2000:21; Hammond 1998:77,78; Hanmer 1978:219). Withholding of vital information, such as housing and pension entitlements, was arguably one of the most efficient ways of getting the unmarried mothers to acquiesce to the demands imposed from above (Lindsay 1997:247; Rawady 1997:392). However, ridicule, defamatory remarks and verbal ‘put-downs’ (words used as weapons) was another less obvious, but nonetheless, effective means of attaining compliance (Code 1995:140; Weinberg 2001:139,141).

As a framework for this analysis I give a brief description of the homes and hospitals and how they operated. I then argue that, since most of the homes and hospitals were operating under strict financial, efficiency and time management constraints, adoption was prioritised by the medical and social work professionals staffing these institutions. Furthermore, compared to the paid personnel who were operating under state directives, the unwed women were young, isolated and in many instances personally and financially destitute. Uninformed of their legal rights to social benefits (which were available at the time but withheld) the young unmarried women felt they had no other choices open to them (Shildrick 1997:77-80; Code 1995:84,122,123; Swain and Howe 1995:133; Andersen et al. 1990:293-297). In retrospect many of the women have used the word ‘forced’ to indicate their complete lack of control over what was to happen to them and their babies. (Lemert and Branaman 1997: Iiiv; Code 1995:84,122,123; Swain and Howe 1995:133; Andersen et al. 1990:293-297; Charles 2000:21). This was made clear recently by one birthmother who states:

My son still can’t get it into his head… I did not give him away… I was forced!

(Interviewee 2, Brisbane, 1999)
Another makes the same point but uses different terminology:

How does one express betrayal, confusion and compliance?... the girls come into the homes innocent young women... they emerge silenced... the homes dismembered them and their babies... then spat them both back into a world that didn't see them as real people.

(Kashin 1997:531)

6.2 The homes and hospitals

The building looked like a fortress and appeared threatening... the front garden was nice but the tall, high brick fence surrounding the property frightened me... I had a feeling in the pit of my stomach that there was evil in this house but I had no idea of what it was...

(Hammond 1998:34)

The maternity homes to which mothers were sent in New South Wales included the Queen Victoria Maternity Hospital at Annandale, which accepted young women from the fifth month of pregnancy. The atmosphere at this home was described as permissive where there were no set hours, girls were allowed out and were allowed to smoke and receive visitors. There were no qualifications regarding age or religion, but the girls in residence were required to help with domestic duties (Farrar1997:118).

Religious organisations which operated the homes included the Catholic Church, which oversaw St Anthony’s Home at Ashfield and the Waitara Babies’ Home. Both institutions were formerly known as foundling homes and accommodated babies waiting to be adopted as well as those considered unadoptable (Farrar 1997:119). Although they stated that there was no distinction made regarding religion, the majority of mothers were Catholic and had their babies at local Catholic maternity hospitals with which they had affiliations. Their babies were adopted through the Catholic Adoption Agency (Farrar 1997:119).

In Sydney the Salvation Army operated two facilities: Bethesda, which operated as a private maternity hospital, and The Home of Hope for Fallen and Destitute Women, which served as an adjunct to the South Sydney Women's Hospital. At the former, mothers were expected to remain in the home to care for their babies until they were adopted. In both facilities mothers worked in a domestic capacity thus paying for their confinement (Farrar 1997:119).

There were two major maternity hospitals in Sydney alone where unmarried women stayed in the very late stages of their pregnancies. At the Royal Sydney Hospital, mothers
were restricted to their section of the hospital. They had freedom of the hospital grounds but they were not allowed out. Here they lived in dormitory type accommodation where it was necessary to look after their own section. They came under the supervision and control of social workers. Compared to the Royal, Crown Street Hospital was strict. There was little freedom as there were no hospital grounds and the emphasis was on medical care. This hospital also administered the Lady Wakehurst Maternity Home, which was in relatively close proximity. Here the mothers were admitted just prior to their confinement and returned upon having their babies until preliminary adoption arrangements were made. The majority of women who lost their babies to adoption in New South Wales passed through the Crown Street institutions (Farrar 1997:118-119). No proof was ever given that the women were now mothers. All left the homes and hospitals without any copies of the signed consent forms. There was no other acknowledgement that they had even given birth (McHutchison 2000:191).

In Queensland many of the homes which opened in the nineteenth century were still operating in the late twentieth century (Healy 1996:123). The Lady Bowen Lying-In Hospital was opened in 1864, and the Brisbane Female Refuge and Infants’ Home was opened in 1870. Here pregnant young women could stay both before and after a pregnancy and until they finished nursing (breastfeeding). The Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross Retreat started the Magdalen Asylum in 1888 in the Brisbane suburb of Wooloowin. The Magdalen Asylum took single women awaiting confinement as well as unmarried mothers with their babies for two years, if they were Catholic. The Salvation Army opened a rescue home called Garth House at Breakfast Creek in Brisbane in 1893, with accommodation for 40 unmarried women awaiting confinement. This home was relocated to Boothville Mothers’ Hospital in the suburb of Windsor in 1925. A Salvation Army Rescue Home was opened in Rockhampton, and St Mary’s Rescue Homes in Brisbane and Rockhampton also took destitute women awaiting confinement (Selby 1992:314-315; Healy 1996:123).

While many maternity homes throughout Australia were funded by charities and churches and others were attached to or operated by maternity hospitals, all had more or less formal arrangements with adoption agencies. The most common procedure was for the mother to have her admission to the home arranged by a social worker for the last few months of her pregnancy. Whilst it was common that the resident inmates would contribute to the day-to-day running of the homes in order to pay towards the cost of their time there,
many of these homes also arranged outside employment for the women in terms of live-in mother’s helps. This was a common arrangement in which working-class and expectant unmarried women would enter the private homes of well established middle-class professional couples and assume child-minding and other household duties (Farrar 1997:120).

A Sydney doctor describes this practice of taking single, pregnant women into her own home:

My experience was that I had four young girls over a period....they usually stayed with me for about two to three months from about six months of pregnancy......all of them were in the same situation, their families were horrified when they found out that they were pregnant and felt that the shame of it all was more than they could cope with....the families actually told them to go away and to come back after the child was born......looking back on it now, I think it was the most shocking exploitation and I am ashamed of my part in it.....but it was the accepted practice at the time and a number of my friends also had these girls.....we were all working and we needed help with our children and they worked as mothers’ help and did light housework.....but I still think it was exploitation.

(Weisberg in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:88)

Some of the mothers also refer to this experience in hindsight:

I was isolated out in the community where I was cheap labour for a mother with three children.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:88)

At 17 years old from a country town, sent to Sydney when I was pregnant.....I had no family or friends in Sydney.....I was placed in a family home to care for their home and two children....I had no support as in what was happening to me or what to expect.....all I can remember is I was constantly frightened, due to being left in isolation.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:88)

I went to stay with the father and stepmother of a close family friend as respite from the social shame and secrecy surrounding my illegitimate pregnancy.....these people were so kind and totally non-judgemental......Mum came to visit once a week.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight with Michelle Rayner
15 July 1999)
I didn’t stay in a home... I lived with a very kind couple... I worked until 6 weeks before my baby was born... the whole thing was bizarre.

(a response to Q24 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

All of the homes had rules and regulations of varying strictness, and some imposed other conditions on the mothers as well. For instance, even though many of the young pregnant woman had nowhere else to turn, many of the homes would only accept the woman if she agreed to placing the baby for adoption. Similarly, many homes would only accept the expectant mother if it was her first pregnancy (Farrar 1997:120). Informed by the ‘moral quality’ of the mothers, rules and regulations at the maternity homes were directed towards secrecy, respectability, responsibility and denial (Farrar 1997:120; Healy 1996:123):

I believed that because I was under 18 years that I had no say in the outcome and this is what I had been told by my parents and the matron of the hospital....I was told many times that if I opposed adoption my child would be made a ward of the State and I believed this.....my pregnancy was not spoken about at home, at school nobody knew and in the hospital it was as though it did not exist...I was healthy and active and carried on normally.....although I was not in denial that I was pregnant it was as though those around me were and the subject itself was taboo.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:163)

When labour was imminent, the mother was transferred to an associated maternity hospital for confinement, but in some institutions, confinements took place on the premises. Occasionally the mothers were allowed to care for their babies, often returning with them to the home until arrangements for adoption were secured by home and/or hospital staff (Farrar 1997:120):

The day came when I had to leave the hospital and take him on the train from one city to another back to the home for unmarried mothers... the baby was so quiet and good... the nun gave me five minutes to say goodbye (crying as she recalls this)... she said you’ll get over it, you’ll forget all about it and have more children... the nun then took me into a huge squeaky
clean hall with beautiful polished floors, turned her back on me and left... I don’t remember getting home.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner
15 July 1999)

Once the adoption was finalised, the mother was advised to return home to re-establish her life.....a cruel practice and one which just assumed that a mother could do this (Farrar 1997:120):

I went back to my mum who would say “how are you dear?” (as a formality).... “I’m fine now mum... I'm ok” (keeping my chin up for Mum) and it was never ever spoken about again.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner
15 July 1999)

It is not possible to re-emerge to continue on in life.....everything is a lie and a pretence.....there is an overwhelming sense of loss.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner
15 July 1999)

I did walk in the door saying that I thought adoption was the best thing because my mother was working I could not see how I could look after my child....it was as if I was picked up and taken along with yes, I want to adopt....for all these years I didn’t know there were alternatives.....I was not given any alternatives....it was as if I walked in the door and said “I want to commit suicide” and she said “very well.....do you want to go into the community and commit it or do you want to go into a home and commit it?

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:124)

Go and get her mother from the ward, Nurse.... she must carry Assumpta over the long corridor... I was appalled at this cruel custom... by now I was crying myself... the baby was calling Da Da and clapping her hands... suddenly there was a shriek from the distraught mother when she saw her beautiful daughter ready to go to God knows where... Sister walked first along the corridor that linked the hospital to the convent... the girls stood at the doorways watching this heart-rending scene and the mother's uncontrolled crying could be heard all along that long corridor... at the end Sister opened the door that adjoined the convent and turned and
took the baby from her mother’s reluctant grasp... the distraught young mother never slept or ate for the following week... she lost a stone in weight and finally went back to finish her nurse’s training... my tears the night Assumpta left did nothing to impress Sister who carried out her duty with stoic indifference... Assumpta could have been a bag of apples or even potatoes so long as she was formally handed over... I missed her so much... I could not even begin to contemplate the depth of her mother’s grief.

(Goulding 2000:39,40)

Dawn says when she went to Ashgrove Private Hospital she expected the nurse to dress the baby in the pretty clothes she had bought for her and then she would take the baby away... she was horrified when told the natural mother would be called in to the room and told to hand over the baby... she hadn’t seen that baby before that day... part of the procedure had to be that the baby was to be given to her and that then she was to hand that baby to me... to me it was horrible... Dawn said when the girl looked at the baby for the first time she had an expression of absolute joy... and then the tears started to come because she was realising that she had to hand that baby to me... and just for that minute, despite the fact that I was doing something that I desperately wanted to do, I sort of felt that I was doing something hurtful and horrible, like wrenching that girl’s heart out... she was seeing the baby that she’d had five days earlier for the first time... she was holding that little bit of humanity in her arms and then she had to give her to me and never see her again... Dawn said she could only thank the girl and promise that she and her husband would dearly love the baby and she would be well looked after... then she looked at me once more and she ran into her room and I could hear her crying and crying and crying and crying and crying...

(Dawn's Story in The Sunday Mail, August 27, 1995:10)

Most homes and hospitals operated to a strict regime of:

… chores, prayers, meals…

(a Western Australian mother at Q25.5 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

6.3 Religious hostels

Most of the homes provided hostel-style accommodation for unmarried women only and the average age of the residents was 18-21 years (New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:74). All homes charged an operating fee and this differed in accordance to those running the homes. For example, whilst Carramar, an
Institutions run by the Church of England in Sydney charged its inmates $17 a week, the Presbyterian-run Queen Victoria Hostel charged $2.10. As already referred to previously, in order to sustain such low charges the unmarried mothers were expected to help in the domestic chores of the homes and in most establishments a routine roster system involving cleaning, preparation of food, serving, washing up etc. was set up and closely observed (New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:74):

I was worked very hard in that home......I was 15 and can remember being very sick a lot of the time but the nuns still forced me to work.

(Interviewee 6, Brisbane, 1999)

We worked on a roster system doing unpleasant, heavy, domestic chores six days a week with one day off....6am start, dormitory inspections....similar to what army life would be like. Daily regimen included: up at 6, shower, set tables, make breakfast, washing, clean bathrooms, wash up, reset tables for lunch, wash up, reset for dinner, wash up, cook, exercises etc... I got off cleaning bathrooms, because I was a qualified teacher so was happy to supervise the correspondence for six of the high school students.... afternoon free time... could be spent in the art room, using the sewing machines or in the garden.

(a response to Q25 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

In many ways these homes, hospitals and hospital annexes appeared to these women to operate military style:

Our existence at the home was regimented from morning till night – the day commencing at 6am with alarms ringing, our bed making and dressing then gathering in kitchen to prepare for breakfast... we had to be out of the rooms by 6.30am, not allowed back upstairs until after lunch... the regimentation came in the form of all work, chores, meals preparation, cleaning etc... this was the duty of all who passed through these doors... there was a roster compiled weekly, adjusted to include any newcomers regardless of how advanced the woman was in her pregnancy or how long she intended to stay... there were no mod-cons... all cleaning, washing, scrubbing was done on hands and knees and the entire building had wooden floors with the exception of the matron’s quarters upstairs, carpeted and off limits... every morning, after clearing and cleaning up after breakfast, all the washing was done, by hand, in tubs in the laundry... all floors cleaned, furniture included, every day, by every woman regardless of what condition we were in... most suffered morning sickness every day including all the so-called
normal ills and chills which occurred in pregnancy but we were not given any relief or allowed any dispensation from our jobs.

(a Brisbane submission to the Royal Commission 1997:1,2)

While I was at St Anthony’s, every fortnight we had to sign a cheque, a social security cheque, and from that cheque we were given, I think, $2 a fortnight to spend and the rest of the money was kept for our board and keep... also while I was there, we performed long, hard, heavy work... we were never paid for that work, but our money was kept for our board and keep, which was unreasonable.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:161)

I was constantly reminded that I was a walking sin...my experience at St Anthony’s bore that out......to a certain extent I felt that their treatment was about punishing me because I had done something wrong......when I was at St. Anthony’s all the girls had duties, jobs, every day......for five mornings a week I helped out in the kindergarten......at the end of the shift I had to scrub all the floors in the huge playing area and the bathroom, clean the toilets, basins and toys......I did not help out in the afternoon shift, but came back at the end of the afternoon and did the same: scrubbed the floors, cleaned the toilets, etcetera......as my pregnancy advanced, and because I was having twins, it became increasingly difficult for me to fill buckets, carry them and scrub......but there was never any conversation about whether I would keep on with my duties......certainly a lot of people had heavier duties than I had....basically the unmarried mothers ran the place......they did all the labour......they would cook all the meals, do all the washing and cleaning not only for us but also for the nuns......I was only there a couple of months....I was going to be there longer but I went into premature labour and I am sure all the work I did there did not help my pregnancy go longer.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:130)

Now I have seen it all, he said, as I got into the car... what do you mean? I said, the smell of tar permeating the air now to a nauseating degree... close your window, he said but keep your eyes open... as he turned the car and eased it down the avenue, we rounded a clump of flowering shrubs... then I saw them, about eight to ten girls, all in varying degrees of pregnancy, with heaps of gravel, a fire burning to heat a black bucket of tar and a roller that took three pregnant girls to pull... Pat drove in first gear and stopped when one tall girl came up to his window... mind your tyres sir, she said... go around on the grass... we'll have the whole avenue done
before you bring Nurse back tonight... I think that is the worst sight I have ever beheld, he said when he got out on the road... you told me about conditions in there, about the plucking of the grass, the cross-cut sawing of the timber, the ploughing and the conditions of life behind those high cement walls, but I never imagined it would feel so terrible to see for myself.

(Goulding 2000:193)

On entering the homes the young mothers were expected to change their names: I was told to use my second name... because there was another... already in the home.

(a Brisbane mother at Q18 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I was instructed to use an assumed name by the hospital almoner who was a master of subterfuge.

(a Victorian mother at Q18 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I found the whole thing fairly traumatic......it was just like a business and people could come and go but the business kept on.......it was an institution and it did not matter whether it was me, some other mother, or dozens of us, we were all processed I suppose.......when I went there I was told I would not be able to use my surname as everyone was known by her Christian name......as there was already someone there named Helen I had to use another name.....they allowed only one person to use a first name at a time......it was impossible to know who people were because some people had to change their name and last names were never used....I am sure that that added to the feeling of disorientation......my mother and my doctor saw it as a haven, a refuge for me and also a way of getting me out of the way.......coming from a Catholic background my situation was seen as shameful.....an aunt, a nun, also knew.....my mother and my aunt used to say that being pregnant was the one sin that showed and they would look at each other and smile.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:130)

Although it can be argued that this policy was intended as privacy and protection against further stigma, one source suggests differently:

At the home everyone had a different name and this ended up very confusing as we were used to being called such and such......the policy was intended to maintain anonymity and secrecy
thus our surnames in particular were changed.....it was as if you were a completely separate person......we went along with it because we were so traumatised with everything that was happening to us that we thought this is not really happening to us.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner
15 July 1999)

In reality the effect of changing one's name and identity served to instil in the young woman a permanent sense of inferiority and diminished capacity for motherhood......thus making the separation task that much easier for staff:

Basically my self esteem was undermined to the extent that I felt unfit to be a mother and would have nothing to offer my child.

(a rural Queensland mother in response to Q22 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

The confiscation of certain possessions in which self-feelings were invested was also required of the ‘inmates’ upon admission to this total institution. Not only did the unmarried women typically lose their full name, they were deprived of personal possessions and often denied access to the cosmetic and clothing supplies or identity kit necessary for managing personal image. As Goffman, cited in the work of Lemert and Branaman (1997), points out, in the total institution (in this case the home for unmarried mothers), the young woman has none of the resources (physical or personal) for maintaining a sense of personal identity or self preservation. Due to the hierarchical nature of the home and her inferior status within it, the unmarried mother is able to attain only minimal control over her own being and her own personal identity (Lemert and Branaman 1997:Iiii,lviii). Outside of total institutions an individual is able to hold objects of self-feeling – such as body, her/his immediate actions, her/his thoughts, and some of her/his possessions – clear of contact from others. However in the total institution these territories of the self are violated... one’s personal space and privacy is often denied (Lemert and Branaman 1997:lv; Code 1995:83). Many women were deprived of their own clothing on admittance to the home:

I lost my clothes when I went in and I never saw them again until when I went home and then only after I was made sign the consent for adoption.

(Interviewee 16, Brisbane, 19)


Nelly issued me a range of maternity clothes that looked like they had come from the Ark….they were cheap smocks and large shirts…I had always been so proud of my appearance and I liked to dress in nice clothes.

