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Commune girls – Growing up in Utopia?

Women reflecting back on childhoods in
British intentional communities 1970–1985

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I, Lucy Rhoades, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Commune girls – Growing up in Utopia?

This research is underpinned by my own autobiographical process of reflection on how the culture, ideals and practices of the intentional community I lived in as a child influenced my world-view and way of ‘inhabiting’ my self, my life, and my relationships with others. The research uses themes of relationship and identity to patch together the memories, recollections, impressions and current ways of ‘making sense’ of the author and a group of 13 women of my generation (aged between 25–40) who also lived in intentional communities (communes) as children in this time frame.

The research focuses on how participants and I have navigated our life narratives; childhood and family, relationships and identities, conceptual and social spaces and if/how this relates back to the experience and practices of time spent as children in the counter culture and in communes in the UK in the 1970s and early 1980s. Of particular interest to me was how participants recall they were thought about and treated as children in the purportedly egalitarian and resistant spaces of communes, their impressions of how family and relationship was thought and practiced there, how it has been for participants to cross over into more mainstream spaces and lifestyles, and how participants feel they have been shaped and affected by their childhood experiences of community.

Seeing all identity as embedded in relational as well as conceptual and structural ‘webs’, the research seeks to explore if and how women who spent time in communes as children have witnessed/lived communes as ‘new family forms.’ The work enquires about the ways of conducting intimate relationship present in these spaces and how participants have responded to the vision and practices of the communes movement.

The research takes particular interest in issues of power and relationship, and keeps an eye open for resistance to both hegemonic mainstream and powerful ‘counter-cultural’ notions of ‘how to live one’s life.’ It explores the perceived benefits and boons, hurts and harms that participants feel their unusual experience gave them. The research asks how participants have rejected or embraced their childhood experiences at their current age and stage.

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Introduction

'Well you can bump & grind
 And it's good for your mind
 Well you can twist & shout
 Let it all hang out
 But you won't fool
 the children of the revolution'

Marc Bolan, Children of the Revolution lyrics

I, like many of my generation from the liberal middle classes, had parents excited by the social and political ideals of the counter culture. Like many people of my generation (and those ever since), my parents separated (to divorce later) in 1978, when I was seven. My mother then took the unusual step of joining a commune not far from our old family home, as an alternative to setting up home on her own. She took my younger sister and I with her. Already steeped in the radicalism and radical/counter-cultural ideals and networks of my parents' young lives, my sister and I now became children immersed in a community that was attempting to live out an alternative to mainstream or conventional lifestyles, and for us an alternative to nuclear family life.

We stayed in this community for only three years, yet my sense of identity has remained bound up with this experience ever since. I have carried a sense of that other world, that communal world, and its ideas and ideals, that has irrevocably shaped my world-view and way of being. Always lurking beneath is a 'commune kid' – an experience of self that only ever finds identification with other children of the counter culture.

This underlying sense of self has remained even when it is not reinforced by my current life circumstances. It was a powerful childhood to undergo. One designed to mould and shape a certain kind of rebelliousness and resistance; a questioning of mainstream subjectivity and practices of family, gender, authoritarianism, competitive individualism, and materialism. It left me with a deep suspicion of convention and the mainstream, but also with some questions about alternative cultures.

Was I the only one who felt like this? I wanted to know... One of my primary motivations for approaching this research was to make sense of my own experience and to swap notes with other people with similar histories. My old community does not exist any more. The building is still used by a community

of the same name, yet the last remaining members of the original group who lived there with me are gone now from that place. They are all absorbed into more conventional ways of life once again. And in the physical space that remains, although the practices and ideals in the community have similar concerns, time has shifted the focus and practices in line with the times and the changing nature of the current community there.

Networks of my peers – old commune-dwellers - are still functioning, and my generation of ‘kids’ are all making choices about how to live our lives, as we come into mature adult status and face choices about lifestyle and practice, family, relationship, parenting, work, property, money, politics and identity. My generation are all in their mid twenties to late thirties now, and it seemed to me that we were all facing some interesting dilemmas about how to proceed with our lives. As one of my participants Jody illustrates while musing about having bought a house:

“It’s funny because with this house, I feel like I am setting up a nuclear situation, you know? Me and [my partner, soon to be husband] living in this house and we can have the two point four nuclear situation. [And] sometimes I wonder, how did I end up here? I have conversations with other people [from my community], you know? I might not have kids, or not for years, but I still think about how I would deal with them. How would I educate them? What kind of environment would I want them to grow up in? [And] that’s really important, even though I might not have any kids for years yet. [But] through talking about that, I think that having that kind of set up where there are a number of adults all supporting each other to bring up kids is a really good idea, and I think that really worked... I still have connections with all the people I grew up with. There is that network and I think that will become more important when I have kids. Then I start thinking about, ‘do I want to bring them up in a nuclear family?’ [And] I start thinking about buying a big house, you know, not with ten adults, but with three or four other couples who have kids, and it seems to make so much more sense. Why do we bring up kids in a way where we are not supported – where we are on our own? It doesn’t seem to make sense...”

I was curious about how other ‘commune kids’ were dealing with this legacy. When I began this research, I had just reached the end of my twenties and felt, along with many of my generation, particularly the biologically time-limited women, that now was the time to think about ‘growing up’ ‘settling down’, perhaps buying a house and making a long-term commitment, having kids, deciding on a career of some kind...

But settle down to what, exactly? A whole range of options, creative options, about work, home and social life were in my awareness, when many of my

conventionally raised peers were not aware of (or did not take seriously) such radical options, outside current 'norms', as communal living. I became interested in this legacy of 'knowing it can be different' and the creativity – and insecurity – of such flexible thinking 'outside the box' and how different people might have positioned themselves in relation to hegemonic norms and resistant ideas, practices and identities. I also began to be interested in how 'the norm' has shifted toward many of the ideas that seemed radical and different in my childhood.

My attempts to work out my own story and make sense of whether aspects of my experience and character were to do with spending time as a child in this other culture mingles here with all of the nuance and drama of my emotions about my relationship with my parents and the attempt to come to a place of understanding them.

The issues of parenting and childcare were one of the serious gaps in work about UK communes and their members in the 1970s. The mainstream upsurge of new family forms led to interesting questions about counter-cultural resistance towards conventional family arrangements. The experience of children of communes – that experimental 'anti-family' culture - could lend useful insight to a wider culture too now, I thought.

In this research I have attempted to provide space to hear the experience of people brought up utopian, brought up with that counter cultural dream, the experiment in alternatives to the family. How was that? What was it like living in a commune, an intentional community, as a child? These were the questions left hanging by researchers who studied Communes in the 1970's in the UK and USA. This research attempts to express a sense of what the answers are, as (some of) the children of those 'utopias' see it.

Structure of Contents

Chapter One. Literature Review.

I begin by 'scene setting' with an exploration of existing work about communes and the cultural and societal background to their arising in the 1960's and 70's in the UK, USA and Europe. This chapter (along with **Appendix One** which provides a rich source of quotes from that original literature) illustrates the kinds of environments participants might have lived in as children physically, ideologically and relationally. I describe my engagement with literatures about

communes in the UK and USA and explore typologies of intentional community. Literatures about children and childhood are reviewed, as are literatures about relationship, the family and changing family forms, and literatures about the emergence of post-modern forms of subjectivity, identity and 'individualisation.'

Chapter Two. Method – Mapping the shifting sands.

Provides a description of the practical process of research methodology and a discussion of methodological issues. Methodology literatures are reviewed that were influential to my choices about method. **Appendix Two** provides further evidence of my methodology, with original questions and material given to participants prior to interview (in the form of introductory letter and my own writing about my own experience of being a child in a commune and issues I was interested in exploring with participants) included. Reflexive practice, my own subjectivity and autobiographical material are discussed as part of this methodological consideration. Issues of temporality and memory are also explored methodologically.

Chapter Three. Libertarian parenting and alternative family scenarios.

Here participants' interview data is first introduced as I begin to explore common notions and experiences of participants' childhoods in intentional community as children. Issues of relationships with parents, and notions of how parenting was thought about and done in practice in participants' childhoods are explored. Anti-authoritarian sentiments in communes are explored as in tension with parenting power relationships.

Chapter Four. Parents, partners and 'splitting.'

This chapter, through interview data, continues to explore non-traditional family forms present in participants' communities. By discussing the ideology and practice of adult sexual relationships in participants' communes, and participants' feelings about how adult relationships affected their lives as children, and continue to affect their attitudes as adults.

Chapter Five. The self-regulating child – attachment and dependency.

Here the common impression of participants that they experienced a level of independence unusual for middle class children of their era is explored with particular reference to issues of attachment and dependency, structure, rules,

boundaries and safety. The different needs of adults and children in intentional community are explored here too.

Chapter Six. The status of children in communes.

Issues of power, respect, authority, status and responsibility are explored in this chapter through the childhood memories of participants. Rhetorics of equality are juxtaposed with participants' experiences of social hierarchy in communal life.

Chapter Seven. Crossing into and out of commune spaces

The notions of 'mainstream' and 'alternative' are interrogated here and how participants managed their subjectivity to cross over between different cultures successfully is explored. Issues and feelings around belonging and identity which arose for participants in their childhoods and adult lives are discussed.

Conclusion. A life more ordinary..?

A summary of how participants have responded to their childhood environments and how their subjectivity has been affected in their opinion by their unusual upbringings. The specificity of those upbringings is discussed and the aspects which participants experienced as particularly positive or difficult are highlighted and summarised.

Appendices.

Appendix one. Includes quotes to illustrate the literature review chapter.

Appendix two. Includes quotes to illustrate the methods chapter.

Appendix three. Includes material supplied to participants before interview.

Appendix four. Material which describes participants and their communities.

Appendix five. An extra chapter about gender roles, feminism and femininity.

This was moved to appendices because its themes were not central to the final work of the thesis, but included because the material was so rich and the participants were so keen to talk about these issues at interview.

Chapter One

Literature review

Revisiting the past...