(Hammond 1998:36)

Many lost their personal privacy in other ways. For example, in the following passage, a Brisbane mother refers to the way in which her private mail was intercepted by the matron of the home:

The only time we were permitted to leave the hostel was once fortnightly on a Thursday, if we wished to go shopping…no one had much money so these trips were rare…..to my knowledge, we were placed on an unemployment benefit as it existed in those days, but of course we were not expected to look for work….we never saw this money as it went towards our bed and board…….I personally received the princely sum of two pound from the father of my child in support and to give me a little pocket money….I had been at the home over 5 months when somehow Matron discovered that I was receiving this money……I think I opened my mail in her presence one day and she saw the notes inside a letter…….she asked how long had I been getting this money in the mail and I said my friend had sent me something every few weeks when he could afford to…….the matron said that if she had known this, I would have had to hand it over to pay more for my board etc…….I knew that our unemployment benefit was going to her but I didn't have the nerve to challenge or contradict her…….we were terribly afraid of her.

(a Brisbane submission to the Royal Commission 1997:2,3)

Another mother speaks of her humiliation when forced to wear ‘hostel clothing’:

Anne was her pseudonym and she was a tall lady and nicely spoken…..one could sense her embarrassment at being stripped of her lovely expensive woollen suit and camel coat when being admitted….she too, like all the other inmates, was divested of her undergarments – vest and brassiere and knickers…..she too had to be humiliated by putting on the coarse denim dress and smock and the shorts with rough seams and a cord around the waist…….her bewilderment was obvious when Sister said go with Nurse and she will examine you.

(Goulding 2000:184)

Since most homes/hostels had a religious affiliation, the unmarried women were expected to attend church services on a regular basis in order to ‘atone for their sins’. Whilst these services were conducted by either middle-class priests or lay theologians depending on the denominational order, all services were imbued with the social expectation that in order to be ‘good’, the unmarried mothers would give up their babies to
‘good white Christian couples’ (a Brisbane mother at Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1):

It was all just do the right thing...you have to adopt and then afterwards you have to go away and forget about it, pretend it never happened and get on with your life.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:134)

I remember sermons delivered by a priest when we were told that good girls were unselfish and gave up their babies to couples who could give them what was described as a Cinderella-type existence...we were told that we were good girls as only good girls came to St Anthony’s.....the bad girls, we were told, went to the Salvation Army home.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:51)

From the day I arrived at Carramar, we were subjected to daily readings from the Bible, with the matron extrapolating on the relevance to our lives of the stories... the readings focussed on: the need for atonement (ours); doing good for others (us for them); noble sacrifices (ours); God's will for his people (the perfect childless couple); having sins forgiven (ours, if we did as we were told); what happens to prodigals and dissidents (us) if they continue to disobey God; then there was chapel every Sunday for more of the same.

(a Brisbane submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:5)

We went to chapel every day.... it was a Christian run home... we were considered immoral and had to pray for our souls... I lost my faith due to my experience there... I prayed for assistance constantly but none came... consequently I discarded the whole idea of Christianity.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner 15 July 1999)

We were to attend the church on Sundays, irrespective of our own religious beliefs or upbringing in this area... many young women refused to attend these church services and had to remain in the confines of the home

(a Brisbane submission to the Royal Commission 1997:1)
Some unmarried mothers did not wish to mix a great deal with the other expectant mothers residing in the homes for various reasons – age difference, shyness, lack of trust/confidence, fear of further rejection or need for their own personal space:

I kept to myself... we had our jobs to do every day... I helped to do the washing by hanging it out on the line with the old ladies, then I did fancy work on a large table cloth and kept the room clean where the adoption took place.

(a Brisbane mother at Q23.1 and Q25.3 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

As... I entered Carramar... the matron had promised my mother in the December before that, as I was older, I would be given a single room... however, I was put in a dormitory of seven teenage girls, the youngest of whom was 13 years old... I was in the dormitory about six weeks... during that time I watched girls vacate single rooms and yet I wasn't given one... I BELIEVE THIS WAS DELIBERATELY INTENDED TO BREAK MY SPIRIT.

(a Brisbane submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:4)

However, many mothers recall that they were not encouraged to mix by either parents or middle-class administrators who were more interested in overseeing the smooth functioning of the institution so as to ensure separation (Goffman 1961:146; Hammond 1998:40,41; Cole 1997:2):

I had no one to talk to during this time... I was very isolated, my family were in Adelaide... I was told not to make friends with the other girls... it was a lonely, scary time.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:75)

In the seven months I spent in this hostel, I never came across another woman who had had a baby, who may have been able to say it’s like this or this happens... there were some women who only came for a week, had their baby, told it had gone and then disappeared back into oblivion.

(a Brisbane submission to the Royal Commission 1997:2)

Betty (name fictitious) rang today... she said do you remember me from the home? I was the one who was always knitting... oh, I said, I remember now... the knitter, the one who I thought just kept on knitting as a form of escape... she said to me: I remember you... you are the only one I do remember... you had blonde hair and you liked to flash your engagement ring... you
were the defiant one... you know they made an example of you (You know this was never my perception, but there you are – she was watching, not just knitting)... oh yes, they whisked you away and then came back and told us that was what would happen to us if we tried anything.

(Interviewee 20, Brisbane, 1999)

At the outset of this section isolation is identified as one of the tactics employed by state agents in their quest to procure babies for the childless. This is coercion and is any form of abuse (whether physical or psychological) which is intended to break the spirit of the victim and in turn effect compliance (Rathus 1996:129-139; Mann 1996:83-92). Whilst thus far one of the mothers has referred to this experience of having one’s spirit broken (a Brisbane mother in a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:4), the following will examine evidence of other practices to further test the level of coercion felt by the women who were surveyed (Goffman 1961:146; Mann 1996:88; Schien et al. 1971:247).

6.4 Words used as weapons

Treated like I was the “scum of the earth”.

(a Melbourne mother at Q26.6 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Very scathing about us, our status and our competence as human beings and mothers.....ridiculed and put down.

(a Western Australian mother at Q26.6 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Jessica Weinberg (2001) refers to the use of language as a form of abuse. In the past and still today language has been used to deprecate or belittle women. Words can become weapons. Furthermore, how language is used is often a reflection of where one is situated in the social hierarchy. For instance, prostitute and whore are powerful epithets, designed by men to keep women in their place, that is, inferior to men and excluded from their social circles. In a society founded on violence, exploitation and self-interest and where masculinist ideology dictates that it is permissible for men to abuse women, it is interesting that there are no comparable labels attached to men. Rather it is middle-class men with the
power and resources to do so who define and then attach labels to women (Weinberg 2001:139-141; Scutt 1990:281).

Lorraine Code (1995) argues that language in the form of ridicule is designed to reduce the control potential of the person under attack and in so doing increase the control potential of the attacker. Ridicule, like gossip and rumour, controls because it tears down the character or honour of others. It is often deliberately intended to damage (Code 1995:140; Sites 1973:160; Andersen et al. 1990:294-297). Ridicule can range all the way from mild joking to the use of derogatory epithets. The more spontaneous and irrelevant the verbal assault the stronger the hostility that lies behind it. Words cannot kill, but they can be very damaging and when used in the homes for unmarried mothers can have the effect of debasing, humiliating and thus serving to instil in the young woman a permanent sense of inferiority and diminished capacity for motherhood (Sites 1973:168; Swain and Howe 1995:61; Cole 1997:1).

In this section I provide pointed evidence of such assaults on self-respect as experienced by white, unmarried women in the homes. The evidence shows that the long and sustained attack on personal self-worth and the lack of any checking powers to counter this seriously compromised much of the behaviour by state agents towards those in their care (Rickarby 1998:8; Goffman 1970:79,96). Although not all carers abused their station, many did. In the isolation of the homes, it was relatively easy for carers to do as they pleased (Andersen et al. 1990:297). Whilst the abuses which took place within the homes were not confined to any particular time or place, the mere fact that they were perpetrated is perhaps indicative not only of the much broader social malaise operating at that time but indicative of the types of personalities who might be drawn to taking up such supervisory positions (Rickarby 1998:13; Lichtenberg et al. 1997:140-144; Du Preez 1994:115,116). For instance, it can be easily argued here that female agents (whether matrons in the hospitals/homes, nurses, social workers or nuns, many of whom were unmarried and therefore childless) could resent the unmarried mothers for their very presence reminds them not only of their own unmarried and childless state, but their own disliking of and/or inability to relate to men (Du Preez 1994:116). Consciously or unconsciously they are well placed to try and obliterate those feminine qualities they themselves do not possess (Code 1995:85; a submission by a Brisbane mother to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices; Kidd 1997:44; Brownmiller 1975:109). On the other hand,
the unmarried mothers might remind some women of their own personal tragedy. Brisbane mother, author and private investigator, Suzanne Hammond (1998) in her personal memoirs about adoption refers to one such case among many. In tracing her child many years after the event she learnt that the matron responsible for the loss of her own daughter was herself an ‘unmarried mother’ at the age of 15. This matron lost her child to adoption (Hammond 1998:73).

Of course abuse was not the preserve of female staff nor was it always motivated by individual grievances (for instance, personal rivalry/jealousy). In the largely male dominated medical profession, Shawyer (1979) for one wonders if some male obstetricians and gynaecologists chose their specialisation because of their dislike for or even hatred of women. She recalls the story of a very young, withdrawn and depressed single woman, who on seeking an abortion was told by a male obstetrician that “Hitler had a good idea for your type” (Shawyer 1979:281). Working at the coalface of the adoption tragedy, consulting psychiatrist, Geoff Rickarby (1998) also refers to this staff/patient power imbalance. He finds it incomprehensible that social workers (male and female) at the time, although not trained in psychopathology, could be so naive as to not see the grief that would emerge from losing one’s baby – a grief so intense that for many it would lead in later years to acute psychiatric breakdown (Rickarby 1998:72, see Chapter 3).

As the following quotations from mothers indicate, the disparaging remarks/comments, ridicule and scorn could occur at any time and under varying circumstances. For example, it might take place when the young mother is at her most vulnerable (that is, during labour):

Hour after hour, I screamed and yelled for help but the young interns who came into the ward just told me to be quiet... they came and examined me, threatened me about the noise then left the room again...they turned the lights out again as they left... one of the doctors said, she’s only a 16 year old tramp having an illegitimate child so don’t worry about her.

(Hammond 1998:7)

Most of my pregnancy was spent at Pittwood in Ashfield, an unmarried mother’s home where we worked for our keep...during this time we were overseen by deaconesses whose daily function was to tell us that we were useless, and continually put into our minds that we were too young to be mothers and our children would be better off in a home with two parents and a sizeable income.....during labour I was laughed at and told what a slut I was by two mid-
wives...my baby was born shortly after and whilst being stitched up the baby was placed across the room with the two mid-wives moving sideways to taunt me.

(a Queensland submission to the Royal Commission 1998:1)

My labour was long and difficult and I was treated with open contempt. Every examination was performed rectally. After the birth I was sedated and kept prisoner. This became evident after I sneaked out of my room and was discovered in the unmarried mothers’ ward where I was talking to other girls. After this my sedation was altered and a nun was put outside my room to guard me.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:162)

The treatment I received at the hands of, firstly, the hospital staff and then, a few days later, a social worker has been etched into my mind. The cruelty and total lack of human kindness shown to myself and my son is something I will never forget. To be told to shut up by two nurses when I dared to cry out in pain during labour was only the beginning of my punishment for having a child outside marriage in the 1970s. For some reason, these two nurses left the labour room, which gave me a few precious moments alone with my son, who was laying across my leg. I was heavily drugged with pentobarbitone, pethidine and sparine and it took all my strength to prop myself up to look at my baby. Days later I again managed to look upon my son, this time gazing at him through the nursery window. The image of his face was to become the only comfort during this traumatic time in my life.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:152)

I will move on to actually giving birth. I went into labour and was taken upstairs to the labour ward. I do not remember having any instructions about what was going to happen. I went in there very naive, with no relatives around, because they were in Newcastle. Mum and Dad would visit me occasionally, but I went into all this on my own. I was very scared in this room on my own. They gave me the gas mask to help with the labour pains, and I took too much. Nobody was there to tell me to take only a little bit. I remember getting into trouble and being scolded. I actually had a reaction to it and my hands were crippling up and I had pins and needles. It was like I was this naughty girl in this situation and here I was taking too much gas – how dare I!........another thing I would like to mention about the treatment in hospital is that I always felt like I was on show. Crown Street was a teaching hospital, therefore I always had these doctors around discussing me and my body like I was an object. The same thing happened in the labour ward. I have some recollection that I was just about to give birth and there was a
yell at the door and, next thing, the room was full of these male doctors witnessing me giving
birth. One of the major things I remember is some nurse holding my hand, and I do not know
how I would have coped without her holding my hand. It was like I had some connection with
the human race, that I was not just this thing on a bed shooting out this baby they were going to
take.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:22)

On 1 February 1967 I gave birth to my son after a prolonged and drug induced labour. At the
moment of his actual birth, I reached down, only to be told to keep my “grubby little hands
away”. This was a time of fear and uncertainty for me. I then had my hands secured to the side
of the bed and a pillow was placed over my face. There I was, giving birth to my newborn son,
with my legs in stirrups, my hands tied to the bed and my face covered by a pillow. Add to this
a drugged stupor, and I think that was a situation that any humane person would deem totally
inexcusable, and my only crime was being a single mother.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices
2000:134)

During the later stages of labour there were two men who were laughing and making jokes and
one of them had a pair of scissors in his hand – he kept on opening and closing them in a jovial
manner toward me terrorizing me and when my baby started to come they laughed and said
.....”we'll have to cut this one”.

(a Queensland submission to the Commissioner for Children, 1999)

Shouted and sneered at during delivery....

(a response to Q27 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Some of the nurses were quite friendly but my doctor laughed at me as if it was all a big joke.

(a Western Australian mother in response to Q26 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Just as some of the women were ridiculed during labour, others could be ridiculed prior
to the onset of it:

We were subjected to all sorts of medical investigations by various interns and doctors. We
were treated like second-class citizens, not worthy of any respect or compassion. One incident I
shall never forget is being visited by a group of young interns and a resident doctor. This intern told me to lie on the bed and lift my dress, smugly adding, “Come on, you’ve done this before”. His fellow peers, including the resident doctor, all laughed. The shame and humiliation I felt has stayed with me to this day.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:167)

Then I saw through my legs that he was coming at me with a long piece of wire and he broke my waters. He did not tell me that he was about to do that; he did not ask me if he could. He then put a drip into my hand and arranged for some fluids to be put up. I asked him what they were for and he said that they were just to keep me hydrated. Later on the father of the baby was allowed over, probably because of the fuss I created, and the father asked one of the nurses what the fluids were for. They said it was to induce the birth. So the doctor had given me a drug. When I specifically asked him what he was putting up he told me it was just to keep me hydrated, and it was not what the fluids were for at all. He was inducing the birth to get a move on with the labour.

I do not believe that the baby was in any danger when he came and assessed me in that way. I think it was probably illegal and a highly unethical thing for him to just come in and treat me like that. I do not know whether it was because he had just found out that I was giving the baby up for adoption but I did notice a change in his manner. Afterwards he was more polite, but arrogant. He had a condescending tone to the way he spoke to me since then. It was smiles but there was a tone that I had not noticed earlier but I could not say for sure whether that is just the way he operates when he is in action.


I spent six months at St Anthony’s, Croydon, from March to September 1967. I told the nuns that I wanted to keep my baby, but was repeatedly told not to be silly. I was constantly pressured to surrender my baby for adoption and received daily verbal abuse from the nuns and other staff. I was constantly told that if I loved my baby I would give him to a proper two-parent family where he could have a good life and everything else he needed. I was told I was selfish when I insisted that I would keep my baby. They said that I should forget about the baby and get on with my life. I never have forgotten about my baby. Whenever I asked for help or asked about non-adoption alternatives, I was told I was not a fit person to keep my baby and I should think of the unfortunate people who could not have babies of their own and that I would be able to have as many babies of my own as I wanted when I was older.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:160)
I feel that unmarried mothers were treated cruelly and differently to other people. A few instances that I have are being given a shopping list while you are in the home to buy baby clothes for your baby to supply to the hospital. I was working with children, three and four year olds. All the heavy lifting resulted in me needing a hernia operation. The night before I was to have the hernia operation, [the Sister] at the home at Waitara said that she would have to shave me instead of the nurses at the hospital. I can't go into all the details of that night, but I want to table them as extra.....the operation itself – I had to have local anaesthetic. The surgeon doing the operation wouldn’t believe me that I could feel it. I was starting to squeeze another doctor’s hand and I said, “I can feel it”, and the surgeon said to me, “you can't possibly be feeling anything”. Later, the doctor holding my hand told him that I could feel it because I kept squeezing his hand. Then they realised I could feel it and gave me more anaesthetic.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:154)

I was 16 years old when my mother told me that I was pregnant. I said, “Don't be silly, Mummy, I am not married”. I tell you this only so you can understand my youth and vulnerability at the time. What followed can only be described as a nightmare, from which I still wish that I could wake up.....from the moment my pregnancy was diagnosed, I was vilified by the adults around me. The family doctor berated me for my loose morals. He made a point of making my physical examination as painful and humiliating as possible and when I became distressed he scathingly told me to get used to it, as it was only a taste of what was to come true.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:161)

I went into labour 9.30pm, Sunday 26th .........7am, 27th I reported to the hospital with back pain and was told to stop whinging and given 2 disprin......at breakfast 8 - 8.30am a woman stood behind my chair at breakfast with her hands on my shoulders so I couldn’t leave the table......I was on the loo when my water broke.....I’d already changed into a nightie when I told the nurses.... I had one nurse under each armpit.....I was on my knees in a pool of blood and they are calling me a liar.....I’d said my water had broken and they reck on I’d must have had another baby to know what was happening otherwise I’d only think I’d wet myself.....they then tied me to a bed (stirrups)......I didn’t know what was happening.....I had the urge to squat so I didn’t know why I was being tied to a bed and no-one explained....everyone left the room.....when my baby started to come I rang and rang the bell until someone opened the door....I said the baby was coming and was told “if you think you'll get away with it that easily you’re mistaken......it’ll be hours and hours yet”........my daughter was born while I was tied to
the bed with no-one else there......when someone in a navy blue cardigan came in with a pile of linen she saw my daughter slip over the edge of the bed.....the woman dropped the linen and caught my baby in mid-air.

(a Tasmanian mother in personal correspondence, 1999)

A tirade of verbal abuse often accompanied the mothers when trying to access their babies in the nurseries:

I have dreadful memories of returning to a ward full of mothers who regularly had their babies brought to them for feeding routines; the nursery (I believed my baby was there also) was so close, we could hear them crying......I constantly asked nurses who was feeding my baby.....no-one ever told me.....I knew only that I had to try and see her...I had to remain in bed for days before I was even capable of standing, let alone walking....I finally made my way up one floor to a nursery where I was told by a young nurse “that’s where the babies are kept who are going to proper parents”.......I ventured along a dark corridor, feeling absolutely drained, towards a pair of swinging doors, through which strode a very tall, uniformed nurse of some obvious authority......she stopped in front of me and demanded to know where I was going....I replied “I was told that I could see my baby” .....this nurse immediately shouted at me “you’re all the same you lot....you have a baby, can’t look after it, palm it off onto someone else, then off you go back to your old life, sleeping around”.....I was shocked to the very core of my being.....I couldn’t think, let alone speak.