This project is about a past time, it is about remembering; it is about a group of women who had (at least in some aspects) similar childhood experiences and contexts. That shared history is of a minority family form, a marginal experience, a resistant environment to grow within. In this work a group of us have engaged in a shared sense-making process that references past times and places subjectively. The project cannot claim to be describing a singular 'reality' of what was happening in communes in the 1970s and early 1980s in the UK. That time is long gone, and none of us can get back to past times to even begin to accurately describe a cohesive sense of reality situated in a particular time and place. This research does not directly address the experience, ideologies, thinking, practice or subjectivities of the adult generation in communes of that time. Instead it focuses on the remembered impressions of participants' childhoods in those settings, from the perspective of now adult children who had only partial understandings of what we lived through and within at that time. The research describes a very particular positioning, a child's eye view reinterpreted through the veils of adult sense-making processes accumulated over the years since and the concerns of the current moment of my and my participants' lives and identities.

This chapter attempts to give some sense of context to place the impressions, memories and opinions of my participants and myself. By borrowing from literatures which do describe researchers' impressions, and adult communards' comments about what was happening in communes of that era, I hope to furnish the reader with a general sense of the 'scene' within which participants' lives took place in childhood. Because of limitations of space and words I have included significant quotation from these literatures in a separate appendix (Appendix 1). This material is, I believe well worth reading as it conjures a real sense of what life in a Commune in the 1970's was like, what the counter culture was all about, and illustrates more fully the ideas of key theorists I have used in this work. To gain a flavour of context first hand reading this material in Appendix 1 would be very useful.

I must present a note of caution here, because these impressions do not come from research based in any of the actual communities participants lived in.

What is presented in this chapter does not constitute or substitute for any actual account or understanding of what adults in those specific communities were doing; why or what their thoughts, hopes, motivations and experience actually was. Hopefully there will be recognisable aspects of commune life that are transferable from these accounts. In my experience of reading these literatures there was much I recognised from my own memories of childhood, although there was also a lot that didn't seem so familiar, particularly in descriptions of counter-cultural life and communes in the USA.

Studies of UK communes in the 1970s are a little thin on the ground, so I have drawn on US studies despite my awareness that there are significant differences in the cultures, ideologies, contexts and physical environment between UK and US communes and the wider 'counter' culture surrounding them. I began the research process by reading past material about communes and intentional communities of the era between the early 1970s and mid 1980s in the UK and the USA, and this chapter aims to summarise some of that material in a way which I hope will give some general sense of the era and social spaces of intentional community that participants are referencing in descriptions.

To that end, then, the core texts about communes in the UK in the 1970s are limited to the following studies:

Abrams & McCulloch (1976); Mills (1973); Rigby (1974a, 1974b).

I will draw most strongly from these texts in this chapter, as they are the most specifically relevant studies.

Abrams & McCulloch (1976) studied what they described as 'secular family communes' that Rigby would have described in his 'six fold typology' of communes (1974a) as somewhere between 'Communes for Mutual Support' and 'Practical Communes' with perhaps a touch of the 'Self Actualising Commune' and in this I have echoed the choices Abrams & McCulloch made in recruiting participants from similar types of community for my research. This meant I rejected sampling from 'Religious Communes', 'Therapeutic Communes' and 'Activist Communes' (the other categories in Rigby's six) as did they. (For more detailed definitions of these terms see Rigby (1974a, p. 5-6). Rigby looked at examples across the entire range of his typology and in doing so took in some communities far more radically different (from 'mainstream' families or lifestyles) in practice and ideology from those Abrams & McCulloch studied. In both Rigby and Abrams & McCulloch's studies, the populations of communes were predominantly white, middle class, heterosexual, young

(generally in their twenties and thirties) and able bodied. Some diversity did exist with people of other classes, races, sexual orientations, ages and some people with either mental or physical 'differences' but these were a very small minority.

Abrams & McCulloch paid some attention to gender in their research and were unconvinced that women in communes were significantly better off than in more conventional nuclear family scenarios or marriages. In fact they suspected that women were rather worse off in communal scenarios, ending up still being the primary carers and child rearers, and inputting the majority of domestic labour, doing this with less security in their relationships with partners, and still without access to earning or the economic power that might put them on the level neither with their male communards, nor in a situation where the need for engagement with wage labour was rendered unnecessary. (See Appendix 1 for, quote 1)

Abrams & McCulloch (1976) did not focus heavily on children in their study but did raise questions about the serious doubts they had about communes as 'great places for children', contrary to what adult communards they met and studied kept asserting to them. According to their research adult communards thought of their children as likely to be more 'free' and unconditioned than they because of growing up in communes which in communards' view liberated them from the 'love nexus' of dependency inherent in nuclear family life (in the world view of communards).

Abrams & McCulloch (1976) doubted whether children were more 'free' in communes although they did acknowledge attempts to be more libertarian and child centred. They said that 'on balance the world of the communal child is richer in human content [than dual earner middle class nuclear family life]' (1976, p. 150). They concluded that 'Communes provide children with a life that is neither systematically better nor systematically worse, so far as we could tell, than the life of children in most families.' (1976, p. 150).

They worried about how the insistence on the value of autonomy over dependency, attitudes of non-possessiveness, anti-structure and anti-constriction in relationship, left children 'at sea in the flux of adult relationships whether the sea is calm or tempestuous is beyond their control, and often beyond that of the adults, too.' (1976, p. 150). They said 'the critical problem in this instance is the child's need for a certain stability of attachment – and the

inability of the commune [in practice] to find any regular and effective substitute for the child's mother for that purpose' (1976, p. 148).

I looked at literatures of children and childhood (for example Boocock & Scott, 2005; Cosaro, 1997; Jenks, 1996) in order to gain a context for understanding notions of children and childhood that presents some challenge to taken-for-granted ideas about children and their 'needs.' Boocock & Scott (2005) devote great thought to how research about children needs to recognise children as having different needs from adults, and not attempt to ignore their particularity. They focus on issues such as developmental and learning processes, emotional learning processes too, and the different ability of children to communicate, to know themselves or have social knowledge about their environment, physical size, strength and growth, and the power positioning of children in society. They neither caution researchers to neither over nor underplay children's agency and power. At the same time, they say, 'As a social group, children are arguably the most powerless group in almost any society.' (2005, p. 18) but 'like other relatively powerless groups, kids have discovered many ways to resist, undermine, or circumvent adult authority.' (2005, p. 18).

As an attempt to include a sense of agency for kids, Boocock & Scott (2005) talk about how children 'bring up parents' as much as adults bring up kids, that there are ways in which children train their parents to be responsive to their needs as much as they are being socialised by adults around them. They look at trends towards changes in family and childhood, and how there are two camps. One sees these changes as problematic or 'damaging' for children, seeing stable nuclear family life as being a better environment for children to grow in, and the other seeing change and diversity as inevitable and not necessarily detrimental to children's welfare. They believe that promising new forms of childhood are emerging in the twenty first century, that dilution of parental power and more open communication between kids and parents are indicators of a desirable democratisation of the family.' (2005, p. 69).

Boocock & Scott (2005) warn that it is easy to assume that children's needs are served by whatever adults around them would prefer, as in the example of assumptions that divorce and separation of parents is better for children because it's better for the adults involved, or at the other end of the spectrum that nuclear family life is necessarily better for children because it is desired by their parents. According to Boocock & Scott (2005) many children carry a strong notion that a 'normal' family is a heterosexual nuclear one, and some suffer

feelings of shame or unhappiness, or experience discrimination and harassment from peers and at school if their family form is 'not normal' – the further from the perceived norm the family is the more likely is discrimination and harassment to occur. Also in their study, they say that many children from 'unconventional' families have plenty of positive things to say about their experience of that family form and the ways in which they feel served and loved at home.

Abrams & McCulloch saw particular issues for children in communes because of the fact that most of them were sent to mainstream schools, and this created a strong tension between the values of 'home' or the commune and the values of 'outside' or the school; often the values of 'outside' were rejected strongly in communes and this could be confusing for children in their view. In my research I have attempted to address the question they left hanging in their research about whether the children would experience communes as 'great places' to grow up in as adult communards claimed. These claims Abrams & McCulloch were dubious about, observing a 'remarkable gap between the promise and the practice' (1976, p. 147). The positive claims of adult communards about children in communes focused strongly on children in communes as more free according to Abrams & McCulloch. (See Appendix 1 for, quote 2).

Rigby did not really focus on children except to repeat what adult communards said (echoing Abrams & McCulloch's respondents) about what a 'great place to grow up' they believed their commune to be. There is more material about children in the US studies of communes, but I have only found one book which focuses purely on children in communes. This book is not a sociological study but a personal account by a couple who called themselves 'Hippies' travelling around US communes paying attention to the children in particular, as they were interested in perhaps bringing their children up communally. 'Children of the counter culture' (Rothchild & Berns Wolf, 1976) is a fascinating read. They visited a range of different types of communes and they did not come to a firm conclusion about whether communes were generally good for kids, but they decided not to take their children to live in a commune permanently in the end. They were worried about some of the children they saw as being rather ignored, or even positively coerced in ways that they saw as damaging (one little boy was having sex with his mother and other adult commune women

from the age of 6 and this was seen by these women as a way to 'cure' him of any oedipal hang-ups, for example).

Rothchild & Berns Wolf talked about their experience of meeting a lot of very hostile kids whom they felt were not being adequately cared for and were resentful of no one paying them any consistent attention and living in a constant state of flux and insecurity. They talked about witnessing a lot of kids looking after other kids rather than being looked after by adults. They were impressed with some kids from communes maturity and self sufficiency, but raised questions about whether they were being equipped to ever be able to deal with life in the mainstream, describing them as children of 'a marginal civilisation' and worried about how this limited their choices later in life and made a sham of their 'independence': 'You cannot just step into a commune. Communes involve a revolution in behaviour, a revolution in how children are allowed to act.' (Rothchild & Berns Wolf, 1976, p. 205).

Rothchild & Berns Wolf talked about how in many communes the 'only important question was whether the little girl is being a bitch right now, or the little boy is being a brat right now.' (1976, p. 198). They described a common situation where children were not recognised, praised or encouraged for being good at things in these communal environments because talents were seen as irrelevant – it was about being, not doing. They said that commune kids they witnessed were never expected to have long-term goals along the lines of 'what do you want to do when you grow up?'

According to Rothchild & Berns Wolf, in rejecting mainstream ways of life for themselves, communards also rejected them for their children to varying degrees in different communities. (See Appendix 1, quote 3). Rothchild & Berns Wolf described a focus on emotional 'goodness' which included a moral sense that rejected mainstream values (materialism and ambition in particular) as corrupt to some extent and put emphasis on maintaining relationship and connection as the central focus of life. 'Commune parents wanted a kind of emotional goodness for their children – which they gave them at the cost of the self-centred drive that leads to great personal achievement.' (1976, p. 207).

Direct relationships with adults meant in their opinion that children could not seek protection easily from parents in communal life. (See Appendix 1, quote 4)

Rothchild & Berns Wolf talked about how particularly in rural communes, where physical space was abundant, parents were less preoccupied with and fussy about their kids well being. (See Appendix 1, quote 5). They admired the

emotional maturity of commune kids, particularly their ability to relate to others in a direct and 'real' way. (See Appendix 1, quote 6). They described commune kids as being far from introverted, in general, but also far less attention seeking from adults than kids they knew in more mainstream environments. Rothchild & Berns Wolf talked about meeting a number of children who 'yearned for normal things' and for greater privacy and for more attention from their parent(s) than they were getting. They observed children struggling to deal with environments with different rules than the commune; mainstream environments like other people's homes or time at mainstream school. They mentioned that in many of the communes they visited the children did not 'help out' with chores, they worked like the adults on group projects, and that this gave the children a sense of being included which they loved. Abrams & McCulloch (1976) described a situation in UK communes where there was strong critical feeling about 'straight family life' among adult communards. 'My whole life so far has been fucked up by my family, there's got to be an alternative,' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 122), one respondent said to them and spoke for many when he did so according to these researchers. They described a concern in communes for 'a reconstruction of the family – to substitute openness, spontaneity and growth for domination, possession and violence' (1976, p. 122). In Muncie, Wetherell, Langan, Dallos & Cochrane's (1993) text 'Understanding The Family' the communes movement is described as 'anti-family', echoing Abrams and McCulloch's ideas. (See Appendix 1, quote 7).

Abrams & McCulloch talked about the critique of family offered by Laing (1971) and Cooper (1971) as being the closest to those of communards they talked with. Particularly Cooper's search for 'the spontaneous assertion of full personal autonomy' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 122) that sees the family as a place which destroys people, which turns 'the possibility of mutual affirmation into the reality of systematic mutual invalidation.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 122). (See Appendix 1, quote 8). Freedom for children from this family trap of enmeshment and dependency, and freedom for adults from the 'terrible responsibility of parenthood' (1976, p. 148) was the conscious and discussed aim of many adult communards in Abrams & McCulloch's study. (See Appendix 1, quote 9).

The repression of sexuality within 'the family' was another key concern of their respondents and they connected these notions to Freud, Reich, Fromm and

Roheim (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 123). They said that 'Some parts of our research indicated strongly that, in this sense of breaking the love nexus, building an alternative to the family was what the communes movement was about.' (1976, p. 124). They also talked about the difficulty of this venture when 'the social stifled the self; but the self can only realise itself in a society. The only known society is a monstrous offence; a new society must be created, but the only account of it that can be given is that it should be not society - that is, not the society that is known. The most that can be said is that it will be an opposite.' (1976, p. 131). To their eyes, communards showed a 'startling lack of awareness' of how, to be realised, their values of 'Love, freedom, equality, self-expression, or for the less ambitious, companionship, mutual help, convenience' need to be 'embedded in specific social relations.' (1976, p. 132).

Abrams & McCulloch described how naïve they felt was the idea that it was as simple as 'getting together and overcoming emotional, mental and practical difficulties' as communards saw it. They described how often what happened, in their experience, was that 'social structure is smuggled back in.' (1976, p. 132). They said that 'Communes can for long periods of time insist quite convincingly that even the most inescapable variations between individuals – man, woman, child, infant – are insignificant for them as the basis of differential treatment.' (1976, p. 132). This was particularly difficult if involvement with a wage-labour economy was not fully broken, which was the case with most communes they studied. They saw children as 'firmly secondary' in communes, and commented that the focus on the self-determination and autonomy of the adults (particularly the men) in communes meant that children's needs and wants were often simply not taken into account because as in traditional family set ups they were simply not as powerful as the adults.

Rigby defined a commune as 'a group of people, of three or more persons in size, drawn from more than one family or kinship group, who have voluntarily come together for some purpose or other, shared or otherwise, in the pursuit of which they seek to share certain aspects of their lives together, and who are characterised by a certain consciousness of themselves as a group.' (1974a, p. 3). He said that, in 1970 a good estimate of the number of 'communes' in the UK might be around 100. His view was that it was appropriate to site communes as part of the wider 'counter-culture' or 'underground' in Britain. He saw commune members as 'alienated' from 'mainstream' society, but as proactive in seeking solutions to what they felt was wrong with socially accepted

knowledge and norms of the wider society. 'The cultural tradition within which people have been brought up is perceived by them as inadequate for the solution of certain life-problems which they see as confronting them.' (1974b, p. 65).

Both Abrams & McCulloch and Rigby placed strong emphasis on friendship and relationship as central to communal life, they saw communes as an attempt to create a new strong form of friendship and mutuality somewhere between mainstream notions of friendship as voluntary association with people who you share interests or ways of seeing the world with, and kinship ties which have greater weight and expectation of mutual support and shared economic interests. They say: 'The secular family commune... is an attempt to cultivate friendship... a notion of friendship of a particularly ambitious and idealistic type.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 26–27). (See Appendix 1, quote 10).

Both Abrams & McCulloch and Rigby stressed the anti-rationalist feeling amongst their participants and their hostility towards sociology and sociologists on the basis that in their view their way of life and way of being could not be grasped by such a rationalist discipline. They all made a point of noting that communes receive a scrutiny and interest that is potentially detrimental to them from journalists and social researchers and a critical attention well beyond what 'ordinary families' might face.

Neither Rigby nor Abrams & McCulloch saw British communards as being a heterogeneous group. They were rather seen as having diverse reasons for being involved in communes or the counter culture, and having different ideas about what communal living was 'really' about. Similarities among communards were seen as: being rejecting of mainstream society; freedom seeking, and interested in developing their creativity, their relationships with others, and in 'self actualising,' which involved being freed from their 'conditioning'; and adopting different (more free in their view) ways of relating with others and of living. Notions of equality were central to the vision of nearly all the UK communes in these studies, but actual equality was less in evidence according to both Abrams & McCulloch and Rigby. (See Appendix 1, quote 11)

Both studies brought up the problem of unstable populations in communes, and difficulties around constantly shifting membership and fluid configurations of relationship, particularly sexual partnership, in communes they studied. Monogamous heterosexual pairing was the most common type of

sexual relationship amongst communards in these studies. In some ways, particularly in Abrams & McCulloch's study, some communes could be seen to consist predominantly of fairly recognisable or mainstream family forms – two parents with children, blended families, single parent families – contained in a larger 'family' which was the community. This is what Muncie, Wetherell, Langan, Dallos & Cochrane described thus: 'Some... kept pretty well to heterosexual pairings, but 'defensive monogamy' was discouraged and tended to be seen as breaking up the solidarity of the group.' (1993, p. 152). This was largely true of the 'secular family communes' of my participants' childhoods. Rigby looked at some communities with far less mainstream and more radical ways of organising sexual relations, such as group marriage or a complete refusal of possessive sexual relations, although these groups are not directly relevant to this study except as a further 'scene setting' of the ideas and practices of the communes movement.

Problems with achieving the aims of communes are mentioned in Muncie, Wetherell, Langan, Dallos & Cochrane who say 'communes have been set up with the stated intention of breaking down many aspects of family life such as possessive monogamous sexuality, and constricting gender roles and to enable people to opt out of 'the rat race.' (1993, p. 150). They go on to point out that 'frequently pre-existing socialisations continually caused problems. Gender roles were difficult to eradicate... Some women found it hard not to encourage their children's personal attachment to them and men often did not consider that childcare was really their responsibility or felt an allegiance only to their own children...' (1993, p. 151) and 'ideals of non-exclusive sexual relationships caused considerable personal anguish.' (1993, p. 152)

Power was seen negatively by communards in both Abrams & McCulloch and Rigby's studies, as a corrupting force. (See Appendix 1, quote 12). An anti-structure sentiment was produced as part of this rejection of 'power' hierarchy and inequality. 'The commune may be thought of as an attempt to do away with social structure, and in particular the structure of the family, and substitute relationships that are open, direct and unpredictable.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 45). Ideologically, then, traditional notions of the family, and marriage, were rejected, even if in practice they were still very much in evidence in communes.

There was a strong belief that 'if one tries hard enough one can be different' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 45) and that changing the world is 'a matter of

changing people's minds' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 45) and encouraging them to want something different from existing social structures. (See Appendix 1, quote 13). This created a strong emphasis on choice, and on voluntarism in communal life and in communards view of human beings 'true' nature.

There is a vast body of literature about US Communes from the 1960s to the current day. Examples of texts I have found particularly useful are: Case & Taylor, 1979; Judson, 1975; Kanter, 1972, 1973, 1977; Hall, 1978; Love-Brown, 2002; Miller, 1999; Roberts, 1971; Rothchild & Berns-Wolf, 1976; Smith, 1990; Speck, 1972; Teselle, 1972; Zablocki, 1980. I have drawn a little from the descriptive content of some of these studies here (and in Appendix 1), despite really significant cultural differences between the USA and UK communes movement. I am interested in bringing the reader into a sense of what similar social spaces to participants' communities were like from an adult perspective (albeit not the adults involved in their communities) before introducing participants' child's eye view.