(a Brisbane submission to the Royal Commission 1997)

I had my child through the Catholic Adoption Agency, the unmarried mothers’ home at Waitara supposedly called the Sisters of Mercy Family Centre, which was the most degrading, distressing situation I have ever been in in my life. I have travelled through many, many countries in the world and I have never experienced degradation like I did there and in the subsequent hospital stay at Crows Nest. The doctors and nurses felt no shame at laughing at my predicament, at leaving me during the course of the pain of childbirth, not explaining anything about what was happening, and on several occasions after the birth I was separated from my son, who is now 27. I was chastised tremendously for sneaking into the nursery to try and see him, but I was reassured that he was the most beautiful baby that had been born there at that time. I had no doubts about that; he was my son.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:175)
Many mothers experienced a complete lack of respect for and denial of human rights when trying to retain custody after the forced signing of consent:

They have no rights...once they enter the gates they lose all rights about themselves, their bodies, their souls, and also all rights to their babies or their whereabouts......I have spent nine months there and now all I want is to be free because in a way I am also a prisoner....I cannot voice my opinions and I know whenever I tried I was shot down......nobody nor nothing will change the regime in that place.

(Goulding 2000:194)

I think the private adoption by medical practitioners probably was not all that common....the common thread seems to be the lack of any information being given to these young women about what their rights were at the time.....they were just treated as an incubator to carry the baby and pass it on......now you go away and get on with your life.....you have no rights.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:158)

I was in hospital for three weeks during which time I fed him, cared for him, lay with him in my arms and did all those things mothers do......I wanted to tell him how much I loved him......how perfect he was......it was a stern time......we had no right to do that......we had fantasies that someone would come and say everything is going to be alright but that never happened (mother cries as she recalls this).

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner 15 July 1999)

There was a couple ready and waiting so I was not told my revocation rights.

(Interviewee 13, Sunshine Coast, Queensland, 26 August 1999)

Many women endured harsh, judgemental and punitive attitudes whilst performing their household duties:

They made us scrub the toilets and wash the bathroom floors on our hands and knees, even on the hottest days of summer......I felt faint from the smell of the disinfectant and from the heat, but I had no choice....they constantly reminded us that we had to atone for what we’d done, start a fresh life by hard work and prayer.

(Bloch Jones 1993:48)
If I did something wrong, I wasn’t allowed to have visitors.....the staff had the power to isolate us completely.....there was one nun who was especially mean.....she didn’t like me and made me dust all her religious statues over and over again.....we were like Cinderella......if we did something a nun didn’t like, we’d be punished......we were prisoners, waiting out our sentence.

(Bloch Jones 1993:46)

Others recall having their already fragile personas further diminished by the derisory comments made at the time of leaving the homes and/or hospitals:

The social worker counselled me one final time before I signed the papers......as I was about to leave she said “Go, Pam, and sin no more”......it was her final chance to throw a rock at me, and she did......I was already in bad emotional shape, but she wouldn't give up an opportunity to reinforce the idea that I was scum, not good enough to keep my own child.

(Bloch Jones 1993:98)

My anger because I was young, unmarried and wanted to keep my baby but was told I could not was construed as unreasonable, selfish and another temper tantrum and ‘put on’, something which is to be treated as an abnormal response......for instance, when I approached the matron of the home again in the hope of seeing my son she responded with the question: “what is the matter with you?......all the other mothers have put it behind them and are getting on with their lives.....why aren't you?”

(a Brisbane mother in response to Q31, 32 and 33 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I was stereotyped, as were many other girls also imprisoned with me in a ward known as Waiting Patients, as having loose morals, sleeping around and getting myself pregnant. Go and sin no more was the only advice ever given to us in the words: you must go away and get on with your life; forget about this and in time you will have another baby when you are married. I was scarred for life and scorned. I never forgot.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:143)

I held my babies and went down on my knees crying and begging to be allowed to keep my children together....these two precious bundles....my children......the ‘nice’ lady then said: I’ll leave you now and when you’ve finished just sign the forms and you can go home, start a new life, get married and have more......you’ll forget.

(Price 1997:1)
Perhaps the ultimate in humiliation and degradation was being taken on an excursion to the seaside under the false pretense of going on a picnic. A mother who experienced this recalls how in the 1950s she and a busload of other unmarried mothers were transported from the home to the beach for a ‘day’s outing’. Upon arriving at the destination all of the women were blindfolded before disembarking. They were allowed to walk around somewhat and smell the sea breezes. However, they were not allowed to see or touch the water. There was no picnic (Interviewee 17, Perth, 1999; Andersen et al. 1990:297).

When looking back on her experience as an ‘inmate’ of a home in Brisbane in the 1960s, a Toowoomba mother relives a similar scene of humiliation, degradation and open contempt for the young expectant women. Her sense of complete social alienation which derives from being made to feel acutely aware of her ‘outsider’ status is quite readily apparent here:

We were never, ever encouraged to make friends with each other at the home......you could hardly call it mixing.....yet when we went on our weekly outing to the local shop we had to move in a group......it was as if “hey you have to go in a group so that they could reinforce how ‘bad’ you were........so all the neighbourhood could see you as ‘those girls’ from the home.

(Interviewee 9, Toowoomba, 1999)

The previous quotations highlight the abuse meted out by hospital and residential home staff (that is, nurses, doctors, matrons, social workers/counsellors and others entrusted with their ‘care’).

However, due to their social and physical vulnerability as isolated ‘inmates’, some of the unmarried mothers were automatic scapegoats for further abuse from unsupportive family members (often parents of the young women) or significant others (for example, the natural father’s family):

I was visited by the father’s (now my husband) father in the home where I was staying and he was very angry with me....blaming me......I was very, very upset......crying a lot and so the matron told him to leave and not cause so much distress to the young lady......I will never forget what he said as he turned to leave..... “she’s no lady.......she’s just a girl”.

(Interviewee 18, Sunshine Coast, Queensland, 26 August 1999)

I was an outcast, a leper......I no longer fitted in......not good enough to live in my own home......not good enough to spend Christmas with my family.....not good enough to have even
one visit from my father all the time I lived away...my mother, though, would visit me, twice a week and continue to tell me what a shameful, disgusting person I was......after she left I would feel physically ill but on and on went the attack......I was savagely criticised and was made to feel like I was the lowest person in the world.

(Cole 1997:521)

This man over a number of months repeatedly pinned his daughter up against the wall and spat into her face every disgusting insult you could think of. Throughout her labour my girlfriend pleaded for someone to phone me to get me there for the birth, but nobody bothered to help her, and just hours after my beautiful little girl was born my girlfriend's father came into the hospital, forced her up against the bedhead and again threatened her and spat insults into her face as she screamed for help so loudly that members of my family heard her three floors down and ran to rescue her, thinking that she was going to be killed. All the while, not one person in that hospital came to check on what was happening.....despite all this, my girlfriend still defied her parents by saying to me in front of her mother on the day of our child’s birth, “Cam, I want us to be a family....I want this little girl to be Rebecca Horn....I want that so much”, to which I replied, “So do I, beautiful, so do I.......we will do it somehow”.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:141)

Reading their medical charts/social work records (where they have been made available) years later, many of the women and their children (adoptees) are able to provide further evidence of the prejudicial attitudes which were and continue to pertain to the unmarried mother. Whilst staff attitudes were often patronising or condescending, they were almost always dismissive of the women as people with rights which ought to be

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1 Many of the records relating to past adoptions have either been destroyed or are simply not released (Durey 1997:103-105). As one mother in response to my questionnaire explains “the information that is allowed is selective and prohibits mothers from proving that offensive misconduct occurred” (a Sunshine Coast mother at Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1). Similarly another mother states a “complete misrepresentation of how it really is......current policies of hiding details from the searching party is not in anyone’s best interest” (a Tasmanian mother in response to Q43 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1); see also the section in this chapter where I discuss the withholding of information as a coercive tactic.

My mother and father made it clear that I could not keep the child at home.....as I have said, it was either adoption or he was to be made a ward of the state as I was under 18.....I was virtually led to understand that I really did not have any rights, both by my parents and by the matron of the hospital......my eldest sister’s husband asked if I would allow them to adopt my child......I thought about this but I thought firstly her husband asked me, she did not ask me and secondly I really felt that I would eventually marry the father of the child and so I said no.....I was attending a Church of England church at the time and I felt that by having my baby adopted into a Church of England home he would grow up with the same values as I had because I eventually intended to find him.......as to what happened to my request, it was rewritten to read: “my religion is Church of England and I desire that my said child shall be brought up in the Methodist or any other Protestant religion.”........I believe that my request was ignored as the adoptive parents had already been selected and my request did not entirely fit with the adoption order which stated that the adoptive mother was Methodist and the adoptive father belonged to the Church of England church.....as it turned out neither parent was practising either religion, but they must have been aware of my request because they had him christened Church of England.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:161)

I was proven to be a good mother by all officers except the two who caused the damage to my family....one officer who met me once for less than half an hour, the other met me only when he wanted me to sign a form for Donna in hospital, and yet, his report, 12 months before her death read a nightmare that I had four illegitimate children with different fathers and I was an immoral woman who had sex with many men in my home in front of my children when they were babies......when I read my file I couldn’t believe the reports of those two men only, but judges believed them....I had no idea why the welfare did this to me......my girls and I today have very little contact because they were told I was a bleach blonde prostitute and I gave them
up.....their belief is that I kept Darryn because I did not want girls....the girls are now 33, 35 and 36 years old and we have lost our fight......one girl wanted to fight the government for wrongfully removing her from me......the scars are deep.

(Origins newsletter 1998:4)

.....the adopters were a Maltese couple and not naturalised Australians......they applied for Maltese passports ten days after the adoption order was finalised in April 1968.....they left Australia permanently about two weeks later......I believe that because of my mother’s Maltese bloodline, my son was chosen specifically for that couple who had made their application for adoption only one month before he was born......I was never given any counselling or any option other than adoption......I was constantly told that I was no good and that my baby was better off without me; he would never amount to anything if I kept him; he would be taken from me by welfare and made a state ward and spend his adult life in gaol if he was to grow up with me; he would be ridiculed by his peers and that I just should forget about him......I never signed any consent forms and believe the signature was forged.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:160)

I was given some insight into my dilemma, just recently, when I was able to view my social work records. They were just as informative in what they did not say, as in what they did. It was noted I was of average height and average build with lots of brown hair. That was it, my full description, the social worker could have been talking about a monkey. My personality was narrowed down to someone who was selfish and self-willed. No wonder I was given so many drugs on entering Crown Street, they must have held grave fears that someone evidently as strong willed as the social worker had indicated I was would run off with her baby. I was furious when I received this badly scribbled nonsense, this assault on my character by someone who had been, at the time, not much older than I was, herself unmarried, childless and obviously a total incompetent. These insults, this character assassination were what she had used to entitle herself to do what she did and to absolve herself from any guilt she might have felt in forcibly removing my baby from me and giving her to someone else. This mockery of justice, my social work records, and my medical records were all I had left of my baby. All that I had to help me make the event real and to resolve my grief. These records also mentioned that I was fretting after the birth and that I had come back to the social worker three months after the birth where I was described as still being very upset over the loss of my baby. Why in God’s name did this person coerce me to relinquish my child when it was obvious that I had not wanted to do so? Reading in between the lines I could feel her contempt for me, her complete lack of compassion and could at last get an understanding into the callous way in which she had dismissed me as a human being in order to steal my baby.

(a submission to the New South Wales Law Reform Commission 1998:6)
Last year I accessed my so-called court records and was shocked at what had been written about me by [child welfare officer 1], the child welfare officer assigned to me.....I can say it was never my welfare they were looking after.....I quote this from my records of what [child welfare officer 1] said, “her apparent lack of guilt feelings on her part would seem that if the girl feels little guilt, one wonders both whether she has an appreciation of a moral code and also the ability to form the proper relationships to form friends later” ......I would like to face [child welfare officer 1] and tell him that I have been married for nearly 25 years and I would like him to put that somewhere where it would fit......also, wherever I was taken, it would be best to be away from any male influence......what did they think I was going to do?.....perhaps they thought I got my stepfather to make me pregnant.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:169)

This section has looked at the personal abuses experienced by many of the women once incarcerated in the homes and hospitals to have their babies. I have argued that the impact of such ill-treatment was both divisive and negative. In the next section I look at the withholding of information as a coercive tactic. Pregnant unwed women (yesterday and today) are in urgent need of information on accommodation and welfare payments if they are to retain custody of their babies. In the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s unwed Australian women were denied this crucial information (Lindsay 1997:247)

6.5 Withholding information

I think they purposely withheld information that might have helped me....to sit there on the other side of that desk and say nothing for hours, watching me break my heart is just incredible......all she wanted was that signature.

(transcript of interview with a birthmother, cited in Rawady 1997:392)

Stehr (2003) maintains that it is not unusual for individuals to distribute valuable information selectively in order to increase their degree of control in a situation (Stehr 2003:643-655; Sites 1973:163; Lindsay 1997:247; Code 1995:112; Burke et al. 1984:86; Delany 1997:128; Truong 1996:375). If someone wants access to certain information for the purpose of control, she/he must typically be willing to have her/his behaviour controlled in the sense of being willing to give valuable information to others. Keeping others ignorant
of important information is one of the more important control devices (Oakley 1992:341; Foucault 1976:86; Goffman 1969:54).

The information provided to the mothers in the homes and hospitals was and continues to be very selective. This information is geared to societal expectations. It was never concerned with the interests, needs or hopes of the natural mothers. Because those administering the homes/hospitals (with the blessing of church, state and often the young woman’s immediate family) had consent taking as their primary objective, processes had to be put in place in order to effect this. For example, information pertaining to housing and financial assistance (one’s social and economic rights) was (and still is) crucial to an unmarried woman who expresses the desire to keep her baby (International Charter on Human Rights, 1948, Article 25 (1) and (2). However, in mid-twentieth century Australia, those who possessed the knowledge to assist in this way kept silent (Lindsay 1997:247).

This section is divided into three subsections. In the first I discuss the vital information on housing and pension entitlements which should have been disclosed but was not. The second subsection looks at the withholding of information concerning revocation of consent, while the third examines the ways in which outside communication was often intercepted by the authorities, thus effectively cutting off potential life support systems (Code 1995:84; Andersen et al. 1990:295-297; Schien 1971:80).

6.5.1 Withholding of information on housing and pension entitlements

In the Child Welfare Act 17 1939 regulations found in the book titled Children in Need by Donald McLean (1956: 15) it is argued that:

District Officers are instructed to explain fully to the mother, before taking the consent, the facilities which are available to help her keep the child. These include: homes licensed under the Child Welfare Act for the private care of children apart from natural parents; financial assistance to unmarried mothers under section 27 of the Child Welfare Act; admission to State control until the mother is in a position to care for her child, and assistance to affiliate the child and obtain a maintenance order against the putative father. Appropriate practical advice should be available to the natural mother so that she may decide freely whether to keep her child or whether to have him adopted.
When all of these possibilities were rejected, the officer was expected to explain to the mother the full implications of the act of surrendering her child. Only when a mother had considered these implications and still wished to proceed with the surrender should the consent be accepted. Child Welfare of New South Wales 1958 Social Work Training Manual reiterated the above.

Again in 1968 the Department of Social Welfare reported on benefits available to unmarried mothers. Allowances for Children, Section 27, explicitly stated that:

Not all unmarried mothers wish to have their child adopted and in many cases have no family at hand to help with the care of the child. This embryo family group has an important mother-child relationship that needs both support and nurture and the department assists the mother by acting for her in affiliation proceedings and by the granting of regular allowances once the mother's eligibility has been established. The services of the Social Aid Branch are also used in special cases to supply a layette, special foods and milk. Many unmarried mothers call on the services of the department to act for them in court to obtain an affiliation order. There is no charge for this service. The facilities available to the unmarried mother include:

- Financial assistance: from the Commonwealth the unmarried mother receives the maternity allowance of $30 and thereafter child endowment of 50 cents a week and is entitled to a benefit from the State which varies according to circumstances but is always $1 below that of the widow's pension which, in 1968, was $23 a week.
- Child day care facilities: she will be given priority at one of the six Sydney Nurseries Association day nurseries which take children under the age of two years.
- Accommodation: in New South Wales she can apply to the Housing Commission for accommodation and she will probably be allocated a flat. In 1968 the average waiting time was three to three and a half years. There was one infants’ home in Sydney where a mother could go with her child.

(New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000: 220)

As the above excerpts make clear, material resources in the form of housing and pension entitlements should have been offered to the women prior to and/or at the time of birth by counsellors/social workers, doctors and others entrusted with their ‘care’.

However, as the following statements from mothers indicate, alternatives to adoption were not canvassed. Vital information with regard to state housing and pensions was withheld:

I was supposed to have been informed of all the alternative child placement arrangements that were available to me, not just adoption. I was not. I was supposed to be informed that adoption would cause me great pain and grief at the loss of my child, and that that pain could last for years. I was not. I should have been informed that adoption causes an emotional wound, that of
the feeling of abandonment by the natural mother and that my child could hate me for causing her this pain in the years to come. I was not. I had a right to be informed that there was in 1969 a widow’s pension which I would have been eligible to receive and would have given me some sort of financial assistance. I was not. All of this information by law was my right to receive. All of the emotional effects caused by adoption were well known by social workers who then failed in their duty of care to pass on this information. They had one goal and that goal was the procurement of my child. I would like to know how this could happen in Australia in 1969.

(a submission to the New South Wales Law Reform Commission 1998:2)

I take issue with the wording “came to a decision to adopt” because I do not consider that I had a decision. In the case of my son in 1965 I felt that there was absolutely no other choice. No alternatives were offered to me. There was no other option. Adoption was discussed at every visit with the social worker. In 1971 when I had my daughter I felt that in the intervening six years anyone could have done anything to me after the loss of my son. I was very vulnerable, perhaps even more so than in 1965. Being reprimanded by the social worker then and being told finally to get on with my life, that I had doors opened to me, it seemed to be an easy choice

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:25)

Had no option, no help, nowhere to go to live, no money and I could not go home to parents house to live...

(a response to Q34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I did not have enough support, no house (or housing) no husband or partner (the father denied paternity), no money, no family support…I was persuaded that my baby needed a father, that it was better for his sake (not mine) to go to a “proper” married couple….I also did not want him to suffer the stigma of illegitimacy.

(a response to Q33 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

It certainly felt like theft as no option was given other than adoption.

(a response to Q39 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

No information was ever given to me by anyone involved about alternatives, for instance keeping the baby, getting monetary support, etcetera. That was neither the doctor, parents, or
hospital staff or solicitors. I never saw a social worker. It was never mentioned that I could change my mind after signing. I was firmly told it was irrevocable.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:155)

I think it is important that adoptive parents, adopted children and the wider community have a clear understanding that many birth mothers relinquished their babies because they were given no choice other than adoption. I was told that as I was under 18 years of age and was not allowed to marry I either allowed my son to be adopted or he would be made a ward of the state. The 60s was a different era with a different morality, but that in no way diminishes the fact that the law as it stood at the time was broken. Apart from the withholding of information that I was entitled to receive, I was asked to sign adoption papers the day after my son’s birth. I refused until I had been given access to my child and then thinking that I really had no other choice I signed after three days. I only recently learned that it was illegal to be asked to sign prior to five days after the birth and only then after counselling. Many adoptive parents honestly believe that the children they adopted were unloved and unwanted and maybe some were but there were thousands who were removed through illegal practices. Many adopted children fear they will appear ungrateful to their adoptive parents if they search for their natural parents and this, coupled with the fear of rejection, makes them reluctant to search for their origins. It is time that the many thousands of children who were adopted in the 60s to the 90s learned the truth of what went on in their particular case and that adoptive parents also accept that in many instances they received the gift of a child because of illegal practices

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry 1998:159)

I was never informed by anyone, not doctors or social workers that there was financial help available to unmarried mothers, but I was told many times throughout my long stay that I should have my baby adopted out so he or she could have a good life and two parents who had money and a house and all that material stuff. I know that he would have chosen to grow up with his real mother, penniless or not

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry 2000:151)

I felt that I had no support and no method of bringing a baby home with me to live – no place to live with a baby and no income

(a response to Q34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
All in all the procedure appeared very straightforward with no complications. I understood what I was doing, as much as one can attempt to at that age, unaware of the long-term implications for myself and my child. I was aware of the relevance of the signing of the consent form and the workings of the revocation procedure. However, to the best of my knowledge there were no outside options available to me. As far as I knew my parents’ word was final. Unless I had their support or blessing there was nothing left for me to do but let my child go. That is what girls who got pregnant before they were married did. I had been adopted, the precedent had been set.