Placing communes accurately in terms of their history, function or place in social movements of the time is a major concern of many studies of communes, but this is less my concern here than to provide a 'feel' of what communes and the counter culture were like in the 1970s and the ideas and practices therein. My methodology is drawn from sources other than those 1970s studies of communes which were mostly ethnographic or participant observer studies; not a possibility for my research as my participants are no longer children and no longer live in communes.

Previous studies (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Aidala, 1989; Kanter, 1972, 1973; Metcalf, 1984; Rubin, 2001; Scanzoni, 2001; Smith, 1990) attempt to frame communes as alternative family structures and as experiments in (what were at that time) emerging or fairly new ways of formulating, thinking, practicing and experimenting with family and relationship. I have found this approach useful for my research. I read these studies but drew theoretically on literatures about changes in subjectivity and relationship across 'mainstream' society that are arguably connected to communal and counter-cultural experiments in their attempts to reshape family, relationship and subjectivity in terms of personal fulfilment.

In this view communal experiments both foreshadowed and followed an increasingly widespread cultural shift towards what Giddens (1992) describes

as 'pure relationship'; a form of relationship based on notions of individual fulfilment rather than legality or social duty. He describes a shift from 'traditional' marriage and kin ties towards 'a social relation entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another, and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it.' (Giddens, 1992, p. 58). In line with this way of seeing communes I read and have utilised ideas from Giddens and from Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim who, also writing about relationship and changing family forms, talk about changes in subjectivity they call 'individualisation' - an ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement which can now be seen as the single "most powerful current in modern societies" (Beck 2000, p. 164).

There is a rich vein of literatures that place attempts at 'communalism' or 'communitarianism' as an historical phenomenon and it is a usual way to begin to explain communes as part of a wider social movement. These literatures trace waves of communal experimentation that have arisen throughout European history since Roman times and spread with European settlers to the USA and Antipodes with colonial settlement, and see the communes movement of the '60s and '70s in western nations as the contemporary and latest 'wave' of such experiments.

In Britain in the early 1800s, the early Industrial Revolution, a rash of attempts at community life came into being, and were documented historically by Hardy in his *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth-Century England* (1974), which has become a core text for those wishing to illustrate a continuity of communal projects since the Industrial Revolution, and even before, in the Reformation period. Hardy describes the 'radical Protestantism' and 'utopian socialism' that underpinned nineteenth-century communalism and draws a direct line of descent for communalism in Britain from the Diggers in the seventeenth century. Key histories of British communalism include Hardy (1979, 2000) and Coates (2001).

There are a large number of histories of USA communalism, for example Apsler (1974); Holloway (1966); Nordhoff (1966); Zablocki (1980). Again I have not attempted to describe or directly draw on this literature here although I did read it! For sheer manageability it seemed more important to limit how much I tried to deal with, and a summary of observations about communes of the 1970s seemed more important than the movement's history.

Having stated that it is worth noting that some commentators on the wave of communalism that began in the 1960s across the western world drew distinctions between nineteenth and early twentieth century communal experiments and later twentieth century ones (the communes movement of the 1960s, '70s and '80s). This distinction was drawn largely because of the emphasis in twentieth century experiments on individual rights as opposed to the needs of the group (Munro-Clark, 1986) and the stronger flavour of anarchist rather than utopian ideals in twentieth century communes as opposed to nineteenth, or earlier twentieth century ones (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Jerome, 1974). This has direct relevance to my drawing parallels between processes of 'individualisation' (Beck, 2001) society wide and the 'creative individualism' (Rigby, 1974a) of communes in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. It also adds further evidence to the existence of strong tensions in 1970s communes between individualism and communalism, and makes sense of my interest in Giddens' (1992) ideas about 'pure relationship' because of the exploration of mutuality and individual fulfilment in these literatures.

Accepting Abrams & McCulloch's (1976) and Rigby's (1974a) placing of UK communes as an offshoot of the 'counter-culture' of Britain and strongly influenced by the 'counter-culture' of the USA, I will now try to paint a picture in this chapter of the ideologies and attitudes, values and beliefs of 'the counter-culture' more generally in both countries from literatures of the time as part of the 'scene setting' for my participants' comments. I read some of the large body of literature about 'Counter Culture' and 'New Social Movements', for example Byrne (1997), Crossley (2002), Della Porta & Diani (2005), Larana & Gusfield (1994); Roszak (1969), Scott (1990), Shehr (1997), Stryker, Owens & White (2000) and Tilly (2004).

I have read but not explored here some of the literatures about or histories of European commune movements outside the UK, for example 'The German Youth Movement' (Tyldesley, 2003) 'The Paris Commune' (Shafer, 2005) and 'Utopian Communism in France' (Johnson, 1974). I am aware of a body of literature about the communes movement in the Antipodes (for example Cock, 1979; Metcalf, 1995; Munro-Clark, 1986; Sargisson & Tower-Sargeant, 2004). I also read material about the Kibbutz movement in Israel (for example Bettelheim, 1969; Spiro, 1956) and about cults and religious communities across the world (for example Zellner & Petrowsky, 1998). All these movements and experiments could be argued to have connections with, be influential on, and

share similarities with UK communes of the 1960s, '70s and '80s as part of the socio-historical view of communalism (Hall, 1978; Zablocki, 1980) and made interesting background reading, but comparative analysis is way beyond the scope of this project.

Signs of the times...

The 1960s and '70s were a time of change in Britain with many discussing a new 'permissiveness' emerging in society, Christie Davies (1975) wrote: 'During the last twenty years Britain is said to have become a 'permissive society'. C.H. and W.M. Whitely (1964, p. 21) wrote of the general change in morality that has occurred in this century. (See Appendix 1, quote 14). Davies talks about the 1967 Divorce Act as a particularly important move away from a former moralism in Britain and the recognition of shifts in attitude towards marriage and family life that are directly relevant to the search for 'alternative' family forms such as communes.

Davies also talks about how the ideal of the welfare state and the huge upheaval of social life and rigid class divisions that the Second World War ushered in allowed an entire generation the optimism of the possibility of large-scale social change and better conditions for ordinary people. According to Davies a new sense of entitlement for the 'common man' and a breaking-down of the traditional social order, of 'knowing your place', was present. This was particularly evident for the poorer sections of society, after their war efforts left them feeling they had made sacrifices and should be rewarded, and allowed them to rub shoulders with 'higher' sections of society in an unprecedented way, and for (particularly middle class) women, who had been brought out of the home to workplaces in the war effort and of whom some weren't at all keen to be sent back into purely domestic settings once the war was over (Davies, 1975).

Theodore Roszak in 'Making of a Counter Culture' (which focuses mainly on the USA but also talks about European 'Counter Culture' and the relationship between the two countries' counter cultural movements) describes how 'the disaffected middle-class young are at hand, suffering a strange new kind of "immiserization" that comes of being stranded between a permissive childhood and an obnoxiously conformist adulthood, experimenting desperately with new ways of growing up self-respectfully into a world they despise...' (1969, p. 35). Roszak echoes Abrams & McCulloch (1976) and Rigby (1974a, 1974b) in their observations of UK communards when he talks of comparatively permissive

childrearing techniques experienced in childhood by young people of the 1960s and '70s, and about the huge upsurge of college attendance in the 1960s, about women's inclusion in higher education in increasing numbers, and a rejection by the young of their parents' lifestyles, the 1950s suburban lifestyle of middle America, the 'leisure' society, and the economic boom and parallels can be drawn in Britain. (See Appendix 1, quote 15).

Roszac talks about a split in counter cultural 'scenes' between on the one hand the thinking of 'New Left Radicalism' amongst 'Beat-Hip Bohemians', those who were interested in social and psychic 'liberation' and drew strongly and directly on a history of activist and intellectual conflict theory (mostly Marxist and Anarchist), but with reference to Freud's psychoanalytic ideas (through Marcuse and Brown) in their thought, and on the other hand more mystical or consciousness oriented 'Hippies' who drew on eastern religions, psychedelics, magic, anthropology and psychotherapeutic notions in an anti-rationalist rejection of technology and science and an attempt to explore less rational aspects of human experience.

Despite being able to define a distinction between these 'types' in the counter culture, Roszac states that a mishmash of ideas from across this spectrum formed an ideology influenced by both sides of this divide, with no clear boundary between these 'types'. It was more a kind of leaning one way or the other in individuals and groups involved with the counter culture. (See Appendix 1, quote 16). Key social theorists and thinkers that Roszac sees as influential in shaping the ideology of the counter culture include: Brown (1959, 1966); Buber (1960); Campbell (1949); Castaneda (1968); Cooper (1971); Eliade (1959, 1964, 1961); Fromm (1955); Ginsberg (1961); Goodman (1964, 1951); Huxley (1962); Laing (1961, 1971); Leary (1968); Malinowski (1948); Marcuse (1955, 1964, 1969); Marx & Engels (1846, 1848); Reich (1942); Sartre (1960, 1963); Skinner (1948); Watts 1957, 1967).

In Charles Tilly's history of social movements he recognises 1968 as a key turning point across the Western World, and the moment when ' "Old" social movements on behalf of power for workers and other exploited categories had passed their prime. "New" social movements oriented to autonomy, self-expression and the critique of post-industrial society, many observers thought, were supplanting the old.' (Tilly, 2004, p. 70). Key moments and movements in American culture came to a head at this time. For example, the protest against the Vietnam War intensified, the assassination of the Civil Rights and anti-

racism campaigner Martin Luther King, student protests and sit-ins at universities. In Europe, the 'old' political mobilisation which resisted oppressive systems of top-down control began to shift in line with the more identity and lifestyle based movements which were becoming apparent in the USA, new 'causes' were taken on by these 'New' social movements, for example expressive feminism, homosexual rights, psychedelic drug use, indigenous people's struggles, environmentalism... (Tilly, 2004, p. 71).

This shift allowed the anarchist/utopian vision of communes to emerge (or re-emerge in a new form from earlier attempts) in the USA, according to Marguerite Bouvard: 'one of the most astonishing characteristics of the community movement is its complete apoliticism. Who would have guessed that the tide of political radicalism which swept young adults in the sixties would become transformed into an apolitical and peaceful program for gradual social reform?' (Bouvard, 1975, p. 6). Tilly echoes her sentiment: 'Unlike their sedulously interest-oriented predecessors with their aims of wringing power and benefits from the existing system, ran the argument, identity-centred new social movements could recast the very frame work of social life.' (Tilly, 2004, p. 71). (See Appendix 1, quote 17)

Some observers of the counter culture maintain that UK counter culture maintained closer ties with 'old' movement politics, with socialism, unionism, and Marxist thought, in particular, than was the case in the USA. For example the French Students' involvement with the General Strike in Paris in 1968, and the situationist movement was an influence close to home which involved an alliance with 'the workers', and an attempt to include those not already given access to the full benefits of the existing order of mainstream society. (Roszak, 1969, p. 68).

Contrarily Richard Mills' study of communes and the 'hippie' movement in Britain in 1973 also points out differences between UK and USA versions of 'hippie' but he claims a more total sense of being 'outside' mainstream or 'old' movement politics among young hippies in the UK. He sites the historical precursors of the English hippies as being 'the Romantics and the Bohemians,' whilst claiming their American counterparts have stronger historical parallels with 'the multitude of chiliastic bands whose search for the millennium has coloured so much of American history.' Mills talks about an inevitable sense of compromise in British political tradition that the hippies in the UK cultivated something you might describe as an amused detachment from mainstream

politics, where he saw hippies in the USA as more committed to a worldly morality and expresses his sense that American hippies were grieving deeply for the American Dream.

'Hippies' in the UK counter culture were described by Mills as dedicated to an apolitical aloofness and outsider status: 'From beginning to end they were resolutely committed to playfulness, inconsequence and irresponsibility, holding their moral values aloof from the everyday political world.' (Mills, 1973, preface viii). Mills stresses the influence of 'the east' and travel to the east in shaping the subjectivities in communes and more widely in the counter culture in the UK. He also stresses their rejection of a 'work ethic' in preference of an ethic of play and leisure and their focus on exploration of consciousness and of interpersonal relationship as central to their values and way of life.

According to Andrew Rigby (1974a, 1974b) 'the counter-culture' emerged most powerfully in Britain not among 'the workers' but in the universities from amongst a generation of young, mostly middle-class Britons. They had arguably been raised in circumstances of relative ease, privilege and affluence as well as greater permissiveness and had come to expect a certain level of self-respect and self-esteem and these 'youth' now bridled against the limited experiences that seemed on offer from mainstream life, similarly to the USA. (See Appendix 1, quote 18). This concern with personal fulfilment as emergent in the counter culture in the UK in the 1960s and 70s echoed the situation in the USA where a similar culture among the young was very much in evidence, but America had a different cultural context as well as a different history of radical movements, as Davies points out. (See Appendix 1, quote 19)

According to Roszak (1969) the young generation in the counter culture across the Western world developed a strong flavour of anti-rationalist, anti-scientific, anti-structure and a valorisation of the imagination, the intuitive, spiritual, emotional and embodied aspects of life, a move away from notions of objectivity and towards subjective internal journeys of exploration of consciousness, experience and a strong interest in personal connection, relationship, sexuality and 'being together.' These currents flowed together in the counter culture according to Roszak, but were none-the-less sometimes strange bedfellows. And out of the mixing bowl of all this change, both mainstream and radical, a new wave of British attempts at communal living emerged...

The ideology of communes?

Roszak describes a generation in both Britain and America who wanted to shift out of the mind set of their parents – the practical self-preservation a hangover from the war years; food on the table, roof over your head, work hard and accumulate – into a search for something more, a reconnection with the spiritual, the possibilities of human society, something idealistic and with higher purpose than gritty survival and dirty destruction and war; something fun, something beautiful, something meaningful. At the radical end of this spectrum these participants in ‘the counter culture’ had serious questions about the state of British society (and of the world) and the possibilities open to them (or not) in conventional mainstream lifestyles. The communes movement at its beginning was recognised by participants and observers as one attempt to find an ‘alternative’ way to live (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976).

However, the exact nature of that alternative was unclear, developing and experimental, as Rigby says of the movement in the late 1970s. (See Appendix 1, quote 20). A questioning of tradition and custom and a sense of entitlement to a better and richer life attracted many communards towards ‘consciousness-raising,’ with various issues being marked out as worthy of awareness - all involving the disruption of some version of ‘false consciousness’ or ‘conditioning’ – hegemonic ways of thinking about the world, which served the interests of the powerful against the interests of oppressed, marginalised or minority people, and were often seen as being ‘anti-life’ or ‘anti-joy’ (Rigby, 1974a) – a denial of pleasure in preference of obedience to ‘the system’ or to self denial in line with protestant Christian moralities (Rigby, 1974a). Communards were seeking alternative ways of thinking, of being, of doing things which ‘liberated’ the self from such internal structures of personality, and external structures of social control or hierarchy, power and control (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976).

Andrew Rigby’s enthusiastic report about five UK communities, *Communes in Britain* (1974a), paints a picture of the enthusiasm and idealism, as well as the emotional and practical problems, of his featured groups, and his personal excitement about communes as a ‘revolutionary’ force for social change. (See Appendix 1, quote 21). When the world was moving from the upsurge of youthful energy of the 1960s into the 1970s, the communes movement began to flourish and utopian vision was kept alive by communards growing out of the larger counter culture even as the protest movement began to lose its energy

(Zablocki, 1980). In small groups veterans of counter culture 'retreated' to communal experiments as their attempts to change the larger culture on a mass scale became frustrating or personally unfulfilling, and here they held the dream of being a living example of 'another way', as well as living lives they would find more enjoyable than 'mainstream' options (Rigby, 1974a).

Communards did not give up the idea of an alternative, they changed the goal from being transforming the world at large to transforming themselves and their own lives, and their offspring (myself and my participants) carry the legacy of that belief in 'an alternative' possibility. 'Everywhere we hear it said, all day long – and this is what gives the dominant discourse its strength – that there is nothing to put forward in opposition to the neo-liberal view, that it has succeeded in presenting itself as self-evident, that there is no alternative' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 29). Bourdieu's comment illustrates attitudes in Europe at the end of the 20th Century - a creeping sense of the 'hopeless naïveté' of such utopian ideas about wide-scale revolution or social change or about the possibility of real alternatives to existing social and economic orders.

Once, some of the ideas of 1970s communards and broader New Social Movements – for example racial equality, equal pay for women, the value of organic or health food, recycling, or environmentalism – were seen as fairly crazy and threatening to the status quo as part of demands for radical social change. In the 1960s such concerns and ideas were both seen as threatening and ridiculed or dismissed (Roszak, 1969). It is important to realise that the communities of my participants were existent at a time when this was still largely the case.

Arguably now some of these ideas are comparatively mainstream, acceptable, 'status quo', at least in their less radical guises; arguably they are being remade to fit into the market, to work within the status quo, and made 'practical' – made liberal rather than radical, that is - tweaked in order to fit round the established order rather than calling for its overhauling as an essential part of the challenge such ideas necessitated, and therefore neutralised and absorbed, but still changing the world for the better in small ways. (See Appendix 1, quote 22). The ideology of communes and communards in the 1970s ran a spectrum, but even those who did not recognise themselves as overtly political often held quite radical world-views compared to the rest of the population of Britain at that time. According to Rigby after studying communes in the 1970s '... for any individual to join a commune he must first feel dissatisfied with at least certain

aspects of his life in conventional society' (Rigby, 1974a, p. 13). The concerns of communards to find fulfilling lifestyles may not seem so unusual now that the process of individualisation's demand for people to be choosing, self-creating individuals has put the pursuit of self and self-fulfilment into such a central location in our lives in the mainstream (Beck, 2001). In that past era of the 1960s and '70s, questioning conventions such as marriage and working practices, and not 'doing your duty' in any number of ways, was more extraordinary and had previously been a privilege of only a tiny minority of very privileged radicals. The era of the 1960s and 1970s was one when much larger numbers of (predominantly middle-class) young people began to demand fulfilment from their lives and have an interest in social justice and alternative lifestyles in the UK (Byrne, 1997). Nonetheless those radical enough to become involved in New Social Movements like the Communes Movement, remained a minority. Even more broadly than the subculture of the subculture that constituted the communes movement, those involved in any kind of 'New Social Movement' remained relatively few in number according to Paul Byrne. (See Appendix 1, quote 23)

Relationality, Community, Subjectivity

Central to the concerns of my research was the notion of 'community' and the attempt to remake relationships, both society-wide and domestically, along more egalitarian lines, as well as these notions of autonomy and self-expression, which were key concerns in the communes movement of the 1970s. As Philip Abrams and Andrew McCulloch commented in their research about communes of that era: 'Communes are ... a species of association and a species of encounter' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 25). They are also 'demonstration projects for a gentle revolution of the individual' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 6).

Communes were notoriously hard on partnerships despite such strong interest in relationship, connection and mutuality, according to Aidala (1989) and Jaffe and Kanter (1976). (See Appendix 1, quote 24). Some clue to the tensions of life in communes for those attempting exclusive pair bonding is given by Abrams and McCulloch's comment:

'What is wanted [by communards] is a self intimately involved with others and yet intact in itself; the 'possibility of deep relationships with a number of other people, self discovery in a situation where one can experiment and develop.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 32)

Self discovery, and the environment, space and time to focus on exploring self and relationship was a common motivation for communards to get involved, according to Andrew Rigby. (See Appendix 1, quote 25).

The interest in new forms of social life and individual fulfilment is an interest which has ballooned across post-industrial western societies since the onset of modernity, and it is hardly a new comment to make that the youth movements of the 60s and 70s spearheaded a movement which tore at the roots of traditional order (either allowing positive change or beginning the descent into self-obsession and intemperance, or both, depending on your viewpoint) and which we are seeing the results of across the whole of society today. This tearing up of old forms and the insistence upon the freedom to be 'self-creating' has played out across the mainstream social landscape (Beck, 2001; Giddens, 1994).