At no time during the discussions with the social worker was I offered choices or alternatives that would enable me to keep my child. It was taken as fact that within my world there were no options. No information of any kind was offered. I was completely unaware of any support mechanism, social or financial. I came from an almost rural township. I was extraordinarily unaware of anything outside the family or school. No options were ever raised or discussed. It was up to me to live with what was then termed my decision to adopt. This was untrue. These decisions had been made for me. I was not expected to be able to make my own.

If circumstances had been different and alternatives had been presented would I have stood up and thwarted my parents’ expectations? I do not know. If I had known that there was community social support and government financial support so that families could stay together, would I have chosen this? I do not know. If I had known that other girls managed without their family’s support, would I have dared? I do not know. If I had known of the pain, suffering and grief that lay in store for me, would I have avoided this? I do not know and I will never know. None of these issues were ever raised for me to even consider.

When I did fantasise about keeping my baby there was one consideration: Would I be a good parent to this child considering the nature of its conception? I did not want this child to possibly grow in an atmosphere of resentment being a constant reminder of the chaos that was created in my life. I did not know what to do with these concerns.

There is absolutely no doubt that I would have had to leave home, but if knowledge of support mechanisms had been available to me, I would at least have had the opportunity of considering this. I left home within six months anyway due to a complete lack of acknowledgment that anything had happened in my life. No counselling had been offered or sought. I hadn’t known to ask. My parents had no emotional interest regarding the future of my child. We weren’t family. This was not their grandchild. I was having to surrender the only person in the world that I knew I was related to. The problem was dealt with and solved clinically. I was indeed denied any access to non-adoption alternatives.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry 2000:140)
6.5.2 Withholding information on revocation rights

By law mothers should have been told about the 30-day revocation period during which time consent could be revoked thus enabling them to retain custody of their babies. All women should have had an opportunity to find out about and discuss their revocation rights with a social worker before the consent-taking interview. Under the regulations of the Adoption of Children Act, adoption agencies were required to provide counselling to assist women to make a decision about the future of their child and to understand the legal implications of adoption. This expectation was reiterated in departmental instructions and the Australian Association of Social Workers Adoption Manual (New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:140). The 1971 Adoption Manual stated that where possible the social worker who witnessed an adoption consent should be the same worker who provided a casework service to the mother before her confinement:

A case work service is necessary in order to help natural parents come to the most satisfactory decision for their child. It should be used to explore with them the legal situation with regard to the relinquishment of their child – for example, when their parental rights will actually cease.


This manual also advised that if it was not possible for the caseworker to take the consent, the witness should try to see the mother on at least two occasions. The first time to hand her copies of Forms 9 and 7 and to explain her revocation rights, and the second time to witness the consent (New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:140). Similarly, as early as 1939 an explanation of the Child Welfare Act 17, 1939 regulations cited in Children in Need by Donald McLean (1956) and endorsed by the then Deputy Premier, Mr Heffron states:

A mother giving consent must be fully aware of the import of her action and must be emotionally and mentally able to appreciate all the implications of such consent.....a consent should not be taken if there is any suggestion of indecisiveness or that she has not given sufficient consideration to the matter.

(New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:219)
That these issues and expectations were not canvassed with the mothers becomes obvious when reading their accounts. Many mothers were not aware of their rights in this regard. Many were simply not told of the time period enabling them to retain custody:

I was not told I had 30 days to revoke the document.

(a Tasmanian mother at Q34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

What right? I wasn’t aware I had any!

(a South Australian mother at Q34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I believed I had no rights.

(a Western Australian mother at Q34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I was unaware of the 30 day revocation period.

(a Sydney mother at Q34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

If they were told, because many of these mothers were very young and lacked family or other support, they were not aware of how to assert their revocation rights – where does one go to do this? Who does one see?

Many young women were not aware of the processes of law enabling them to do this:

I did not know I’d signed a consent until 1995.....the nurse refused access.....the sister-in-law of the birth father refused to help me get my baby......when I begged to get out I did so to get help, to get my baby, to hold her and to feed her.....the woman refused to help me.....I did not know I had rights.....I had no support......information and communication was withheld.....I did not know I had signed a consent.

(a Queensland mother at Questions 28 - 34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I felt that I had no support and no method of bringing a baby home with me to live.....no place to live with a baby and no income.

(a Sydney mother at Q34 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
On the eighth day I signed a document that I did not understand because it had never been explained to me. I was under the influence of eight days’ worth of heavy sedatives. I assumed Stephen’s name as well as mine would be on the birth certificate because no one told me any different. We named our son Ben. I was never informed of the correct procedure for revocation. I remember being dropped off in front of the hospital by my sister about 10 days after I had been discharged. I recall jumping out of the car and running towards the main entrance to get my baby. It is a fragment memory and I cannot recall what occurred once I was inside the hospital. That is all I remember. I blocked this experience out. Stephen has since told me that on the 30th day, as I was close to collapse, distraught and in a panic, we telephoned a number that I had been given. We had a number. We do not remember who gave it to us. We tried to get our baby back. He does not remember what was said to me, only that I was hysterical when the receiver was replaced and he had grave fears for my condition. We did not get our baby back. I blocked the whole pregnancy and childbirth experience out and I remained dissociated and split off from that reality for 20 years.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:214)

Where the mothers were aware of their rights, lies, deception and coercion by stealth meant that their attempts to retrieve their children were often fruitless. This is illustrated by the following quotations, including a statement attached years later by a mother to the bottom of social work records:

A couple of hours after giving birth to my son I went to the nursery to get my baby and was told I was not allowed admittance.....after lunch I returned to the nursery and proceeded to walk straight to my baby....I was physically held back, the nursery door was locked and a social worker was called...I was told not to make any trouble....you have no right to be here and to return to your room......I made several unsuccessful attempts to get into the nursery to be with my baby.....on the fourth day I was called into a back office to sign papers....when I refused to sign I was told that I was too young, there was no help and that I would be a ‘bad’ mother and my baby would never forgive me.....I was told that he would be better off in every way for not being with me......I was stood over and pressured into signing my baby’s life away......once they had succeeded in getting me to sign away my son I was told to go away, forget and to move on with my life (an impossible task)......on the 14th day of August 1971, I rang to see how my son was doing....I asked to speak to someone regarding taking my son home, to be told that he had already been placed in the care of his new parents and that I could do nothing about it.....I then went to the hospital not believing this story and was met by the consent taker and escorted off the hospital premises......my son was given to his adoptive parents at fourteen days old.....he was supposed to be kept in hospital for 30 days.

(a submission to the Royal Commission, 1998:1,2)
As I lived three hours away from the ‘home’ I was asked to sign the papers before I left.......three to four days after getting home I rang to arrange to pick him up but he had already been given to his adoptive parents (I was told).....no one ever asked what I wanted to do or informed me of my options.

(a response to Q33 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Vickie’s maternal grandmother rang last Tuesday.....sounded distressed.......said Vickie very upset and wanted baby back.....could not settle down at home and school etc......advised 30 days up this weekend and told her what Vickie should do to revoke.......rang Catholic Welfare......Mrs Slater not there.....message left.....telephoned Mrs Slater yesterday from home......told her of situation......she said she would contact Vickie before placement.....Mrs Slater rang today to say she’d been in touch with grandmother who said things much better.....Vickie away with parents for weekend and had been able to sort things out and has decided willingly to proceed with adoption......advised nursery of this......baby will go in next couple of days.

It was pointless fighting them all for my child.....the 30 days were up....IT WAS OVER!.....they made me quiet for 30 days......they won. (a Social Worker’s Report in a ‘Request to make arrangements for the adoption of a child’ 1974)

An officer of the Department of Children’s Services came to see me on the Monday.....I told her “to go away as my baby was not up for adoption” .......she rang my mother and asked her to come to the hospital on the Wednesday.....my mother sat in the waiting room for two hours wondering what was going on......the officer had me upstairs badgering me to sign the papers......she told me “my mother felt it was best” .......she would not let me see my mother when I asked as I did not believe her.......she told me “I could not leave the hospital with my baby, the department would not allow it as I could not support the baby, but I had 30 days to change my mind”......if I could prove to the department I could support the baby then I could take him home......I then signed the consent.

(a response to Q22 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Fourteen days after I signed the consent I rang the hospital and told them I was coming to pick the baby up....they told me I had misunderstood .....it was 30 days only if they hadn’t found suitable parents and they had....I was too late.

(a Brisbane mother at Q33 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
I was told he was ill and needed to recuperate before I could take him home.

(a Sydney mother at Q33 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I was told that I could get him back....I asked them to do this.....however, after two days I contacted the home again to be told that they had been unable to contact the adoptive parents but had spoken to the ‘maid’ who said they were so happy with their baby they had gone to her (the mother's parents) to show him to them.....I was then told that the adoptive father was a barrister and his wife was a nurse.....she had had a number of miscarriages and was unable to have a child of her own......I had nothing other than my love and did not know how I was going to survive or where I would live......how could I compete with this?......at this point I said to leave him with them.....18 years later I found out that his father was a ‘linesman’ and his mother did ‘home duties’......I feel very angry, abused and cheated – MY SON WAS STOLEN !!!!!!!

(a response to Q33 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

6.5.3 Withholding visitation rights

Not informing mothers about persons wishing to visit was another method used by those in authority to gain complete control over their charges. If the young women could be kept isolated from anyone who might offer aid and perhaps even marriage, the desired outcome (procuring a baby for adoption) would be more likely (Code 1995:112). Looking back on her experience in an ‘unmarried mothers’ home’ years later, a mother speaks of not being able to receive her boyfriend’s mother, who was her only confidante and comfort at the time:

My boyfriend’s (natural father) mother came to visit......I was not allowed to see her.....I was so angry because from my window I watched her walk away......they did not ask me if I would like to see her.....I did not even know she was coming.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner 15 July 1999)

Many mothers recall being denied visits from their friends, boyfriends, lovers and fiancés:

Friends drove 400 miles to visit and were turned away by the nun in charge.

(a mother from New South Wales in response to Q17 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
On the other hand, natural fathers were often denied information about their girlfriends. For instance, some fathers did not receive mail which was sent to them:

My baby’s father was in the army.......he was overseas......he did not know I had his baby as he did not get the letter I wrote to him......he did not find out until 1996!

(a New South Wales mother in response to Q8 and Q14 in the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

In many other instances the natural fathers were simply dismissed when approaching the authorities for information:

I was working in the city at the time and used to go down after work each day to visit Diane.....I guess I had become the invisible man.....I was tolerated but not really encouraged.....most of the time I would visit her we would spend outside rather than in the ward and I guess looking back that was because we were made to feel uncomfortable being together......I was never recognised on my own.....I was sort of tolerated rather than consulted.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:154)

My boyfriend was repeatedly denied access to my ward each time he tried to visit me......hospital staff kept intercepting him before he could reach Godfrey Ward which was the ward that they reserved for Carramar girls....on the evening of the day that our son was born, Stephen rushed to the hospital after work to be with me only to be denied access......he protested that he was the baby’s father and had some right to information....they refused to give him any information.

(a Sydney mother in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000: 212)

.......was not permitted to see me.

(a Queensland mother in response to Q16 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

He visited twice in the home for unmarried mothers – fathers were not encouraged to visit.

(a Brisbane mother at Q16.1 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

In the early days it was really a situation of – and I hate to be crude – “Piss off Steve, we do not want to know about you......your name is not on there”......with the attitudes that prevailed then,
if a young lady got pregnant she was virtually classed as a slut.....that was the furthest thing from
the truth in our case.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption
Practices 1998:22)

So what were my rights?.....Section 23 of the 1965 Adoption Act plainly states that I had every
right to oppose the adoption.....[Social worker 2] never informed me of that, despite my
repeated asking......all she ever said was that they only needed one signature for a
consent......the fact is that under Section 6 a father’s guardianship of an ex nuptial newborn did
not have to be declared by a court......it was automatic unless expressly revoked by a
court......this had been precededent twice before 1980.....since the Adoption of Children Act
required that everyone who is a guardian of a child must sign the consent every single newborn
adoption in New South Wales which post-dates 1976 but does not have the consent of an easily
accessible biological father is invalid......some in the adoption agencies treat this inquiry simply
as a research opportunity for their memoirs as if they did nothing wrong.....their defence is that
they were beholden to the culture of the times......since when has treating someone with a little
dignity and according to the law been a matter of culture? ........these consent-takers ask us not to
judge them by today’s standards but the immutable higher laws by which these church entities
are supposed to operate has never changed and that is what condemns them........as for carefully
worded apologies, the only statement which would mean anything to me is one personally
addressed to either myself or my girlfriend, signed by [social worker 1] and [social worker 2],
admitting culpability, a breach of duty of care and regret for their practices in my personal
case......I would be more than happy at any time to speak to these people and discuss with them
such a statement although I would warn them that words ‘illegal’, ‘unethical’ and ‘stolen white
generation’ will feature prominently.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption
Practices 2000:142)

In this section I have argued that the mothers were not given vital information on
housing or benefits. Most mothers were not aware of their rights in this regard. If they
were aware they were often tricked or manipulated by state agents using isolation and
other tactics. Often a member or members of the young unmarried woman’s
immediate family would wittingly or unwittingly aid in the separation of mother and
baby. I have argued that coercion did occur and often by stealth. In the next section I
argue that coercion also occurred in a more overt manner, and often under the threat
of force.
6.6 Fear, terror tactics, threats and intimidation

In the home you were made to accompany a girl to the labour ward.....it was like you were to be instilled with fear, that is, constantly intimidated.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner 15 July 1999)

Kirby (2001) maintains that shaming devices are powerful mechanisms for getting persons to do what others want them to do. In total institutions, such as the home for unmarried mothers, it is not unusual for sanctions involving embarrassment, harassment, guilt and shame to be used against the young, pregnant women, who, because of their unwed status, are not seen as conforming to societal expectations (Kirby 2001:149-152). These individuals are in the homes because they are not doing what they should be doing. Hence the message is: Shape up and act right! (Kirby 2001:149-152).

Sites (1973) maintains that persons in positions of power will resort to violence as a means of attaining specified goals. However, he also suggests that physical violence is only invoked as a last option. The threat of violence is usually enough to get persons to conform to required goals. Threat tactics tend to take two major forms – threatening to move toward a more forceful type of tactic if demands are not met and threatening to withdraw rewards if demands are not met. The conditions under which each of these is most likely to be used depend upon what one has to bargain with. If individuals or groups have few resources, they will probably use the former type of threat if that alternative appears feasible. If they have adequate resources they will probably, at least at first, use the latter (Sites 1973:167).

Similarly, Hanmer (1978) maintains that violence and the fear of violence moulds behaviour (Hanmer 1978:219; Andersen et al. 1990:296,297; Loizos 1979:183-195). At a subliminal level fear is experienced as unease, a concern to behave properly or worry that one may be laughed at or ridiculed (Crowley 2000:179). Fear can be activated by knowledge of actual violence to oneself or others, or by deviating from accepted social behaviour or even contemplating doing so. At its most covert the threat of force or force itself may proceed from behaviour which on the surface may appear friendly or joking, but in its effect produces fear, dread and/or anxiety, thus facilitating the complete breakdown of
the individual’s resilience (Hanmer 1978:219; Mann 1996: 83,84,85; Andersen et al. 1990:295,297).

Young, naive, vulnerable and without outside support, the young women were easy prey for those whose sole purpose was to separate mothers and their babies and thus save the Australian state any monetary obligation (Mann 1996:86; Rathus 1996:133). Whilst not allowing the mothers to see, hold or touch their babies was a very common tactic (and is referred to in the next section on physical constraints), other methods were used. For example, some mothers had their clothes withheld until signing the consent, while others were threatened with police arrest or intervention. Many were threatened with vagrancy, soliciting and/or having their babies made wards of the state. Whilst it was common practice for the natural fathers (boyfriends) to be warned away from the premises with threats of carnal knowledge, the mothers themselves could be threatened with incarceration in a state mental institution if not complying with the wishes of those in authority (Mann 1996:86).

Many mothers were not allowed to leave the hospitals/homes until consents were procured, while in the meantime withholding their clothes:

I was not discharged from hospital until I gave consent to have my baby adopted. I remember so well the day I signed. [Matron 1] came to the hospital and took me to a room to wait for a man to come with the papers......I remember signing with my eyes filled with tears......I remember being escorted back to the ward and being given a drug to calm me down because I was quite hysterical......at the time of signing I was a minor, just seventeen and a half years of age.....I certainly was under a legal disability....I question the legality of the adoption as I was unable to sign a consent form a week before when I was admitted to hospital and yet I signed a consent for the adoption of my child.....after the consent form was signed, I was allowed to leave Hornsby Hospital.....I went back to Carramar to collect my belongings and returned home to my mother's house to get on with my life......as yet, I have not had contact with my son......my hope is that it will happen soon.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:171)

I signed the adoption papers on the sixth day after my son’s birth in my pyjamas, was then allowed to dress and leave the hospital.....if I wanted to take my son with me, then I first would have had to find him, as he was removed from me straight after his birth and I felt that I would have had to confront the whole hospital establishment to do this.....I also had no place to take
my son to......I had become isolated from my peer group during my pregnancy......there was no family support for me to keep my son......no community help that I was aware of and marriage did not present a solution to me.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:145)

“We will call police if you attempt to discharge yourself and baby”

Matron told me to sign the papers or else....she had the papers with her.....I told her that there was no way I was going to sign anything and that I would be going back for my baby the next day.....Matron went into her office and closed the door.....she stayed there for some time while I waited for her to sign me out of the home.....she said in a very quiet and threatening way “I have an envelope for you.....you will leave Brisbane today and get on with your life....your baby has been given to a good family and if you try to step foot at the hospital I’ll have you arrested.”

(Hammond 1998:77-78)

I begged the nurse to let me hold him......“please,” I repeated, “just one time, for one minute”.....I remember her clearly, a woman with a round, kind face and eyes that filled with tears......”no, I'm sorry, I can’t let you hold this baby”......I felt that I was a horrible person and that I didn’t deserve to hold my own son......but I couldn’t leave without touching him.....my face was wet from crying and I clung to the window that separated us as if I could reach through it and pick him up......they finally had to call an orderly and pull my hands off the glass to get me to leave.