This ethic of communes, self-fulfilment and relationship that have the dual demands of autonomy and group cohesion and care, have been accompanied by another more widespread and 'mainstream' vision which has promoted a form of self-sufficient and competitive individualism (Beck, 2001). Now it is, arguably, hard to distinguish one kind of individualism from another. It can seem difficult to imagine 'creative individualism' (Rigby, 1974a), a subjectivity that could hold within it the paradox of the social nature of human community, whilst at the same time paying such high homage to individual expression and freedom. Such a subjectivity attempts to pull away from restrictions and disadvantages inherent in hierarchical systems, such as traditional positioning of class, gender race, attempts dis-embedding from many previous and traditional roles and relationships. At the same time it attempts to build new social worlds in which to re-embed new social spaces (less restrictive ones, in this utopian vision) to inhabit.

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) explain their vision of the process of individualisation as being an impossible tension between the demands to be an autonomous individual, who is free to fit into the neo-liberal economic labour market, and the qualities of commitment, care, embeddedness and stability needed for successful home and family life. (See Appendix 1, quote 26).

Commune-dwellers could be both seen as having been critics of this move towards individualism and inherent stress on family and community in modern society because of their perception of a lack of communal life, and to have

brought to the fore a need to renegotiate social life in order to allow greater equality between people - this dual pull between the desire for an autonomous but necessarily social self - attempting to solve the puzzle with affirmative action by setting up communities which shielded them from the worst ravages of the lifestyles of modernity, and began a process of attempting to renegotiate how domestic and working lives should be arranged in order to gain maximum freedom and equality for all.

Communards could also be seen as heralding in a move towards further individualisation with their demands for self-creation, self-fulfilment, self-realisation and self-expression, and their rejection, along with tradition, of duty, formal structure and commitment, which we are now (thirty years on from the heyday of the communes movement in the mid seventies) seeing the longer term effects of:

‘The Western type of individualised society tells us to seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions. For example, the tension in family life today is the fact that equality of men and women cannot be created in an institutional family structure which presupposes and enforces their inequality.’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, preface, xxi)

Just like the mainstream nuclear family, communes in the 1970s found difficulties in managing how inequalities in the wider world impacted upon the social world inside, particularly economic inequalities (access to money or good jobs was not equal between men and women), or different classes or races, for example, and only certain kinds of work would be remunerated by the world at large, which didn't include looking after your own children or household. For many people who turned to commune life the vision of competitive individualism and bondage to the labour market, as well as conventional forms of nuclear family life, was what was being rejected.

Individualism was also at the heart of the comunard project (Rigby, 1974a). A strange new combination of individual freedom and the search for personal fulfilment, and the ethos of relationship and community, social care and ‘genuine’ (as opposed to dutiful) contact with other people created a heady brew which had at its heart a version of what Anthony Giddens (1992) describes in his study of love and intimacy as ‘pure relationship’. This new vision of the possibilities of familial and social relations as ‘pure relationship’ is a vision that seems to offer more potential for fulfilment to individuals (and families) through an attempt to evade restrictive social structures that do not value or support this kind of ‘pure’ relationship.

In retreating from city life, from career achievement or material goals, and in an attempt to evade the pressures of the labour market (by pooling resources and minimising the necessity to produce a lot of income, and often through attempts to be more 'self sufficient'), communards were consciously rejecting 'given' roles and traditions, and this was true of how they viewed traditional marriage and family life too, as restrictive. Many communards were seeking more flexible relationships and more 'meaningful' encounters in the social world, according to William Smith in his study of families in communes in America (1999). (See Appendix 1, quote 27).

This desire for more 'meaningful' 'exploratory' 'freer' 'pure' types of intimate relationship is a concept which Giddens (1992) describes and tracks as the current trend in relationship 'style' and structure throughout society over the last fifty years. Pure relationship implies a shift from marriages and relationships shored up and enforced by social structure and accepted as 'given' structures, that life was lived within, towards a kind of relationship based not on structure but on flexibility and content. It is the quality of the 'contact' or the 'intimacy' between people which is the focus of this new kind of relationship. A pure relationship is one freely chosen and always with a 'get out clause' possible for both people. The people involved in 'pure' relationship, according to Giddens, look for more emotion from their relationships than previous generations might have. Relationships must offer positive benefits, rather than simply being 'bearable', to be seen as worth maintaining. As people asked for 'more' from life, and the modern 'subject' the reflexive project of 'self-creation' began to come to the fore society wide, relationship and community were obvious sites to be affected. (See Appendix 1, quote 28).

Communes perhaps present an opportunity for reflection about the interplay between independence, self-responsibility and dependence or mutuality. These reflections about the experimental communes of the 1970s may offer insights to a wider society as family forms shift across the board and other pressures of post-modern society continue to create tensions which communards were attempting to find solutions to, according to Laurie Taylor (2003). (See Appendix 1, quote 29).

The 'filter down effect' from middle class practice to general practice which Taylor talks about means that groups like the communards, who in the 1970s felt themselves to be radicals attempting 'alternatives', now look much more in line with how relatively large sections of the population feel about family life in

the context of a post-modern world, where such practices have become problematic and contentious for many. (See Appendix 1, quote 30).

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) caution us against being hasty to judge responses to this dilemma, about family life and traditional marriage as being narcissistic, hedonist, selfish or 'permissive' in a pejorative sense of that term. Caught between 'love and freedom' and the demands of the modern labour market, men and women are, to some extent, genuinely between a rock and a hard place, in their view. (See Appendix 1, quote 31)

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim talk about '... an awakening of, or a fight for, co-operative individualism, which presupposes [in couple relationships or marriages] that each has a right to a life of his or her own and that the terms of living together have to be renegotiated in each case. The twofold search for individuation, which is often unsuccessful, might be termed the freedom culture.' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, p. 4). They describe how these domestic conflicts and personal struggles are played out always already in relation to the landscape of wider society and the wider world (in a global market economy) so that: 'Individualisation is a compulsion, albeit a paradoxical one, to create, to stage manage, not only one's own biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it and do this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life, while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labour market, the education system, the welfare state and so on.' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, p. 4)

The longed for freedom to self-seek that the communards and other radicals of the 1960s and '70s envisaged from the restrictive social environment of their young lives has ironically become a pressured, rather than free, mainstream necessity. Soul searching and management of the self and one's individual life path choices has become an almost inevitable facet of experience. Arguably this shift towards individualisation has been so dramatic that for younger people now it is hard to imagine the very different context of their parents' young lives and, therefore, their very different responses and thoughts. To understand communes of the 1970s it is important to attempt to recollect the cry for freedom inherent in counter cultural movements of the time (Roszak, 1969).

In the process of self-realisation many communards, even those not involved in directly 'self actualising' communes, had some engagement with psychotherapeutic discourse or practice, according to Rigby (1974b).

Throughout the 1980s therapy culture became much more prominent in

communes (Zablocki, 1980) as it did across the board (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). Arguably the counter cultural demand for 'self realisation' and creative individualism became a more mainstream and commoditised concern than it had been when Roszak (1969) was describing the 'radical demands' of counter cultures of the 1960s for an experience of self more vivid and less inhibited than previous generations' subjectivity. (See Appendix 1, quote 32).

What made communes fascinating, is that whilst they can easily be seen as part of the movement towards this concern with the individual, they also had such strong emphasis on community, on the group, on relationship and relationality and rejected existing structures of social life of the time. Their experimentation with relationship and family life in particular seems, in retrospect, to have been a powerful sign of the times:

'This would seem to be the special legacy of communes. With old patterns no longer compelling and new institutional arrangements not yet in place, intense ideological communities allow limited experimentation with alternatives to conventional beliefs and behaviours. Not all alternatives are viable guides for social life. However, the mere existence of noisy competitors erodes the authority of traditional forms (Aidala, 1985). In the area of family life, once assumed imperatives seemingly determined by a biology of sex and age are no longer seen as self-evident and 'natural.' Communal experiments were both manifestation of and contributed to the larger process of family change.' (Aidala, 1989, p. 335)

Perhaps in contrast to these ideals of individual fulfilment in the ideology of communards in the seventies was a strong echo of the Marxist notion of 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need' - inclusive notions of community prevalent in the commune movement (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976). Communes were anti structure but pro community; many in the movement saw capitalist society as not caring enough about peoples' welfare in preference of profit. Their attempts to maintain an ethos of collectivity and social responsibility, as well as individual freedom, could be argued to have bucked the trend of competitive individualism. (See Appendix 1, quotes 33 and 34).

Communes of the 1970s, then, can be seen as both echoing societal trends towards individualism, but maintaining a utopian vision of community despite that. Much is made in sociological literatures about the problems of communes and their failure to work out. Often this is because the population does not stay stable rather than because the whole project falls apart (Zablocki, 1989).

Communes are described in some literatures (Kanter, 1976) as performing important functions for members as temporary places to live rather than as life

long homes - between two and five years is an average time for a member to remain in a community, according to Rigby (1974b). This view-changing population does not necessarily constitute a failure of the communal project. Longevity or stability is only one way of understanding 'success'. The attempt to create community, whether in a commune or not, is often fragile, as Zygmunt Bauman illustrates beautifully in his book 'Community' (2001) (See Appendix 1, quote 35).

According to Rigby (1974a), communes, at least in theory, wanted to be inclusive and have space for everyone who wanted to be included, whatever their differing financial status, level of need or ability. These ways of seeing community – communard ideas about deep connection and common humanity – make using more functionalist sociological analysis of these ideas and ways of being problematic, now as then (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976). (See Appendix 1, quote 36).