(personal correspondence, Jigsaw, Brisbane)

“We will call police if you do not leave the nursery, do not leave home/hospital premises or attempt to revoke and/or retain custody of child”

I left St Anthony’s on 22 September when my baby was twelve days old.....I made frequent trips back to St Anthony’s asking for my baby.....I had not signed the form so I still thought that he was legally my baby.....I was told he would go to a respectable home, would be loved and given everything he needed.....my repeated protests were ignored......my continual return visits to St Anthony’s were treated with contempt by the nuns......on one occasion I was told to wait in the waiting room.....I did, for two hours, and I went and asked the girl at the desk where [the Sister] was.....she told me she had gone out and was not expected back until about 8pm.......another time I was threatened that she would call the police and have me removed
I am the father of a daughter born in 1954 when I was sixteen and a half and my girlfriend was eighteen. Her parents were very strict Catholics. They found out that she was pregnant when she was six months pregnant and she was placed in St Anthony’s home for unmarried mothers. She was imprisoned there until the time that she was to give birth at St Margaret’s Hospital. I was not allowed to visit or speak with her in any way. On 23 June 1954 our daughter was born and I arrived at the hospital later that afternoon. I was allowed to nurse our daughter and again, two days later, I visited and nursed her and we made all the plans that young people usually make. My parents had already said to me that if I was half a man I would bring them both home. On the fourth day I visited again to find my girlfriend in quite a mess and she said to me that the baby had been taken, our daughter; that her aunty and a couple of nuns had made her sign the papers and taken the baby. I asked the nuns where the baby was, that we wanted to take her home, and I was more or less ordered from the premises. I went back two days later with my mother and was told that my girlfriend and my daughter had been taken back to St Anthony’s home at Croydon. We went there and were told that the baby had already been adopted and there was nothing we could do about it. They refused to let us see my girlfriend and became very abusive and told me that, if I did not leave the premises, they would call the police. We went to the Department of Child Welfare in Young Street and to the Catholic Adoption Agency and just about every other place we could think of in the next two weeks and were told the same story at each one, that the baby had been adopted.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:157)

“You can be charged with vagrancy and/or soliciting if you attempt to leave here with baby”

I was discharged on 8 February 1967, seven days after my son was born. I remember sitting in an office with my parents and a woman known as [social worker 1]. This woman was present at my son's birth, and I had always thought she was the matron from the hospital. I have since found out she was a Presbyterian deaconess and a social worker. One of my questions is: What was a social worker doing in the labour ward during my son’s birth?

While I was sitting in this office with the social worker, [social worker 1], I was told I had to sign a paper before leaving. Adoption consent was never mentioned and I did not sign anything
at that particular time. She was very angry with me and told me when I asked for my son that if she brought him to me he would be handed to me naked, we would both be put on the street, the police would be called and my son would be charged with being a neglected child in moral danger. She then asked me if I had heard of the word vagrancy and she said to me if I was put on the street I would be charged as a vagrant and to just go home and get on with my life. She also told me that I had nothing to offer my son and I was a selfish girl, and by giving him up, his family would be able to give him everything that I couldn’t and his parents would be professional people, probably a doctor or a lawyer. I have since found out that my son was taken by a carpenter and a housewife, not a doctor or a lawyer.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:135)

After the church got what they wanted from me, which was my baby, I was of no use and taken to the Children’s Court, whereby I was charged with being exposed to moral danger and taken to gaol. The name of this gaol and another I was sent to for three weeks are etched into my mind forever, Minda at Lidcombe and Worimi Leichhardt Broadmeadow. The three weeks I stayed in these places were three weeks of hell. I thought I was going on a holiday, until I reached Minda, late at night, with a welfare officer, then I realised what the system had actually done to me. It discarded me like an old rag. “Take all your clothes off, turn around, bend over, have a three minute shower, put these clothes on and get into this bed”, in a dormitory where there were 100 or more girls as well. This is what I had to do or I would have been charged. I was a victim of incest and a victim of the system. I like to call all the people who were involved in my horror the collective profit masters, controlling everything I did. A point I would like to make is should a victim of incest be subject to the humiliation of strip searches in front of other people? I had been stripped mentally and physically of everything I owned, as well as my baby. Didn’t anyone have any compassion for what I was going through? She had done nothing wrong, although the authorities thought otherwise.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:169)

“If you do not sign the consent, your baby will be made a state ward and you would not wish that on anyone”

I would like to point out that at no time during my pregnancy did I ever see a counsellor, nor any social worker. I was visited in hospital on the fourth day of my confinement by a social worker or district officer and again given more pentobarbitone before and after her visit. Surely this practice of administering dangerous sedatives must prove collusion between the hospital
and staff and the various adoption agencies. The woman used all her professional training to obtain my signature, the well-rehearsed sentences that were playing with my emotions, and a natural concern as to my child’s welfare, instilling in me over and over that surely I wanted only what was very best for my son. I was made to feel a bad mother to even consider bringing him up myself, what future could I offer him and how he would be better off to be raised by a stable married couple, something no one could really guarantee. Her demeanour started out in an amicable manner, but when I remained in a state of confusion she became agitated and started threatening me, saying that my son would end up a State ward if I did not tell her the name of the father and I assume also if I did not sign the papers. Clearly she came to my bedside with only one objective: to put in progress the handing over of my son to complete strangers.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:152)

Natural fathers were warned away with threats of carnal knowledge (Cole 1998:101):

The fathers were actively discouraged from visiting the mothers....they were hounded out of the hospitals......mothers were forbidden to see their partners......fathers were often threatened with carnal knowledge if they tried to help the mothers......the fathers, even though they would have had the same legal rights as any other father before the consent was signed, were not allowed usually even in the hospital; and, if they were, they certainly were not allowed to see, hold or touch their own baby.

(Cole 1998:101)

The next day two detectives arrived on our doorstep and wanted to talk to me and my father, which they did.....they informed me that they were arresting me, which they did......they charged me with carnal knowledge......I appeared in court charged with the offence.....there was no denial......it was definitely me and I subsequently received a 12 month good behaviour bond for this act.

(a natural father in evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1999:16)

There was often the threat of solitary confinement and/or confinement to a state mental institution if one did not acquiesce and sign (Rathus 1996:130):

Shortly after this I returned home......not one word was spoken about what had transpired except that my mother continued to administer Stilboestrol, which had been prescribed without my
consent to dry up my milk.....a few days later I called the social worker and told her that I wanted my child back, that I had no recollection of giving my consent for her adoption......my daughter was about two weeks old......she told me that she had already gone to her new home and threatened that if I tried to retrieve her she would have me arrested......desperate and overwhelmed I attempted suicide.......the family doctor threatened to permanently commit me to a mental hospital.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:162)

Once incarcerated in the homes, the mothers (as isolated inmates) had no option but to do as they were told by supervisory staff acting under state directives. In this section I have outlined numerous methods involving threats and intimidation employed by staff to effect compliance. In the next section I elaborate on some of these practices. I also argue that the organisational layout of the homes/hospitals served to ensure separation.

6.7 Physical constraints
6.7.1 Spatial segregation

Societies have generated their own rules, culturally determined, for making boundaries on the ground, and have divided the social into spheres, levels and territories with invisible fences and platforms to be scaled by abstract ladders and crossed by intangible bridges with as much trepidation or exultation as on a plank over a raging torrent.

(Ardener 1981:11,12)

Marcuse (1996) argues that spatial segregation allows for exploitation. Spatial divisions serve a purpose (Marcuse 1996:182,196). They manifest and reinforce positions in a hierarchy of power and wealth in which some people decide and others are decided for (Marcuse 1996:197). One’s neighbourhood is a source of identity – a definition of who a person is and where she/he belongs in society. Whether it be luxury co-ops or public housing, each cluster wishes to be protected from intrusion by the outside (Marcuse 1996:203). ‘Defence of turf’ is a phrase often used to describe the conduct of street gangs. However, it can also describe the behaviour of the majority of city residents – the rich in a
more extreme form than the poor (Marcuse 1996:203; Anderson 1994:15). The ‘defence of turf’ can be carried over into the social policy arena. In turf or official circles, presided over by the white, male, middle class elite, it could be argued that sympathy is not wasted on the poor, the transient, the displaced, the pregnant and unattached. Such persons are all lumped together as the ‘voluntary homeless’. The rhetoric suggests these people want to live that way. They bring it on themselves. It is their fault; their problem to be solved by them. Since the concern is to protect society from their existence, their visibility and the problems their existence implies, state policies are enacted to constrain/control and then exclude (Marcuse 1996:195; Aldred 2003:1).

In a similar vein, Goffman, cited in Ardener (1981), argues that space reflects social organisation. Once space has been bounded and shaped it is no longer merely a neutral background; it exerts its own influence. A dozen people in a small room is different to a dozen people in a great hall. Seating space shaped by a round rather than a square table may influence the nature of social interaction among those seated. The ‘theatre of action’ to some extent determines the action. The environment imposes certain restraints on what one can or cannot do (Goffman, cited in Ardener 1981:12; Goffman 1963:98,99).

The ‘theatre of action’ in this section of the current study refers to what took place in the homes and hospitals where the ‘unmarried mothers’ were incarcerated in the mid-twentieth century. In the section of this chapter where I discuss pressure from boyfriends I refer to the way in which some men in their individual dealings with women appropriate social space to their own advantage. There I argue that some men (not all men) will give the illusion of being interested in a long-term relationship (marriage), all the while manoeuvring behind the scenes to end the relationship once the goal of ‘sex’ is achieved (a Queensland mother 1999:1-9). There I argue that some men will enter into a relationship with a woman who is unaware that he is already committed elsewhere – often at a distance and possibly married (Swain and Howe 1995:57). In a situation where this ‘new woman’ is a third party, she is unable to negotiate her needs, her desires (Swain and Howe 1995:56). The male (married or not) is constrained in his actions by his other lover/girlfriend/wife. Compared to her, the ‘new woman’ is accorded secondary status. She is not listened to, she cannot voice her opinions. She is simply not able to negotiate (and of course an unmarried woman by virtue of her unique reproductive capacity is always vulnerable; her male lover does not have to be committed elsewhere) (Swain and Howe 1995:xvii). Since the male’s
interest in this ‘new woman’ is often purely physical/sexual, once this interest is satisfied, the man will very likely lose interest (Rush 1981:42,53,54; Tatar 1995:32). If the ‘new woman’ happens to become pregnant, he is very likely to disappear (Rush 1981:42; Greer 1986:165; Swain and Howe 1995:34,54,56). Disappearing is facilitated where the male has or is about to appropriate residential space elsewhere (that is, in another suburb, city or country)(Swain and Howe 1995:56,161). Whilst middle-class men are in a stronger financial position to maintain more than one residence, working-class men also disappear (Cole et al. 1997:99-105). Whilst both classes of men are known to not only seek out extramarital affairs and/or chance encounters and in many instances plan their ‘sexploits’ (Swain and Howe 1995:57; Cameron and Frazer 1987:159), it is middle-class men who, due to their high status, social standing and bigger bank balances, have more to lose by not covering up (Ryder 1992:100; Davis 1982:200; Bulbeck 1998:210). Having said this, men of both classes are capable of playing up and covering up (Goffman 1969:80,117; Pile and Kieth 1997:176; Cole et al. 1997:57,59; Cameron and Frazer 1987:159; Ryder 1992:100; Gittins 1993:174).

In the section on pressure from boyfriends I outline in considerable detail the various lengths to which some men (married or unmarried, heterosexual/homosexual, wealthy or not) will go in order to obtain sex with no commitment. Consistent with Erving Goffman’s ‘theatre of action’ thesis which argues that performances can be staged/contrived in order to conjure up a desired effect (Ritzer 2000:469), I reiterate my earlier point: that some men (not all men) perceive the social world to be one big stage – a giant ‘playpen’ if you like. Women are the playthings .... there for the taking ... to be had ... mere pawns in the game (Goffman 1972:181,200,206,212,213,214; Greer 1986:164-165; Evans-Pritchard 1980:192; Caputi 1988:92; Ryder 1992:98; Hintz 2004:32; Luke and Luke 1997:47).

Goffman argues that theatre performances which involve stage craft and stage management “seem to occur everywhere in social life” (Goffman 1972:26). These performances consist of elements: a ‘front’, the stage, props, appropriate expressions and attitudes that allow a performer to conjure up a desired self image and in turn enhance the audience’s (or interactor’s) sense of authenticity (Ritzer 2000:469). A public performance is given on a front stage by a ‘team’ of performers who construct a view of the world for the benefit of a public audience. However, in a back stage area, these performers may ‘knowingly contradict’ the impressions that were carefully publicly presented. Goffman
also indicates that these two regions are connected by a ‘guarded passageway’ (such as the double doors found between the kitchen and dining room in many restaurants) so that the public performance cannot be shattered by an inadvertent view of the back stage. This aspect of Goffman’s analysis is quite literal: it is more a footnote in the history of architecture than a metaphorical description of familiar experience. Goffman gives the following example:

If the bereaved are to be given the illusion that the dead one is really in a deep and tranquil sleep, then the undertaker must be able to keep the bereaved from the workroom where the corpses are drained, stuffed and painted in preparation for their final performance.

(Ritzer 2000:469)

According to Goffman and other sociologists, social positions assume social expectations. People assume different roles, at different times, according to different circumstances/expectations. People are capable of travelling between locations, affecting different identity performances in different sites (Ritzer 2000:469; Cameron and Frazer 1987:157,158; Pile and Kieth 1997:181; Young 1997:71). According to Goffman in Ritzer (2000) performances are put on for different players/interactants in order to achieve a desired outcome. These performances often involve risk-taking, strategic interaction and the adoption of masks (Cameron and Frazer 1987:157; Ritzer 2000:469). Goffman also argues that just as individuals in everyday life are capable of presenting a false front to their own advantage, so the situational (the personal) can easily be related to the conventional (the structural) (Goffman 1972:27). It is to this context that I now turn.

Many people – academics, medical and allied health professionals, the lay person, men and women, young and old – yesterday and today are of the opinion that the homes/hospitals operating at the time served as a ‘safe haven’, that is, a place where otherwise homeless and unsupported women could go while ‘deciding’ what to do about their unplanned pregnancies (Swain and Howe 1995:142). Very rarely is it recognised that these homes/hospitals were deliberately set aside as a means of separating mothers and babies, thus protecting male interests, that is, patriarchal interests, both individually and on a collective basis (a Tasmanian mother at Q43 of the questionnaire, see Appendix 1; Scutt 1990:274). Rarely is it recognised that these homes/hospitals were specifically built as a convenient means of covering up men’s infidelities, whilst simultaneously providing babies
for those who were married but childless (a Tasmanian mother at Q43 of the questionnaire, see Appendix 1; Scutt 1990:274; Swain and Howe 1995:136).

McHutchison (2000) argues that the homes/hospitals at the time gave the appearance of caring and benevolence. In reality, however, without any long-term prospects for financial and/or emotional support (that is, outside support), far from allowing the mothers to make an informed choice/decision, the women were heavily constrained by these institutions and the practices employed there (McHutchison 2000:191; Welfare1998:1; Lindsay1997:247). As the previous sections have shown these practices included: not allowing the mother to see, hold or touch her baby; transporting mothers to another location after the birth and/or hiding their babies; the misuse of barbiturate drugs; marking the mother’s medical files/records/charts and/or beds with terms such as ‘BFA’ (Baby for Adoption), UB-, UB+ or ‘socially cleared’; and segregating ‘unmarried mothers’ from the married mothers (Welfare 1998:91-107; evidence to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:76). McHutchison (2000) maintains that in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, practices were designed to achieve one outcome – adoption. Institutions which held themselves out as providing support to expectant young women did all they could to manage mothers in a manner that ensured that adoption of their children was the most likely outcome. They were so efficient at this, it is not possible it occurred by chance. There must have been some level of planning and agreement which extended across the institutional level (McHutchison 2000:191).

As has been argued previously, there was no information in the public domain to warn mothers of the consequences of having their children adopted and there was no information in the public domain to warn pregnant women of the extent to which the agencies from which they would be seeking assistance had an agenda towards adoption. The media promoted adoption, as did the professionals involved (McHutchison 2000:191; Welfare 1998:105; Swain and Howe 1995:142,14). Mothers presented to these places at a time of enormous vulnerability. The network took advantage of the mother’s demoralised mental state, her vulnerability, her anxiety about what was to happen to her and her baby, the fact that she had not been a mother before. Alternatives were not explained. Nothing was said or done to assist her out of her demoralised state and certainly nothing was done to empower her. It was not emphasised before birth that, once the child was adopted, the mother would never see it again in this lifetime. Her freedom was curtailed within the homes and among
the waiting patients. If her parents did not know of the pregnancy, she was not encouraged or assisted to tell them. Her files were stamped without her knowledge to ensure the separation of her child. She was completely and utterly separated from her child at birth and this was made so much easier where she was deserted/abandoned by the natural father and where others (the married and childless) were eagerly awaiting her newborn (McHutchison 2000:191; Else 1991:50,51; Swain and Howe 1995:142; personal memoirs from a Queensland birthmother).

6.7.2 Misuse of drugs

Many of the mothers do not recall the events surrounding their hospital confinement. It is not until obtaining their medical records years later that they realise that this lack of memory is caused not only by the mind blocking associated with trauma due to life-long separation from their babies, but also by the heavy level of sedation they received at the time of birth (Wellfare 1998:98,99,103). Whilst it was commonly thought at the time by both medical staff and laymen that the dispensing of drugs would make it easier for the mother, what is often overlooked is the potential for their gross misuse (Rickarby 1998:7,12). Because the main goal was obtaining consent, staff may have over-medicated in order to effect this. Although a variety of different drugs were used, Rickarby (1998) refers to sodium pentobarbital, Amytal and Stilboestrol as the most commonly used offending drugs. On examining the medical files for Crown Street Hospital, Sydney, he noted similarities in the drug regime pertaining to both Crown Street and Chelmsford (a psychiatric institution at that time) (Rickarby 1998:12). Furthermore, both institutions had the same senior psychiatrist. My research from relinquishing mothers Australia-wide confirms Rickarby’s findings. For instance, at Question 27(h) of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) where I ask if the mothers were placed on calming medication, of the 68 mothers who responded to this question, 34 responded with yes’, 14 ‘no’, 14 did not tick anything, 2 indicated with a ‘don’t know’, 3 placed a question mark (?), 1 wrote ‘unknown - no drug sheet available under FOI (Freedom of Information)’. Similarly, in response to Question 27(i) (see Appendix 1) where I ask the mothers if they received an unnecessary amount of medication, of the 68 mothers from around Australia who responded to this question, 25 indicated with an unequivocal ‘yes’, 21 ticked the ‘no’ box, 4 wrote ‘don’t know’, 2 wrote ‘not sure’, 15 didn’t tick anything, and 1 wrote ‘no drug sheet available’.
My own research and evidence from elsewhere indicates that a variety of drugs were used both antenatally and postnatally. These drugs were relatively quick acting and could cause extreme sedation (Rickarby 1998:12). This is indicated in the following example of one woman who gave birth to a healthy 8lb 30z baby girl at the Royal Women’s Hospital late in 1952:

Elizabeth was still only seventeen years of age, and throughout her pregnancy and confinement felt a sense of abandonment by both her boyfriend of three years and her family. Now she hoped desperately for some kind of intervention or show of support which would allow her to keep her child. It was not forthcoming......the actual birth involved a difficult forty-four hour labour during which time the barbiturates (Phenobarb) which had been prescribed for depression some six weeks earlier were temporarily suspended......as medical staff bustled about the delivery room after the birth, an especially emotional Elizabeth communicated her desire to hold her baby......due to her persistence and distress, the doctor finally relented, instructing nursing staff to “let the bitch see her”......twenty minutes later the doctor injected her with a powerful tranquillising drug and the baby was whisked from her arms forever.