According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001), with the roots of tradition torn up, questions about the individual come to the fore. (See Appendix 1, quote 37). The exploration of the self, of personal experience, and individual and group consciousness which many communards were interested in, meant that the realms of feelings and of belief were important to many communards, and some of the belief systems may have originally had an intellectual basis but been mutated and transformed so that they were no longer owned as having a source outside the individual person or group's heart and soul (Roszak, 1969). This reliance on 'feeling' as a guide to how to live was apparent to researchers of communes in the 1970s and came across when participants tried to describe the thinking behind certain beliefs, and found it hard to pinpoint any particular ideology other than it 'feeling' right to people. '... Anti-rationalism [of commune members] here reflects a profound belief that the analytical and emotional aspects of life are out of balance, that the former is stifling the latter and that an important task of communes is to redress the balance.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 10)

According to Rigby, (1974a, 1974b) communards tended to believe that the project they were involved in was freeing themselves and others from imposed societal conditioning so that a true, natural, or inner self could surface. This 'self' was often assumed to be loving, happy and caring, positive and concerned with the welfare of all as well as the welfare of itself. Any deviation from such expressions of inner self or higher self were seen to be due to repression,

conditioning, the effects of 'the system' warping an essentially co-operative and loving core self which carried a spirit of humanity and the hopes of all.

But as well as 'the self' that was seen as natural and naturally good (Rigby, 1974a), the ego was seen as a force of division and destruction, a dark side of the self, and suppressing the ego was something often seen as necessary to communal living. This paradox of self-seeking individuals who are also concerned with group cohesion, is described by Abrams & McCulloch as 'a turning to social relations as they turn away from society. Ending up with a culture in communes in which there was a lot of criticism of 'self centredness' or 'not pulling one's weight' – reciprocity in social relations was apparently quite high on the agenda in communal life. (See Appendix 1, quote 38).

What Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) say of common and mainstream experience of narcissistic 'self seeking' in the 1990s has remarkable resonance with what researchers in the 1970s found remarkable, radical and unusual about communards (Rigby, 1974b; Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Zablocki, 1980):

'... talking about an age of narcissism is justified, but it is a distorting and misleading label, as it underestimates the scope and effect of the energies which have been unleashed. Largely involuntary and driven by social changes, individuals are entering a searching and explorative phase. They want to try out and "experience" (in the active sense of the word) new ways of living to counteract the dominance of roles (man, woman, family, career) that are becoming increasingly irrelevant. They want to express themselves freely and give in to impulses they used to suppress. They allow themselves to enjoy life here and now and not just in the distant future, and to cultivate a conscious delight in the good things in life... Casting off standard patterns in one's life and ideas becomes a permanent habit, an unending personal learning process. Instead of the old fixed images there is a new picture of mankind which specifically includes the possibility of metamorphosis, of personal development and growth.' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 43)

This sounds like a description of exactly what many adult communards were reaching for (See Appendix 1, quote 39), even though in their generation it was further from the norm, according to Hall & Jefferson (1976), Roszak (1969) and Yablonsky (1968).

It is important to note that communes formed, in the main, as part of a conscious attempt to reform public and private life. The new wave of intentional communities, or communes, which sprang up in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s, marked a new move towards secular attempts at reshaping social life idealistically. These new secular communities did look to past attempts at living apart from mainstream life in Britain, Europe and the USA.

Many of these had been more directly religiously inspired, and spearheaded by groups of radical Protestants, but with a similar vision of a simpler, better, more moral life shaping such 'escape attempts' as in the twentieth century. In some cases this produced a move towards communalism inspired not by religiosity but by secular concerns. The choice to take up a minority or marginal lifestyle when one has a relatively privileged positioning in the mainstream makes new social movements and the communes movement poignant because of what participants in these movements felt was lacking in their lives despite their apparent privilege, according to Rigby (1974a, 1974b). (See Appendix 1, quote 40).

The communards' fundamental world view, along with others of their generation who became involved in new social movements, might be described as 'post-materialist'. According to Byrne (1997): 'Inglehart argues that the post-war generation is concerned with "higher order needs". These are defined as a desire for opportunities for personal growth and development, and a rejection of formal hierarchies in favour of participation at all levels of decision-making – expressing oneself rather than acquiring more and more material goods' (Byrne, 1997, p. 55). And an important point to note is that, although commune-dwellers were a minority group, and their lifestyles and views did mark them (and their children) out as 'outsiders', this did not nullify the privilege that many of them had in their basic positioning. Byrne goes on to say:

'The point we seek to make here is that "outsider" status must not be equated with disadvantage. If anything, social movements attract the more articulate in society' (Byrne, 1997, p. 19). (See Appendix 1, quote 41).

Anthony Giddens (1992) talks about 'plastic sexuality' and the 'pure relationship'. Sex in this vision is 'decentred sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction.... Plastic sexuality can be moulded as a trait of personality and thus is intrinsically bound up with the self' (Giddens, 1992, p. 2), and relationship is focused on content, on the notion of self-fulfilment through relationship, in sharp contrast to traditional forms of family structure and relationship, which had practical and economic concerns at their heart and were, as such, more focused on structure than content (in terms of human experience or happiness) and did not have modern or post-modern notions of equality.

Giddens extends the notion of 'pure relationship', with its negotiated commitment and quest for individual fulfilment beyond sexual partnerships, into relationships between parents and children too:

'In the separating and divorcing society, the nuclear family generates a diversity of new kin ties associated, for example, with so-called recombinant families. However, the nature of these ties changes as they are subject to greater negotiation than before. Kinship relations often used to be a taken for granted basis of trust; now trust has to be negotiated and bargained for, and commitment is as much of an issue as in sexual relationships.' (Giddens, 1992, p. 96)

The experience of commune children could be seen as part of, or a forerunner of, this wider experimentation with new forms of childrearing and parent-child relationship. Allowing children, as well as adults, a greater degree of autonomy and choice, and a greater range of relationship form and people with whom to form attachments, was a declared objective of many who became involved with communal living - particularly women or mothers who were influenced by notions of women's liberation and wished to experiment with scenarios which might allow them greater freedom and autonomy than a conventional marriage or nuclear family (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976).

In line with Abrams & McCulloch's suspicion of some 'hip men' in communes, who they saw as 'predatory', Giddens also draws attention to the important claim of feminist thinkers who deflect the accusation that women (and feminists in particular) have contributed alone to 'family breakdown', by placing changes in men's behaviour and attitudes (an unwillingness or rebellion against marriage, fatherhood and the economic demands of being a breadwinner) as pre-existing the second wave of feminism in the 1960's and 70's. (See Appendix 1, quote 42).

This kind of observation of wider society is relevant when attempting to gain an idea of the sort of climate in which communal life was set, and the currents and trends moving within it. A suspicion of conventional masculinity, in terms of a rejection of simply serving the market and those who profit from it, rather than serving people and their needs, was present in these environments, along with a questioning of women's roles, and to some extent a questioning of the whole notion of parenting as natural and inevitable. (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976).

'A commune takes the strain off the mother and allows her to lead a life of her own' says one respondent in Abrams and McCulloch's study (1976, p. 148). But they saw this as being largely untrue in their observation of communes:

'Clearly the pursuit of this kind of freedom, if it is to be coupled with the more positive freedom envisaged for children, calls for delicate, elaborate and self-conscious organisation of the relationships between children and adults in the commune as a whole. It is this kind of organisation which the constant turnover of membership of most communes and the ideological objection of many commune members to anything resembling deliberate social organisation make extremely difficult.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 148)

Abrams & McCulloch echo Kanter (1973) in her observation of US communes when they say that often the problem with organising things so that children are properly cared for in communes was resolved by women, frightened for the welfare of children 'going back to mothering.' They saw that women often ended up being the losers in this scenario, but sometimes it was the children who ended up with nobody really willing to shoulder the loss of autonomy involved in taking a parenting role with them. They echo Giddens (1992) in his comments about men's rejection of parenting roles when they say:

'a balance is struck between the respective freedoms of the child and the adult in which in most cases the parent, especially the male parent, does manage to 'spread the load' of responsibility somewhat, while quite often the life of the child is haphazard at best and manifestly insecure at worst.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 148). (See Appendix 1, quote 43).

Clearly such libertarian parenting attitudes were not only present within communes but were also within many liberal, intellectual, middle-class family environments where parents were similarly influenced by counter cultural ideas similar to the list Roszak's (1969) study provided.

Women's liberation was a declared intention of many communes (Zablocki, 1980; Kanter, 1973; Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Rigby, 1974a, 1974b).

Communes arguably created a small enclave, where such ideas were seen not as deviant but as entirely right-minded (at least in theory). This was one of the ideas for which communards sought the support of other like-minded people through becoming involved with communes (Rigby, 1974b). Thus, according to Rigby (1974b) and Abrams & McCulloch (1976), conscious attempts were made (to a greater or lesser extent) to undermine gender stereotypes and roles and to allow men and women greater freedom to embrace identities that might, in other spaces, have been responded to with disapproval, as being 'unnatural' or wrong.

Kanter (1977, p. 77) and Smith (1999, p. 89) make claims for communes and their utopian experiments having laid a path for the idea of the 'post-biological' family now relatively common in the post-modern world. Sociologists of the 'family' have stressed how the reality of family forms have always been more

diverse than the nuclear family, and how the notion of the 'normality' of nuclear family life really only became powerful in the twentieth century (Stacey, 1996). Nonetheless, this 'ideal' holds a hegemonic place in the public imagination. Deviation from this hegemonic 'norm' and the 'post-biological' and diverse alternatives are becoming more socially acceptable at the beginning of the twenty first century, according to some (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). But in the 1960s and '70s this was not yet the case, and this puts communal experiments of those times in a particularly radical positioning - often on the receiving end of significant criticism from mainstream society, according to Rigby (1974a).

Smith (1999) claims that, in the communes in the USA that he studied, commune members tended to come from close-knit families of origin rather than (as he believed might be expected) from those who had difficult experiences of early life or family, and were seeking not so much to make alternative families, but more to gain support for their unconventional world view and preferred way of life.

'While communes seek to become families, they are, at the same time, something different from families; they are groups with their own unique form, something between communities, organisations, families, and friendship groups, and they contain families in their midst as well as generate family-like feeling throughout the whole communal group' (Kanter, 1973a, p. 401)

The idea was that communal life would provide a more equal and helpful platform for women than mainstream, conventional, nuclear family life could manage. (See Appendix 1, quote 44). The idea was to attempt to make the cost of living cheaper and paid work, therefore, less (or not at all) necessary, as well as freeing time (through shared childcare) for women to work; and to provide some alternative to traditional reliance on women-only domestic labour (through shared housekeeping and childcare) and to ease the isolation of mothers with young children (Rigby, 1974a). For many women the ideal was also a space away from and outside current female roles: a place to live without being so confined by current ideas and ideals of femininity; a place to escape the ways of thinking that supported restrictive roles for both genders; a place for a new subjectivity (Rigby, 1974a). (See Appendix 1, quote 45).