(McCabe 1995:84)

The following quotations provide further evidence of heavy sedation:

The ten days until I signed the papers on the verandah were a blur......no wonder since I recently obtained my medical records showing huge amounts of pentobarbitone administered three or four times daily......notations were made each day on my medical papers: “Adoption papers still not signed” .........I continued to refuse to sign the papers and finally, on the ninth day, the social worker told me that if I signed the papers I could see my daughter......all I wanted desperately was to see the daughter that I had given birth to......I signed these papers and was taken to the nursery and my daughter was held up to the glass window wrapped in a bunny rug for what seemed to me to be the shortest moment in time......I felt as though I had traded my soul for that one brief moment......the following day I was released and the last notation on my medical papers was: “Patient still uncomfortable”......... I was so heavily sedated that I barely remember even leaving the hospital that day.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:167)

I was led to believe that Amytal and pentobarbitone were prescribed as antihypertensive agents for women with PET. On prima facie evidence here I did not have PET and yet I was prescribed these doses. I cannot conclude for what other reason I would have been prescribed those medications. I do not believe that I was overly anxious. I certainly was not any more anxious than any other woman in my position. Administration of those medications occurred right up until delivery, even to the point where I was given another 400 milligrams of intramuscular
pentobarb straight after my son had been delivered, in addition to the oral doses at that time. This seems to be an enormous amount of sedation to be given to a healthy, normal woman who is delivering a healthy, viable baby. I have spoken to other women who have subsequently delivered children and who were married and who were not given these doses.

(Farrar 1999:41)

Stuporous states and delusions were also frequent (Rickarby 1998:13):

They put a pillow over my head or up here so I could not see her....she was taken away.....I was drugged......one doctor told me I was drugged so much that he thought I would have been comatose....I was astounded when I got my medical records to find that every night I was administered 100 milligrams of pentobarb before sleeping.....then, the night before I was to sign the papers at 9pm I was given 100 milligrams of pentobarb and then at 11pm I was given another 100 milligrams of pentobarb.....I wonder how off my face I was to be able to take in all the information about the consent forms.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:22)

On receiving my medical records I was horrified to find out that I had been given massive amounts of powerful sedatives on arriving at the hospital, whilst I was still pregnant. These particular drugs are extremely dangerous to the unborn foetus. To give you an idea of how I was systematically drugged what follows is a run down of my daily medication schedule. At 4pm on the day I arrived, I was given 100 milligram of a barbiturate called Amytal. At 9pm that evening I was given 100 mg of sodium pentobarbitone. I was awoken at 4am the following day to receive another dose of 100 mg of Amytal. This was followed by another 100 mg at 10am and then again at 4pm. At 9pm I was given another 100 mg of pentobarb. The following day the procedure was repeated. At that time I was only 5ft 4ins tall and weighed, even at 9 months pregnant, only about 60 kilos. I am amazed that after imbibing this amount of medication I even knew my own name. My medical records revealed that I had signed the consent form for my daughter’s adoption not only under duress but also under the effects of a strong hypnotic barbiturate. I was definitely not in a fit state of mind to sign a consent.

(a submission to the New South Wales Law Reform Commission 1998:1)

......became very upset....put on tranquillisers by doctors......mother said there were no options......the baby had to be adopted.

(a South Australian mother at Q33 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
It seems likely that medication was dispensed on the pretext of giving pain relief when in fact all it really did was enhance the likelihood of separation:

I was given injections all the time to “calm me down”.

(a Sydney mother at Q25 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I was given tablets and told they were for pain.

(a Queensland mother at Q27 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I don’t remember much about the birth at all....I must have been given something because when I came around everything was over and I never saw my son at all.

(a Brisbane mother at Q27 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I was drugged so that I couldn’t stand up......to cover up what they did they drugged me.

(Interviewee 8, Brisbane, 30 June 1999)

6.7.3 Restricted viewing of babies

At birth many mothers were deliberately obstructed from viewing their babies. One of the most common methods of preventing a mother from seeing her new baby was to place a pillow or sheet over her face (Wellfare 1998:91). However, numerous other practices were used to achieve the same goal such as: turning lights down or off; using blindfolds; turning the mother’s head away; standing in her line of vision; whisking the baby away immediately upon birth; holding the mother’s shoulders down to prevent her from lifting herself up; pushing the mother back down if she sat up; and shackling the mother to the bedhead (Wellfare 1998:91,92):

I was in hospital for three days to have my baby......at the time of birth a pillow was placed in front so that I could not see her.

(Interviewee 20, Sydney, 8 December 1998)

At the time of birth, staff in labour area were standing in my way so as to make it very difficult for me to see the baby straight after birth.

(a response to Q27 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
Somehow all of the information from the hospital social worker had translated into the action that was taking place...I had not said anything...I had been too busy but somehow the sister knew that according to the records of the hospital social worker the baby was to be adopted.....I had not said anything to anyone.....the sheet was placed in front of me....after my son was born I pulled it down again - as one would expect a mother to do – to have a look at him.....I had a good look and I expressed what every mother expresses at that point and the sister turned around and said “get that baby out of here”...I said, “no, no, leave him, leave him” ......she said: “get him out” and they took him away....I did not see my baby again until after I had signed the adoption consent.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:116)

Room in semi-darkness…. baby whisked away…. reluctant to tell me she was a girl.

(a response to Q27 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

The baby was taken out of sight – whisked away.

(a response to Q27 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I was in a ward with three other mothers who were married.......they were going over their babies and I was not allowed to see mine.......I was crying and crying but no-one took any notice.......I was finally allowed to see my daughter but only for five minutes and only if I would give her away, that is, sign the consent form.

(Interviewee 20, Sydney, 8 December 1998)

Many mothers recall not being allowed to touch or hold their babies:

I was forbidden to have anything to do with my baby......I was not allowed to see or touch her.......they said it would be easier to let go and forget and then have more children.......so I went to look at her at times when I knew it was safe, that is, when the nuns were having their meals away from us.......it broke my heart because I never got to touch her.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner 15 July 1999)

I was locked out of the nursery and placed back in my ward….this happened several times.

(a response to Q27 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
I was never allowed to see or hold my child.

(a Queensland mother at Q25.4 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I had to remain in my bed… I wasn’t allowed to venture out near where the babies were kept.

(a Tasmanian mother at Q25 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Not allowed near the Nursery.

(a Tasmanian mother at Q25 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I saw the steel trolley and the blonde spiky hair of my son but I did not get to touch him.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner 15 July 1999)

My mum and dad and sister came to get me......on seeing my son for the first time in the nursery
I never forgot this.....it was like he was saying “oh, there you are!”.........I instinctively wanted
to pick him up but held myself back and then left.......I still to this day find it incomprehensible
that we all could just walk away from him......how could we do that?.......we were told that he
would be better off with another family and we all swallowed it......so much so that I didn't fight
for him at all.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner
15 July 1999)

I was alone in a small ward…door locked for 12 days….nurses and other staff escorted me to
the bathroom, waited for me to finish what I had to do, then took me back to my ward, locking
me inside again…my ward was locked at all times, day and night as my baby was in the
nursery not too far away from me, presuming I would sneak into the nursery looking for my
baby….I never ever saw him.

(a response to Qs 23 and 25 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

My hands were held down on the bed until after the baby was taken from the room.

(a Sydney mother at Q27 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)
I went to the nursery and a nurse was rocking her......I remember wanting to smell the baby’s hair and to touch her little arms.......I asked if I could rock her for a while and the nurse told me that she was sorry, it was not her decision, but I could not.

(personal correspondence, Jigsaw, Brisbane)

To facilitate separation, babies were often hidden from the mothers. Alternatively, mothers might be transported (without their knowledge or consent) to another location (at some distance from the place of birth) while their babies remained in the hospital (Arms 1990:32):

I was very sedated during my labour and delivery, in fact probably partly anaesthetised because I do not remember any pain during the delivery......it was like a dream......I woke at one stage and asked if my baby had been born and fell asleep again......next time I woke I was receiving some stitches......the doctor was there doing that and I asked to see my baby......I could not hear anything......I never heard him cry at all......so the doctor told the sister on duty to bring the baby to me – very quickly, he was fairly impatient about it – but I was most definite I wanted to see the baby......I saw him for about thirty seconds......I reached out and touched his face and said he was beautiful and then the nurse sort of quickly whisked him away....I just saw his face really, no other parts of his body......I never saw him again until he was nineteen years old......after the birth he was kept hidden from me in the hospital and from my family and Peter....he was just nowhere to be seen.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:154)

I was transported to Lady Wakehurst immediately after giving birth......Lady Wakehurst was the hospital annexe where some of the unmarried mothers were taken after giving birth......I was taken there without my knowledge......I never got to see my daughter......I was forced to sign the consent to adoption there.

(Interviewee 11, Brisbane, 1998)

I was in a public ward with 5 other women keeping their babies…it was agony and very cruel…my baby was kept from me.

(a Sydney mother at Q23 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

They made me feel my baby was not mine and they had taken him.

(an excerpt from ‘Solitary Confinement’ on Radio National ‘Hindsight’ with Michelle Rayner 15 July 1999)
On August 16, 1965, I gave birth to a son who was deliberately kidnapped from me as I lay unconscious on the delivery table in the Women’s Hospital, Crown Street, Sydney......those responsible committed the most horrendous crime and human abuse.....I was denied the chance to hold my baby in my arms, shower him with love and affection and nurture him through his life......I was robbed of being able to open his baby blanket, count his fingers and toes, smell his wonderful baby smell and breastfeed as my milk began seeping from my breast as God and nature intended it to do......I was robbed of the opportunity to watch him grow......his first tooth......his first step......his first words......his first day at school......to teach him right from wrong......help him build self-respect, self esteem......share love with his biological family, the chance to meet his first girlfriend......to share his pain and joy while watching him grow to manhood.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:142)

Research supports the analysis that all this transpired while a mother was still the sole legal guardian of her child. As Wellfare (1998) argues, coercion by drugging, separating and segregation constitutes a criminal offence under Section 91 of the Crimes Act. Forbidding mothers to see, touch or hold their babies until their consent is taken constitutes an ultra vires act, coercion, violation of human rights, violation of statutory rights, duress and an element of conspiracy to defraud (Wellfare 1998:97).

As referred to in the previous section, marking the mothers’ files with terms such as UB+, UB- or ‘BFA’ (Baby for Adoption) alerted hospital and home staff to the notion that this was a baby for adoption (a priori assumption) and that consent had to be signed. The term ‘socially cleared’ for instance meant that consent had been signed, the mother was socially cleared and thus free to leave the home/hospital and resume her place in society. Alternatively terms such as ‘awaiting social clearance’ meant that mothers had yet to sign. The new mother (unmarried mother) would be forbidden access to her street clothes until that consent was signed:

After I got home I think I was still in shock. I had been totally unprepared for what had happened to me and although I desperately wanted my baby, I had been made to feel I was an unfit mother who did not deserve to have him. Also I did not know how to revoke my consent, so I did nothing......Twenty years later I got copies of my hospital records. According to my records, [doctor 1] was phoned after I was admitted to hospital. On his instructions, I was given chlora hydrate at 11.15pm and the birth was induced at 4.30am. These notes are written in red in my records. In my history and progress notes dated 5 August 1972, which is the day I was
admitted, it is written: “[Doctor 1] said baby for adoption. Mother undecided”. The words “baby for adoption” are underlined in red. There are two more entries in red: “Retaining custody of baby” on the third day and “Baby for adoption” on the day I signed the consent. My son’s records contain one entry in red made on the day of his birth: “Babe to be treated as an adoption until seen by [social worker 1] tomorrow”. [Social worker 1] was the hospital social worker and she did not work on Sundays. I have also seen records belonging to another mother who had her baby in Queen Victoria Hospital in 1966. “Babe for adoption” is written in red in her records too. The only reason I can think of for making these entries in red is to alert the hospital staff to the fact that these mothers and babies required special treatment. This meant being separated at birth and kept apart at all times thereafter. This was confirmed in a letter to me from [social worker 1]. She wrote: It was the policy of the hospital that mothers of babies for adoption should not have access to their babies.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:150)

After admission to hospital I was given a dose of chloral hydrate and left on my own.....at 4 am on the Sunday morning I was woken and given an enema.....my son was born three hours later and taken from me immediately after birth. [Doctor 1] arrived in time to stitch my episiotomy. The next thing I remember is being in a ward with several other mothers and watching the babies being wheeled in for their afternoon feed.....my baby was not brought to me and I had no idea why.....I went searching for him and found him at the back of the nursery in a bassinette labelled “Baby for Adoption”. I have no idea how he got there.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry 2000:149)

My son was born in Crown Street......I was labelled UB minus as that was the system in those days......all single mothers were labelled UB minus and I was put on the conveyor belt for single mothers......I saw a social worker who offered to make me a public patient and put me into a home for unmarried mothers......when I said that I didn’t want this she replied: “Then that is all I have to offer you”.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry 2000:174)

Comments by nurses registered that he was anxious and unhappy and cried a lot, very unsettled......he was given six to eight milligrams of chloral hydrate whenever he could not settle, and on one day it was administered twice and it continued to the day before his discharge. .....his infant chart and nurse’s ward reports were coded, as were mine, with BFA......all hospital staff was alerted to the prescribed procedure for Carramar mother and baby
which was to forbid eye contact, any physical contact or for me to know anything about him.....they deprived him of his right to be held, fed, comforted and loved by his own mother, me.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:213)

I always planned to keep my son … adoption was not an option … I have recently received my medical records and now have new information to add to my submission:

1) BFA was marked on my son’s labour ward report.
2) noted on my medical reports on a daily basis is – asking to see baby, wants to see baby. Consent was forced upon me on the fourth day…I was badgered to adopt, not told of consequences of adoption, not given alternatives, not told of pension, not given counselling before or after......memories come flooding back when I read my medical records of being desperate to keep my son.....

(a Gold Coast mother 1998)

I was never once asked prior to or after admission whether I intended to keep my child, yet the hospital proceeded to treat me as if I had made the decision to give up my child......my baby’s file is notated “not to go to breast”......this is without any discussion.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1999:5)

Before the birth I had considerable freedom…after my son was born my freedom ended…I was told what to do from morning to night but not actually spoken to.

(a response to Q25 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Ms Schar, 44, still finds it painful to talk about her experience. She said she was a 16-year-old student at business college when she fell pregnant in 1969 to her first boyfriend. When her parents found out they took her to the old Crown Street Women’s Hospital, Surry Hills. There, a social worker organised a job for her as a housekeeper in a private home. Isolated, lonely and frightened, she was still determined to keep her baby. However, when she went in for the birth, it was assumed she would give up her baby and she was told that if she really loved her child she would want to give her a better start in life with two parents. Then, in the lead-up to her birth, her medical records reveal she was given huge quantities of drugs like Pentobarbitone. As the baby was finally born, a pillow was placed over her neck so she could not see her. When she struggled, she was held down by three nurses. One nurse told her “It has got nothing
to do with her”. Despite her pleas, Ms Schar was transferred to a hospital annexe in Bondi without ever having seen her child. On the fifth day there, sedated, scared by threats and having lost all hope, she signed an adoption consent form. Her record was then marked with the words “socially cleared”.

(personal memoirs, Jigsaw, Brisbane)

All of the above – the drug regime, the coding system, the organisational layout of the homes and hospitals, the treatments meted out – seriously impacted on the young woman’s ability to retain custody of her own baby. Whilst segregating the unmarried mothers from the married ones, that is, forbidding contact with the married mothers was not practised at all hospitals, it did occur, and served to instil in the young unmarried women feelings of unworthiness, ‘lesser than’ and ‘not quite good enough’ (Farrar 1997:125).

Whilst unmarried mothers were often placed in corridors or wards quite separate/distinct from their married counterparts, others were made to feel different by placing them in the same ward as the married women and yet denying them the same rights, that is, to hold and feed their own babies:

....I remember one day in my room some of the mums were walking down to the end of the corridor where I gathered they had their meals......two of them popped their heads round the door and said: “Aren’t you coming down for a meal?” and I said “No, I can't get up” and they said “Oh, have you fed your baby yet?” and I explained to them that my baby was somewhere else......I didn’t really know where she was.......and then suddenly they clicked that I was one of ‘them’ and they sort of gulped and went purple and raced off as quickly as they could .......they were so embarrassed.......I ate alone.

(Shawyer 1979:135)

The unmarried mothers were sent out on to the verandah.....the next morning, the babies were being wheeled in for their morning feed and I almost had my daughter given to me until one of the staff called out, “stop.....she cannot have that baby.....she is being transferred out on to the verandah”......as I made my way outside I tried not to look at all the other mothers nursing their babies......I did look at one mother and she had a warm smile on her face and tears in her eyes........her compassion almost made me feel human again.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:167)
Our beds were in a separate section….all the unmarried mothers were kept together in one Ward Section.

(a Brisbane mother at Q23 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

I was isolated in the hospital after the birth by placing me in a large public ward by myself….all other married women were together in private rooms

(a Sydney mother at Q23 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Because I was coming from St Anthony’s I was in a whole ward full of people who were adopting……it is hard for me to compare from that experience……but certainly from later experience of having children, it was a totally huge difference……I think the attitude was systemic in that it was just accepted that you were treated in a certain way…..everybody knew if you were in that ward you were going to adopt so they did not have to treat you in the same way that they would treat other mothers……..your babies were not seen as your own and as soon as you gave birth you were supposed to forget them from the first minute……that is over……now you have to get on with your lives……it was really hard.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:132)

On the other hand, some unmarried mothers were required to wait on the married mothers:

I was sent to Queen Victoria Hospital at Annandale which was organised by a doctor in Windsor….I had to stay at the home for six months until my baby was born in October…..I had no money or moral support of any kind…..while I was there I had to scrub floors and work in an ancient laundry ……..the only job I liked was putting the flowers in vases and taking them to the mothers - I mean the married mothers.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 2000:151)

This completes the section on physical constraints. At the outset of this section I refer to McHutchison (2000) who implies that the methods and practices employed by state agents were carefully planned and orchestrated. In the homes and hospitals mothers and babies were managed in such a way that adoption was the most likely outcome. In the next section I introduce the practice of rapid adoptions. This practice of replacing stillborn babies with ‘illegitimate’ babies is perhaps not so well known because it was not quite so widespread.
However, it did occur. The following evidence from mothers seems to indicate increasing complicity by hospital and home staff.

6.8 Rapid adoptions

You described the process of rapid adoption being really the placement of a baby with a mother who delivered a stillborn baby......that is the rapid adoption actually......but am I right in saying that that then encouraged the development of a practice whereby to sort of truncate the process of normal adoption, the mother of another baby was deliberately misled that her child was stillborn?

(Moppett 2000:217)

The term ‘rapid adoption’ was used by both the medical profession and the Department of Child Welfare to describe the need for a rapid decision to be made by a married couple who had recently given birth to a stillborn child, was unable to reproduce again and was offered the option of adopting a substitute baby to replace their own dead infant. As the couple had not intended to adopt and would therefore not have been on any adoption register, these placements would have needed to be given priority and rushed through, hence the term (Graham 2000:215).

Since relatively recent organisations such as Origins are concerned mostly with searching/tracing and representing the views and interests of birthparents and adoptees (who historically have been underrepresented/misrepresented, unsupported), it is virtually impossible to know which adoptive mothers suffered the loss of a stillborn child. Organisations such as Origins can only respond from the point of view of natural mothers being told their babies had died. Whilst Origins and many other self-support groups across the nation were inundated with inquiries from mothers who had been told their babies had died and/or were found by their so-called dead babies, after the 1996 media exposure of what was labelled the ‘stillborn baby scandal’, many mothers sought out death certificates, coroners’ reports and grave sites. Either none were found or adoption papers had been signed. Since many natural mothers were heavily drugged during their confinements (a point already discussed in the previous section), many mothers are of the opinion that they possibly signed adoption papers in their twilight induced sleep, after having been led to believe that the papers were death certificate notifications or the like. Many natural mothers
are of this opinion, and several have come forward with such claims. For example, PIAC (Public Interest and Advocacy Centre) began action on behalf of one mother in 1997. This mother claimed she had been told her child had died at birth. However, this child found her in recent years. Another mother, reunited with her daughter, explained that, as a minor in 1963, she had refused to sign a consent and was told by the almoner that her signature was unnecessary as her mother had already signed. After 29 years of bitterness, hating her mother and cutting off contact, she discovered in 1992 that her mother had been told that the baby had died and had not actually signed anything. To this woman’s regret, she had been punishing her mother for 30 years for something she had not done (Graham 2000:215).

Another mother at South Sydney Hospital was told her baby had died when she returned after nine days to revoke her consent and reclaim her child. Some years later she was approached socially by a nurse from the hospital who had remembered her face and was told that her baby had not died, that she was only told that to prevent revocation. Although this caused her considerable anguish, she put it out of her mind until she was found by her child after legislative change in 1991, whereupon she began to recall that conversation many years earlier with the nurse. Her supposedly dead daughter was living in Nowra (Graham 2000:215). A natural mother, Mary, had her baby stolen:

Mary’s voice shakes with barely controlled anger and grief as she recounts how, 31 years ago, she was told her first born child had died at birth. Two weeks ago she learned the truth. Her son had not died. He had survived and been adopted. The information was relayed to Mary in a phone call from an officer of a New South Wales Government department. “I can't describe the rage I am feeling” she says. “Somebody played God back then and took away my son and 31 years of my life”.

“I never had any intention of giving my baby up for adoption. I am adopted myself and I never would have willingly given away my child. I was still living at home. I had the support of my family. There was never any talk of anything other than me keeping my baby”. Mary was 16 when in September 1965 she was taken to Sydney’s Crown Street Women’s Hospital to have her baby. She remembers being placed in a maternity ward......a nurse coming in to take her blood pressure.....being examined. Then someone came in and grabbed my hand and that’s the last thing I remember. Obviously I was heavily sedated. When I woke up four or five days later I was in Lady Wakehurst Hospital. I never saw my baby. I was told he had died”.
In February 1967, Mary went back to the Crown Street Women’s Hospital to try to gain further information about the circumstances of her son’s death. She was then engaged to be married and wanted to have more children. “I wanted to find out why and how my baby had died”, she says. “I thought there might have been something about his death I should have known if I was going to have more children. I explained the circumstances to a young woman on the desk. She went away and an older woman came to talk to me. I took it that she was somebody in charge. She had an authoritarian manner and was quite abrupt. She told me I couldn’t get any information without the written consent of my parents. When I became a bit more demanding, she told me that my baby had died of respiratory failure but that I would be given no further information.

Mary says she has verification of this event. Her former husband drove her to the hospital and recalls the details of what occurred. It was two weeks ago that a snippet of a television report about Tasmanian women who had been told their babies had died when they had in fact, been adopted, triggered doubts in Mary about the fate of her own baby. “Perhaps it was intuition. I immediately felt uncomfortable. I rang Jigsaw in Brisbane who gave me the number for Adoption Triangle in Newcastle. They contacted Births, Deaths and Marriages on my behalf and were told a birth had been recorded but if I telephoned personally, I would be given further information.”

“I telephoned Sydney, left my details and soon after I received a call from a woman in the adoption branch. I was told my son had survived. He was born on September 20 and adopted on October 15.” Mary can do nothing to bring back the lost years. Nobody can. But her grief and rage are fuelling her determination to discover the truth of why and how her baby was adopted against her will. “I won’t stop until I know the truth.”

(Parrington in the Australian Review, Jigsaw, Brisbane)

Still another natural mother recalls this experience of having her child stolen:

Following the birth of my child it was around April/May the year after when I received a letter from the Department of Family and Community Services notifying me that they wanted my signature to allow them to find one Catholic parent with a partner of another religious denomination. I was not aware that the Catholic Adoption Agency was different to the Department of Family and Community Services. I went to sign the papers and was given the assurance that one parent would be Catholic. A month or so later, another letter arrived stating that my son had died and as the natural mother I should go to the office and sign the legal paper. This I did! Before I left the office I asked the lady at the front desk: who was going to arrange the funeral of my child? – her reply was ‘you don’t have to worry about that now – we’ll take care of that’. She did not offer any sympathy at all. I walked out of the office, thanking God for taking my child away – never to return to have to deal with these people again for the rest of
my child’s life and that my child would now, actually, finally have a home which was permanent. I lived with my memories of my child whom I never saw for twenty one years.

(a Sydney mother at Q39 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Another example is Jane, who entered a Sydney hospital to deliver her child in 1985 at age 23. She gave birth to a living girl. The following day two social workers came to tell her that her baby was sick. Jane asked to see her baby, and they then told her she was dead. When she insisted on seeing her baby they took her to the morgue and showed her a big baby which looked about a year old to Jane. Social workers discouraged any visitors, including Jane’s own mother, who was told not to visit as her daughter needed time to grieve (Graham 2000:216).

Jane had to argue with the hospital’s funeral director about which cemetery to use and was not permitted to see inside the coffin. There are many conflicting details on her records. Her records say her baby died in utero a month before birth; another states she died a few days prior to birth. The social workers told her she died a few days after the birth. She acquired a nursery card, which she still has. Nursery cards are not given with stillborns. There is no record on any stillbirth register of her baby (Graham 2000:216).

She now believes that it is possible that instead of her baby being dead, that the baby was in fact adopted and the dead baby came from somewhere else. She remembers that there was another woman in the hospital, and that the day before a woman gave birth to a stillborn baby. Additionally, some of her medical records give conflicting dates for her admission to hospital (Graham 2000:217). Jane believes she gave birth to a tiny baby, and she was shown a great big baby, about 10 months old or a year old. She said she knew the difference between the sizes (Graham 2000:218).

This behaviour by medical staff occurred as late as 1985, just prior to the enactment of strict law enforcement guidelines acknowledging the deception practised on some birthmothers in this regard. However, if one looks at the observations made by some highly esteemed obstetricians and other medical practitioners prior to the 1980s, one can only conclude that rapid adoptions, where they occurred, were socially endorsed:

I saw my baby and gave him his bottle at feed times.....a week later I was called to the office and told to say good-bye to him as his parents had come to collect him.......years later I learnt from his adopted mother that she was in the hospital giving birth to a daughter at the same time
Ms Pamela Roberts, head social worker at Crown Street Women’s Hospital, asked some of the professionals involved for their thoughts on placing a surrendered baby with a mother who had just lost her own baby at birth and could not have another:

Dr Stening of the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children:

In my experience this kind of rapid adoption has rarely, if ever, failed.

Ms Mary McLelland, senior lecturer in social work at Sydney University:

Although rapid adoptions may be rather hit and miss, many of them are successful... a characteristic is that the parents forget the baby is adopted... this child is later not told he is adopted.

Dr Lyle Brown, general practitioner:

Adopting parents tend to be more anxious about the child than natural parents.....however, in rapid adoption this is largely avoided, with consequent benefits to the child.

Mr Langshaw, Deputy Director, Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare, New South Wales:

Perhaps one of the most desirable adoptions, and in my opinion the most likely to be successful can take place where the mother, who for many possible reasons is unable to have further pregnancies, has just lost a baby.....all the physiological and psychological preparation for the nursing of the baby have taken place and this woman would be able to breastfeed the baby......if an appropriate baby is available for adoption I personally hope that this Act would not prevent such an adoption.......I can remember many cases when a married mother had lost several babies through difficult childbirth and wanted to adopt one while still in hospital... in very worthy cases like these we could come to an agreement with the Child Welfare Department that these mothers could immediately adopt illegitimate children still in the hospital and start feeding them…. within a matter of two weeks these mothers could take the baby home as if it were their own... all adoption papers were completed before they left the hospital.

(Graham 2000: 216)

This completes the discussion of rapid adoptions. In the final section of this chapter I refer to the questions put to the mothers to facilitate separation from their babies. Many
mothers have indicated that they felt manipulated/brainwashed to the point where they no longer felt they were entitled to keep their own babies (Cole 1997:522).

6.9 The questions and the questioner

I had the pillows and the drugs but the real cruelty was in the questions.....the brainwashing.....the shifting of our identities.....the psychic wounds that have kept us disempowered and unable to ever really enjoy life.....they not only stole our children, they stole our dignity and for many of us our love of life.

(Cole 1997:523)

There was never a question of keeping my son......I was not spoken to as a person......I became a nothing.....I had given birth and was cast aside to rot in my own despair.

(a response to Q33 of the questionnaire; see Appendix 1)

Lorraine Code (1995) maintains that the answers provided by women under criminal investigation are very much determined by the questions asked by the interrogator. Questions asked evoke certain responses and are imbued with the attitudes and misconceptions of those asking the questions (Code 1995:86-101; Bacon and Lansdowne in O’Donnell and Craney 1982:87,88; Berzins 1997:335). Rarely is the questioner aware of or in tune with the lived reality of her/his subject under investigation (Garlick 1992:6,7). Unless the questioner is alive to her reality, sympathetic and unbiased, there is huge room for a miscarriage of justice. Trapped in a situation where she is made to feel guilty about her ‘transgression’, when confronted by authority figures, these women are likely to act submissively and cooperatively. In this frame of mind they can be easily manipulated. They are more likely to acquiesce to the propositions advanced by those in power (Code 1995: 86-101,131; Bacon and Lansdowne 1982:87,88).

Those who operated the homes and hospitals for unwed mothers in the mid-twentieth century had enormous power over their charges. By comparison, the women presided over assumed a criminal/pariah status (Code 1995:130-132; Sites 1973: 138). The questions asked almost invariably reflected sectional interests, that is, societal (note taxpayer) interests (Cole 1997:524). Never were the questions framed in such a way that the concerns, needs and interests of the ‘unmarried mothers’ were addressed (Shawyer
Women who are pregnant and without a husband for support require three basic necessities: (1) housing (that is, public housing), (2) pensions and (3) assistance with child minding, that is child care facilities so that the new mother – who might or might not have the support of her immediate family – can work part-time or train for work (many new mothers are very young) (Dowd 1997:22,43; see section on withholding information in this chapter).

If the social workers, matrons at the homes, medical and other allied health professionals at the time were really concerned with the needs and interests of the unmarried mothers and their babies they would have asked questions such as: “Is there anyone in your family or extended family that could possibly take you in until you get on your feet? Do you have any friends or parents of friends that might assist you in this way? Are you aware of housing that you can access? Benefits? Child care?” (Cole 1997:522). Instead the questions were likely to be framed such that mothers were manipulated into cooperating with state agents who as representatives of the then Commonwealth of Australia sought one option – adoption (Cole 1997:524; Sites 1973:135). In Chapter 2 where I discuss my methodology, I refer to the social worker (state agent) who came to my bedside, within hours of giving birth, to ask questions. There I argue that the questions, and the manner in which they were asked, made me very wary and in turn cautious. These questions became the basis for writing this thesis, and my research confirms my own personal experience. Many of the mothers experienced similar types of questions. In this section I outline just some of these questions as related by two mothers in hindsight.

In her submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices, Graham (2000) refers to the soft language, the caring tone of voice, which along with other strategies meant that many mothers were effectively duped/deceived into relinquishing their babies (Ruane 1996:143; Sites 1973:66,75,139; Graham 2000:212). One of these strategies/ploys reported by Graham was to ask questions that required mothers to reply with the word ‘yes’:

‘You love your baby don’t you dear?’ ... answer ‘yes’ ‘You want what is best for it don’t you?’ ... answer ‘yes’ ‘Do you want it to have the lovely things and opportunities that you cannot possibly give it?’ ... ‘yes’ ‘You know what the right thing to do is don’t you dear?’ ... answer ‘yes’.

(Graham 2000:212; Sites 1973:19,143,146)
Graham (2000) maintains that despite such relentless questioning, some mothers were able to retain custody of their babies. However, these mothers were the exception, rather than the rule. They had the support (economic and emotional) of their families of origin (Graham 2000:212). As Graham recalls “I felt even more abandoned because mine was not willing to support me” (Graham 2000:212).

In her recollection of her stay at a Sydney home for unmarried mothers in the 1960s, a Brisbane mother describes a similar scenario to that of Graham ... the soft language ... subtle coercion. On leaving the home “my spirit was already broken ... I was physically alive but spiritually dead” (a Brisbane submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:20):

My grandmother visited me once a fortnight......by the six month point of my pregnancy, my grandmother offered me a roof over my head for myself and my baby......and then my fiancé found where my parents had sent me and rang saying he had demanded his mother sign the ‘permission to marry’ form......things started to look hopeful for my son and myself at last.....I began to take heart that with a roof over our head, and a marriage very soon, my son and I would get out of this OK......so I approached Matron Jones......I told her that I intended to leave and take my baby with me......that I would live with my grandmother and that my fiancé and I would marry......I thought this good Christian lady would be overjoyed as I was.....but her response was to the effect...."Oooh, do you think that’s wise?" ....I can still see the contortions of her face......it took on the look that emanates when someone has stood in dog manure......I approached her the next day, and the day after, but she was always too busy to talk to me, or the time was not right......she made me wait days before she found the time to talk to me......there was a decided ‘cooling’ in her attitude towards me......I had become a non-person......she had begun not to notice me and treat me with avoidance......when she finally spoke to me, she said words to the effect: “What have you got ready for this baby?” .....I mentioned blankets, singlets, two dozen nappies, a bassinette (my own), a pram (my own), and a chest of drawers......she said words to the effect: “Is that all?......when do you think you’ll have time to get clothes, bottles, babies have hundreds of needs......the lovely couple I have chosen for your baby already have a nursery ready.....I’ve seen it......it’s lovely.......they have everything ready for him......he would be so happy with them” .......she continued with words to the effect: “and who will help you if the baby gets sick?” .....I answered .....”I will have my Gran and my fiancé” .....she continued: “your grandmother is old (62)......do you think that’s fair to her?......to expect her to help you?” .......I replied: “she offered......she said she would”........"But your father doesn’t want you to keep this baby......if the baby went to the lovely couple I have chosen for him, he will have grandparents who want him.......if he stays with you, he won't have
grandparents” ....I said: “he will have my Gran and my fiancé’s parents......and he will have me and his father......he will have his mother and father!” ....she then said words to the effect: “how long will it take your fiancé to get permission to marry?....what if his mother won't give permission?......how will you and your baby survive?”.....I asked her if there was any benefit my baby and I could get while we were waiting......I expected there would be a benefit like the one we were all receiving while we were in Caramar..........her answer: “yes there is one.....but it’s very small......you and your baby couldn’t survive on it” ......I reminded her that we would be staying at Gran’s and we wouldn’t have to pay rent.......there was only ONE desired outcome as far as Matron Jones was concerned and it had nothing to do with me sorting through the legalities to enable me to keep my son......my fiancé was having difficulty getting his mother’s permission to marry......the matron was aware of this situation so she used the technique of taking me into her confidence again......she said words to the effect: “.......... is so like you....it’s such a coincidence that you both have the same name and you are so alike......and they are such modern progressive people”......by now I was just about worn down to insanity......this was no way to treat a young woman expecting her first baby......this was the worst kind of duress imaginable....reducing all my hopes for my newborn as though I should be hoping them for someone else......my Gran arrived at the hospital in the afternoon......she was very concerned as to how I was......I told her that I had not been allowed to see my son......she began clearing her throat like she used to when anyone mentioned Matt, her younger brother, who died in France in World War One and whose body was never found or officially identified.

(a submission to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption Practices 1998:4-20)

6.10 Conclusion

This concludes the section on questioning. This also concludes the chapter on institutional constraints and the thesis as a whole. In the introduction the area of interest was introduced and the four main hypotheses were outlined. In Chapter 1 changing ways of viewing love, marriage and the family were discussed. The literature on unmarried mothers was also reviewed. Chapter 2 described the innovative research methods used throughout the research process. Whilst Chapter 3 provided the results supporting my main hypotheses, Chapters 4 and 5 provided the evidence to support these results, arguing that many mothers felt that they were coerced by family and society into giving up their babies to adoption. The practices employed in the state and church run homes and hospitals at the time left the mothers with few options but to have their children adopted. For instance, Chapter 4 dealt with the numerous complicating factors leading to the young women being incarcerated in
such institutions in the first place. Pressure came from boyfriends, his family, her
family and extended kin. Chapter 5 gave a brief description of the homes and hospitals to
which the young expectant women were sent. The chapter also provided evidence of the
coercion as reported by birthmothers in personal interviews, the survey questionnaires,
government inquiries and other secondary sources. According to birthmothers’ perceptions
and memories of what happened at the time the coercion could be subtle or not so subtle – a
point which becomes more readily apparent when one considers that these were very
vulnerable and often very young women, many of whom had no support on the inside and
none from without. Chapter 5 dealt in detail with the coercive methods used against the
young women once ‘incarcerated’ in the homes and hospitals to have their babies. The final
section of this thesis provides a brief summary of each of the chapters. The implications of
my research findings are also discussed.
7. Summary, conclusions and directions for further action and research

I believe that pain is an incredible and excellent window…one’s own pain is a window into the pain of others….if the anger and the pain can be consciously used and turned toward eliminating injustice, then something constructive comes from something terrible.

(Golden 1998:254)

This thesis illustrates a considerable paradigm shift in the way in which ‘unmarried mothers’ have been portrayed historically and across cultures. This thesis shows that class and gender are crucial to our understanding of past adoption practices. However, race is also an important component of analysis and the thesis has made an important (if only small) comparison in this regard. In conclusion I want to look back at my hypotheses, outline the contributions of the chapters and then suggest the further directions that this work might take.

Using both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, this thesis examined the power of institutions (family, religion, the medical and social work professions, society) in coercing ‘unmarried mothers’ to part with their babies in mid-twentieth century Australia. The introduction to this thesis outlined the four main hypotheses: I introduced the reader to the two theoretical frameworks underpinning the thesis (Marxist feminism and post-structural feminism); I discussed the unique social climate (post-World War II) in which the mothers lost their babies. In mid-twentieth century Australia sex and sexuality were taboo subjects. Having a baby ‘out of wedlock’ was seen as socially unacceptable. Only married women could access contraceptives.

Chapter 1 provided an important overview of how love, marriage and the family have been defined by different people in different times and in different places. Whilst it was found that there can be no one universal definition of what it means to be a family, the chapter highlights the cultural prescriptions operating in mid-twentieth century Australia. At this time the nuclear family (comprising Mum, Dad and 2.2 children) was seen as the ‘norm’. Any other family forms were often deemed socially unacceptable. In particular, the growing social work and medical professions at the time stressed the ideal that children
should be reared in households where there were two parents. Whilst the constraining
effects of orthodox religion were also discussed in this chapter, the whole purpose of this
chapter was to provide important background material for the quite lengthy discussion on
coercion in Chapters 4 and 5.

The final section of Chapter 1 introduced the literature on ‘unmarried mothers’. Historically, the literature has been written by men – often white and from the middle class. Men in positions of power have had the time and the resources to put their ideas to paper. On the other hand, it is only in comparatively recent history that women have had the opportunity to write. Hence the literature on unmarried mothers by women is not nearly so prolific. However, what has been written is most informative, allowing an insightful appraisal of what it really means to be an unmarried mother. Since the 1970s, both in Australia and overseas, there has been a noticeably greater outpouring of literature on unmarried mothers by both Marxist and post-structural feminists. In this chapter I described where my thesis sits within this scholarly literature. I also suggested that in the current era when Marxist feminism and Marxism more generally are not in vogue, such theories are still immensely important. Because my thesis deals with an historical time frame in which patriarchal and institutional power was endemic, Marxist feminist theories are invaluable for any appropriate analysis of what actually happened to the women under investigation. My choice of feminist literature reflects this view.

Chapter 2 examined the multi-method research techniques used to gather information for this thesis. Because of the highly sensitive nature of my research topic and the difficulty in gaining the trust of mothers severely traumatised by past adoption practices, I argued the case for the ethical use of feminist experiential research techniques as the most useful means of gathering sufficient data to write this thesis. Thus the chapter involved a detailed description of the advantages and disadvantages of traditional research methods, for instance, the survey questionnaire. In turn the more innovative research methods – feminist fieldwork, participant observation and personal interviewing (developed by feminists in the 1970s and 80s) – were explained and highlighted.

Chapter 3 provided the results of the survey questionnaire (distributed nationally) and the personal interviews. In this chapter I provided the statistics to confirm my hypothesis that white, working-class unmarried mothers in mid-twentieth century Australia were coerced by family and society to give up their babies to adoption. These statistics lent support to my hypothesis that white, working-class babies were systematically taken from
their unwed mothers and redistributed to the homes of white, middle-class parents. Furthermore, the findings on the white stolen generation compares with those of the indigenous stolen generation in that both black and white mothers shared to some extent a working-class background. The unwed status of the mothers provided the rationale for the removals by the state.

Towards the end of that chapter there is anecdotal evidence provided by interviewees that confirmed the hypothesis that all mothers (black and white) were likely to face trauma at the forced removal of their children. Here it is also confirmed that white unwed mothers felt betrayed and humiliated by their boyfriends, families and trusted institutional representatives.

Chapter 4 provided the evidence to confirm the main hypothesis that many white, working-class, unwed women lost their babies to adoption because they were pressured by immediate family and/or boyfriends. Young, financially dependent on their parents or boyfriends, and provided with few options but adoption, not only were mothers often vulnerable to the wishes of their own parents and other close kin, the women were often in a non-negotiating position with boyfriends, lovers and/or his parents and extended family. Whilst the chapter outlined the religious, legal and customary boundaries often precluding the women from entering into legitimate marriages, the chapter also introduced the power of the newly emerging medical profession at the time. Compared to their young charges, medical staff had the power to define what would be discussed at the consultations with their patients. They also held the power as to who would be admitted into the consultation rooms.

Chapter 5 gave an in-depth analysis of the coercion experienced by mothers once ‘incarcerated’ in the homes and hospitals to have their babies. Whilst the chapter argued that the spatial layout of the homes and hospitals was conducive to separation, the chapter also described the various tactics employed by supervisory staff (for instance, social workers, nurses, hospital almoners) who worked in these institutions at the time. Chapter 4 was concerned with the vulnerability felt by these women on an interpersonal level, while Chapter 5 provided evidence of their vulnerability at an institutional level. Chapter 5 also called into question the level of democratic rights afforded these women at a national level.
7.1 Key research findings and suggestions for further investigation and action

The literature referred to in Chapter 1 suggested that unmarried mothers willingly placed their babies for adoption. However, this thesis found that given a choice (that is, if provided with the material means to assist them to keep their babies) most unmarried mothers would not have parted with their babies. Forced by family and the fabric of society to let go of their children, relinquishing mothers are now having to live with the pain of separation. Although (some) fathers of children given up for adoption also grieved, as did the grandparents, siblings and other members of the extended families, their grief had its own qualities and was not the same as that of the woman who physically carried the child, gave birth and signed the adoption consent form. The grief of the natural mother of an adopted child is one that is not often recognised by professionals nor by society in general and so to a large extent has not been addressed by those people in positions of power who might help (Monk 1998:5).

In the past, male dominated legislatures in Australia promoted adoption as a means of obfuscating any financial responsibility for unwed women and their children. Debates concerning adoption were always framed in terms of financial costs to governments, not in terms of how their decisions would impact on the emotional and psychological health of natural mothers and their children (Gordon 1994:241-242). In the current social climate there is a still a great deal of animosity towards anyone dependent on welfare. Hence there is always the danger that instead of providing natural mothers with the monetary assistance to help them keep their babies, legislatures might in the future prefer to enforce adoptions. They might continue to overlook the profound psychological trauma to both mother and child (referred to in Chapter 3). They might continue to completely overlook the huge costs to society (social harmony, stability) and the huge costs incurred when treating psychiatric breakdown. As a Brisbane mother recently pointed out:

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1 For instance, in some American states, such as Ohio and many of the southern states, jurisdictions are currently subsidising the rich to take babies from the poor. In a country which, historically, has never provided the same degree of state protection against poverty as Australia, state governments are now providing the equivalent of A$17,000 a year to couples wanting to adopt (Interviewee 2, Brisbane, 1999; Koch et al. 1998:64,65).
There are thousands upon thousands of women right across this country who have been or are continuing to undergo psychiatric care as a consequence of the removals….these women need constant and ongoing psychiatric care.

(Interviewee 2, Brisbane, July 2001)

Whilst Australia has laws and practices in place today which are intended to protect young natural mothers from some of the more heinous predations currently taking place in the United States, there is always the possibility that protective laws will be replaced, leaving young women very vulnerable (Baker 1998:40).

In Chapter 5 I referred to some of the abuses experienced by mothers once isolated in the homes and hospitals to have their babies. In Chapter 3 I referred to some of the adverse emotional consequences for some women now experiencing psychiatric breakdown. Whilst there should be more research into the abuses by state agents operating these institutions at the time, more research should be undertaken to determine how many women are now experiencing acute psychiatric breakdown, and what is being done to help them. In many instances, the professionals involved in past adoption practices can be accused of gross human rights violations against the relinquishing mother. No longer can these people hide behind the claim that they were operating according to the values of the time. Individuals and institutions are responsible for the displacement of women and their children and must be held accountable (Ansiewicz 1997:346). As Chapter 5 has shown, mothers’ rights were ignored. Important information was withheld (the right to be told

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2 For example, in America today, specially trained personnel, under the guise of giving counselling, are going into the agencies where young pregnant women go for help. They seek out and actually groom and preen the young women under the pretence of wanting to help and comfort them. In reality, however, the women are being preened for prospective adopters, specifically targeted for the end product, that is, a baby for infertile couples. Once again the baby is very much wanted, but the mother is not (Interviewee 2, Brisbane, 1999).

3 Psychiatric breakdown may refer to numerous psychiatric conditions (Rickarby 1998:19,20; Rickarby in Benson et al. 1997:57). For a brief discussion of just some of these conditions see Chapter 3.

4 According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children whether born in or out of wedlock shall enjoy the same social protection, that is the right to food, clothing and housing (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 25 (1) and (2)). As Chapter 5 of my thesis makes clear, in mid-twentieth century Australia, pregnant, unsupported women were not told of their rights in this regard.
about housing and pension entitlements). Lies were told and the right to make an informed decision abused.

Chapter 3 touched on suicide as a possible outcome for some mothers exposed to adoption trauma. Consequently, there could be much more research on separation, grief and suicide. For instance, the 2004 publication *Forgotten Australians*, which is a report into the treatment of children who were made wards of the state in the same period (mid-twentieth century), provided evidence of suicidal tendencies for many people trying to cope with separation trauma. On leaving institutions many young people have few of the social skills or resources so necessary for surviving in the world. Many have told of the emotional heartaches they faced in the institutions. However, these hardships do not cease on leaving the situation. Ill-equipped and often alone, many former state wards drift into a life of drugs, prostitution, poor relationships and broken marriages. The likelihood of suicide is compounded where they are not able to access assistance and understanding (*Forgotten Australians* 2004:155-159). Hence what counselling and other support services are in place to help prevent suicide in this group? Similarly, what support structures are in place to assist natural mothers suffering separation grief? At what stage of the grieving process are supports provided or not provided?

In the literature which deals with criminal offences perpetrated by men, there is considerable agreement that adult men are more likely to be anti-female if they have no or unsatisfactory attachment to their own mother. Sexual offenders\(^5\) show signs of being far less secure in maternal attachment than non-offending men (Smallbone 1998:3,135). These

\(^5\) Sexual offences, sexual violence and other forms of violence towards women ought not automatically be associated with the major psychoses (such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder). For instance, although there continues to be a great deal of controversy and confusion surrounding the causes of schizophrenia (which is perhaps the most well publicised and most misunderstood of the major psychoses) there is also considerable agreement that this condition has a biological basis (patients can now be stabilised with medications; the condition is found in all cultures) (Fuller Torrey 1983:100,156,175,199). Without this medication people with this condition were once more of a danger to themselves than to others (Fuller Torrey 1983:172-175). Because those caring for or living with schizophrenia sufferers are often not trained in how to cope, the more florid symptoms can be very frightening to the uninitiated (Fuller Torrey 1983:103). Due to its unpredictability, all family members (including the sufferer) are very vulnerable to poverty. This is particularly so where a male parent is a sufferer (Fuller Torrey 1983: 154,155,199).
men are more likely to behave violently towards women. They are more likely to condone rape and to commit it. Other forms of sexual violence might also be engaged in (Smallbone 1998:3,135). While this thesis did not make any correlation between male adoptees and violence towards women, this is an area that could be researched. As one Brisbane mother and group leader stated in an interview “there are at the moment 50,000 adoptions a year in America alone – little time bombs ready to go off” (Interviewee 2, Brisbane, 1999; Jackman 1999:17). She also suggested a study of the correlation between adopted males and homosexuality (Interviewee 2, Brisbane, 1999; Doneman et al. 2000:1).

In Chapter 3 attention was drawn to infertility as one of the factors driving adoption. Infertility has existed always and in all cultures (Turner 1984:120,121). However, like ‘illegitimacy’ until recently, infertility in couples was hidden. Whilst pressure from peers at the time meant that couples were less likely to openly acknowledge their infertility, such couples did not have access to the reproductive technologies that are now available (Hall 1994:252-254; May 1998:203-217). Although such technologies are now available, they are very costly and not always satisfactory (Sweet 1999:26,27; May 1998:211,216). Hence there is still a high demand (worldwide) for healthy babies for infertile couples wishing to adopt. For instance, estimates for Britain alone suggest that 50,000 new cases of infertility present for treatment each year and the number of people requiring treatment at any one time may be as high as 2 million (Stanworth 1994:227). Whilst this thesis did not explore the vulnerability of third world women to exploitation by first world couples who cannot have children, Lindsay (1997) and others acknowledge that there is huge room for exploitation of women and babies in those countries where unwed women in need do not have access to the social security systems that are now operating in the highly industrialised west. Furthermore, since the Internet and other information technologies can only facilitate this exploitation, research into this area is extremely important (Lindsay 1997:252,253; The Courier-Mail, Brisbane, 2004:19; Bradley 2001:23; Baker 2002:5; Altink 1995:75).

Finally, Chapters 4 and 5 brought into focus the issue of social and cultural boundaries – the maintenance of boundaries, the crossing of boundaries, the ambivalent nature of boundaries (Marotta 2000:177-178). The early German philosopher and sociologist, Georg Simmel, argued that the human condition should be understood in terms of its propensity to transcend and erect boundaries. Boundaries are ambivalent because they are both constructive and destructive; they provide the conditions to construct an identity because they establish difference between self and other and they can also provide the grounds to
suppress and exclude the identity of the other (Marotta 2000:177). It is not only the
maintenance of boundaries but the transcendence of boundaries which may deny and
repress the identity of others (Marotta 2000:178).

These ideas by Simmel have relevance to my discussion of the allocation of social
space referred to in Chapters 1, 4, 5 and the introduction to this thesis. In the introduction
and in Chapter 1, I argued that, more so than today, women and men in mid-twentieth
century Australia had very clearly defined social roles. Since it was socially expected that
couples marry, having a child outside of marriage was deemed totally unacceptable.
However, since it was women, and not men, who wore the visible evidence of ‘their
transgression’, it was women and not men who were punished and ostracised should an
unplanned pregnancy occur (Vincent 1961:4). In Chapters 4 and 5 I described how
ostracism of unmarried mothers, feared and despised by society’s ‘respectable members’,
took the form of being sent away to homes and hospitals specifically built for the purpose.
‘Out of sight and out of mind’, it was not only male legislators who would wash their hands
of any further responsibility for these women. At the interpersonal level, individual men
also erect boundaries. Some men (not all men) want sex with a woman but they do not want
the ‘emotional baggage’ (Bulbeck 1998:182,183). Hence (many) men plan their sexploits,
that is, they appropriate social space such that once sex is achieved the woman is excluded
(Cox 2002:149-160; Isensee 1990:5,176-177; Dworkin 1997:146,109; personal memoirs
from a birthmother).

Throughout the course of researching this thesis (see discussion in Chapter 2) I also
found that many of the relinquishing mothers erect boundaries – boundaries to protect from
refers to as ‘an invisible shield’. The mother’s armour protects her from judgemental eyes
and from unuttered but cruel words – words like ‘negligent, deserter, not fit to be a mother’
(Rosebrock 2000:30). Made to feel different and ‘lesser than’ anyone else, many
relinquishing mothers were loathe to reveal their stories to me. Many fear intimacy in their
personal lives with others – their sense of trust and faith in human nature may be

Lindsay (1997) refers to this fear of intimacy. She argues that adoption abuse (verbal,
physical and emotional) compromises a mother’s capacity for intimacy. Conventional
social attitudes not only fail to recognise most adoptions as crimes of violence, but construe
them as consensual agreements for which the victim is responsible. Until recently similar
attitudes applied to rape and child sexual assault. She argues that traumatic events call into question basic human relationships: they breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community; they shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others; they undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience; they violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast her into a state of existential crisis. She argues that a supportive approach to recovery would restore connections between survivors and their community. In order to achieve this, perpetrators must acknowledge events and survivors must be supported to heal their wounds (Lindsay 1997:239-252). According to Lindsay (1997) (and I agree with her recommendations) some of the ways in which governments in Australia could assist natural mothers in the healing process include:

- validating what mothers have to say;
- supporting their relationships with their children;
- providing education programs for general practitioners and other health services;
- providing appropriate training for current professionals and university students;
- providing long term live-in trauma retreat facilities similar to those available for other trauma victims (such as Vietnam veterans);
- implementing advertising campaigns, similar to those for victims of domestic violence, encouraging mothers to speak out about their unspeakable experiences;
- telling young, pregnant women considering adoption about the psychological and emotional impact this will have on their future lives and those involved with them.

Adoptions should only take place when all other avenues of support for the young, unwed woman have been canvassed and the reality of choice becomes apparent. It is imperative that all pregnant, unmarried women in Australia today are told of the supports (both economic and social) that are now available to them. Adoptees and anyone touched by past adoption practices should have unfettered access to information/social work/medical files and records. Similarly information should not be denied persons seeking their true genealogy. Changes in language should be adopted to support the mother’s experiences. For example, natural mothers should be able to refer to their relinquished children as ‘my daughter’, ‘my son’. This can be an important path to healing, speaking her reality, not the reality of her oppressors (Lindsay 1997:239-252).
7.2 A last word

Since this thesis makes a significant and original contribution to the study of unmarried mothers and adoption practices more generally it is likely to attract considerable attention and this is beginning to occur. Comments made by many in the community would appear to suggest that many people are now seeing this thesis as a threat to the status quo. Because this work highlights the rights of unmarried mothers, many now see the work as in some way undermining the nuclear family unit. Because some people see the work as uplifting women at the expense of the patriarchy, it ought to be made clear that this was never the intention. However, it has been the intention to achieve equalisation and if this has meant that men should take some of the blame for what happened to these women in the past, then so be it. As the French feminist, Evelynne Sullerot (1966), so pertinently pointed out in her *Journaux Feminins et Lutte Ouvriere*:

> We don’t want to act as playthings, or entertainment for anybody….behind your catcalls despotism is strengthened. You know very well that we don’t want to lower you in any way but you’re afraid to see us rise.

(Sullerot 1966:106, cited in Rowbotham 1975:122)

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6 The nuclear family is still a very important social institution. However, other family forms exist and these also need to be recognised as legitimate families and afforded similar respect. As Chapter 5 makes clear where the family is a single parent family, public housing and welfare payments are vital to both mother and child (yesterday and today). This need for taxpayer funded public facilities will remain as long as men (some men) continue to behave irresponsibly and dishonestly in their dealings with women. Consequently, instead of focusing on the deviance of women, it is time there was far more research on male deviance. See also discussion of the family in Chapter 1.

7 Chapter 1 refers to the ways in which personal blame is often attached to unmarried mothers. Chapter 4 pointed to some of the ways in which unmarried mothers can be tricked by boyfriends who promise marriage in order to get sex. These men then renege on their promises. Because women fall pregnant and men don’t, men (if they so choose) do not have to face the implications of an unplanned pregnancy. Due to differences in reproductive capacities, men are then automatically relegated to an advantageous position (both socially and economically).
At the current point in time some Australian women are contesting the loss of their babies. Since this is a crucial issue and one which is likely to affect women and children in and outside Australia, the research findings presented in this thesis provide an important social, cultural and economic framework for anyone wishing to undertake further research. Much more needs to be written on this issue; and governments should allocate the funds\(^8\) so that the research can be undertaken. In the past (and still today) adoption was promoted as a service to unwed women. However, as the voices of the women interviewed in this thesis have shown, there is a tragic underside to adoption. Lives were torn apart – relationships severed. As in the case of the indigenous stolen children, many white women and their children have been severely traumatised by past adoption practices. Since adoption can have long-lasting, detrimental effects on both mother and child, it is crucial that the abuses perpetrated in the past do not continue into the future (Lindsay 1997:252).

At the time of completion of this thesis, there had been a number of parliamentary inquiries into past adoption practices in Australia. Most of these were held in Sydney. However, there was also one in Tasmania (Interviewee 2, Brisbane, 2005). Whilst it can be argued that the inquiries proved fruitful in that previously silenced women were provided with a forum to voice their experiences, I am aware that this is all the inquiries might ever be – a forum to appease women. The impact of the inquiries as well as the probability of changing attitudes, professional practice or policy is variable. Of course there are benefits if the mothers get to have their say for a day and the public gallery is provided with an alternative view. However, there is always the possibility that the history – the real history which is so precious – is shelved away in a parliamentary library somewhere, possibly never to be seen again by any members of the general public. As in the case of the indigenous stolen generation who hope to receive an apology, white mothers of this country

\(^8\) At a time when Jigsaw (which is concerned with tracing relatives and providing emotional support to persons touched by adoption) and other organisations are lacking in funds and in some cases being disbanded, it is difficult to see how these mothers will receive any form of social and/or remunerative justice. For instance, compared to organisations which do not threaten the status quo and are well funded by the Australian government, in the past Jigsaw (a grassroots, resistance organisation) did not receive anywhere near the same funding (Interviewee 2, Brisbane 1999).
might be far happier if they were to receive a full and sincere apology from all those involved in the separations. Whether this will occur remains to be seen.
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