Kibbutz life in Israel was seen to be of enormous interest by communards because of the shared childcare model it provided, as well as the shared resources and work which kibbutz life organised so efficiently; in Israel the kibbutz seemed to work. (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Rigby, 1974b). For some

women, communes were primarily about making childcare and domestic work a part of a whole community's business, rather than the sole responsibility of women; a chance to start off from a new structure rather than staying in the same condition (a nuclear set-up), and struggling against the internal and external barriers to change. Gender roles, childcare and domestic labour were issues that were openly debated with a directly political agenda in some communes (Rigby, 1974a). For other women, other communities, feminist ideas were not so high on the agenda, but some notion of women's liberation and women's equality was likely to be in evidence in talk comparing commune life to conventional life (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976).

Kanter and Halter (1973) claimed some success for US communes in breaking down sex-role stereotypes, but noted that childrearing remained the women's responsibility. Communes themselves often assumed that communes were good places for women because they were not nuclear families, which were 'oppressive' to women, but this could be rather less evident in practice according to Abrams and McCulloch (1976). (See Appendix 1, quote 46).

According to them, communards were not always willing to make personal sacrifices (like washing up or doing child care, sharing income etc) in order to advance the end result of greater equality for others (See Appendix 1, quote 47).

Non-parents sometimes struggled with the demands that 'shared parenting' made on their time and emotional resources, particularly in a world of shifting attachments and populations, as this testimonial from an adult communard illustrates:

'I am a non-parent; please do not invalidate what I have said because of this. I have a wish to have a child biologically bonded to me. I have cared for [two children] for seven and a half years, yet I still have that wish, that need – why? Firstly because I'd like to see what it looked like; secondly it would be mine. MINE. Mine in the sense that it could not be taken away, taken away from me. I would not mind it leaving me or me leaving it, but to be taken I do mind. I mind a lot and as I write this my heart twists and knots itself and my mind slowly and my mind slows to allow my emotions not to hinder what I write. The non-parent is less free than the parent. I cannot afford to tell a child to go to its mother when I feel shitty. I cannot afford to shout at it so much. I must give – and be confronted with rejections of 'I want Mummy to do it'; 'I don't want you'. I have to fight with that pain. I must love the person who kicks and bites me... Yes, I can help. Help wash shitty nappies that make me feel like puking, help when there is mess to clear, help when Mummy doesn't want to, help when woken by screams in the night 'cos Mummy's not to be found – again and again – I must give and trust.' (From a letter in Communes Network Magazine, Spring 1984)

This letter-writer discusses the need for the biological parents to step back from their children in order to allow others, non-parents, a chance to build relationships with them, despite the guilt that the parents might feel and the distress of the children involved. This begs a very real question about the status of both children and non-parents in this scenario, where potentially children's expression of their own needs are dismissed as childish whimsy: '...difficult to let a child scream while others try to comfort them knowing that a hug from Mummy or Daddy could stop the screams sooner...' as a communes dweller commented in the self published UK based 'Communes Network Magazine' (1984, p21). Abrams and McCulloch's research echoes this personal testimonial, in their research they noted that non-parents had the hard work and responsibility but not the rights which a biological parent retained legally and often socially in the culture of communes (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976).

As women (or anyone else) were not 'paid' for childcare in communes in any of the studies that I have read, and, generally, could not command the same kinds of remuneration for work outside their communities, communal situations did not liberate them from economic dependency on men, to the extent that Abrams and McCulloch said of the situation that there was at most a 'marginal relaxation of the facticity in which the ordinary family is engulfed.' (1976:p145). (See Appendix 1, quote 48)

Abrams and McCulloch also believed, after their research, that women had been somewhat hoodwinked by men in their communes, that women nearly always ended up caving to pressure to do the work of parenting whilst men got out of it, and could pretend that women were 'equal' and thereby be relieved in conscience of any guilt involved in abandoning their women and children. (1976:145). (See Appendix 1, quote 49). Women searching for environments that supported their independence from men, or liberation to parent singly, might also be disappointed by communes, according to Abrams & McCulloch, who claimed that these women, particularly single mothers, were often seen as a drain on the commune, and this was framed in terms of 'givers' and 'takers.' (1976, p. 136-7). (See Appendix 1, quote 50). This language of giving and taking extended, in Abrams & McCulloch's view, to excluding those who were seen as too needy, in some communities; thus at a stroke leaving women who did not have the economic and emotional support of a man, and were therefore seen as (or were genuinely) in need of extra support, outside the inner circle of communal acceptance.

Despite all the experimentation and flexibility, Abrams & McCulloch were cynical about the extent to which sex roles really were broken down in UK communes, and were even more cynical about this in regard to childcare – seeing childcare as even harder for women in communes than in the outside world, because men in the world of communes could more easily claim their right to express or be ‘themselves’ and eschew onerous or dutiful relationship work (1976, p.144). (See Appendix 1, quote 51).

Whatever difficulties emerged in connection with actually attempting to implement genuine gender equality in communes, the strong presence of ideas of women’s liberation and approval of such ideas created a very particular kind of landscape for commune-raised children to live in; one populated by men who cook and clean, and women who drive tractors (Rigby, 1974a), with an attitude that conforming to (perceived, mainstream) societal norms is something unhealthy and to be avoided. (See Appendix 1, quote 52).

Children in communes were often left in the ‘in-between’ space – not fully included in either the mainstream (outside) culture or the dominant (adult) culture of the commune (inside) – a space of acute self-consciousness, where ‘fitting in’ is often a conscious practice, and marginality keenly felt. According to Abrams & McCulloch:

‘The more common situation is for the commune to send its children to the local school and to see that as a positive move towards closer contact with the local community rather than as an offering of hostages to the system – in fact, of course, it is both. This willingness to accept the established system of education not only has the effect we have already mentioned of facing commune members with a very powerful demand, mediated by the children, for the establishment of “normal” family relationships and responsibilities, it is also indicative of the real situation of children in communes as something less than full members.’ (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 147)

In Abrams & McCulloch’s view, children were clearly not consulted or considered as fully as adults in the community:

‘...children, although usually taken seriously by adults, tend to be kept in a firmly secondary condition. The heart of the wrangle about the children’s food at [a commune] was not, so far as we could judge, the question of what the children wanted to eat, but the question of what they should be required to eat’ (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 148)

They go on to describe other incidents which, in their opinion, illustrate how children’s needs were attended to as a secondary concern to adults’, how children ‘run wild but no one seems to consider very much what the children themselves might offer on decisions’ (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 148).

Abrams & McCulloch tell an emotive story about a little girl who was left very alone after losing a group of children who were her peers, as they had to leave with their parents after a bust-up at the community, and who was 'devoting enormous energy to making a father of... a young man who had just joined the group; however, [his] willingness to play this role was fluctuating; often completely generous and whole-hearted, it could vanish suddenly when more pressing adult concerns claimed his attention. One night when her mother was away Amy cried desperately for hours before [he] got around to remembering her' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 149). Their analysis was that situations like Amy's tended to mean that some children were left rather at sea while adults attended to their own needs, whereas others were 'rescued' by their mother's willingness to step in and pick up the 'mothering' role rather than leave children at the mercy of inconsistent others. Indeed, they claimed that, even in the most stable and successful communes, 'once a woman willing to accept a mothering role has been found – she tends to end up as the effective mother of the whole commune...' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, 149).

Communes were often attempts to find other adults to love and be loved by in a counter-cultural world of shifting partnerships and the undermining of structure, in an alternative culture where content or quality of 'connection' was prioritised. 'In almost all its forms, therefore, the commune movement is an attempt to maximise values while minimising structure... What is sought is both freedom (self-realisation) and security (togetherness), both a sense of autonomy and a sense of attachment' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 127).

However communes did not always manage to deliver:

'... to repudiate the possibility of drawing on externalised, "structural", arrangements as a source of reconciliation [of these opposites] the whole burden of solving the problem is thrown on the daily ad hoc practice of relationships. Among other things this makes the life of a commune highly unpredictable' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 128)

In a scene in which commitment and freedom seemed to pull people in opposite directions, some children in communities did play a part of being (perhaps the only long term) constant relationship their parents were engaged in. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim describe the situation for some children in newer, more flexible and diverse family forms which have similarities to communes:

'The child becomes the last remaining, irrevocable, unique primary love object. Partners come and go, but the child stays... Everything one vainly hoped to find in the relationship with one's partner is sought in or directed at the child... Here an

atavistic social experience can be celebrated and cultivated which in a society of individuals is increasingly rare, although everyone craves it' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 37)

Relationships within communes were sometimes somewhat fragile, being kept in place by a 'commitment to open-ended interaction as a formula for both love and self-realisation' (Smith, 1999), with rejection of prescribed roles or structures. (See Appendix 1, quote 53 and 54). As well as (or perhaps because of) the upheaval of the break-ups and changes in formation of relationship that this strategy allowed, the populations of communes themselves were notoriously unstable, with many people managing to live for only a few years in these circumstances. (See Appendix 1, quote 55)

Scene-setting...

In this chapter I have attempted to give a flavour of how communes, and particularly children, family and relationships in communes were described in previous literatures. I have focused more on including descriptive passages than on summarising ideas about communes' history or how communes were placed in wider society or in New Social Movements. I have drawn parallels between now widespread changes to the 'family' and communes, seeing these changes as foreshadowed, influential to and influenced by both the thinking of the counter culture of the 1960s and '70s, and the experimental practices of family and relationship of communes of this era. I have tried to outline some sense of the counter culture or New Social Movements of that era, from which communards drew many of their ideas and influences, drawing links between the ideas of these movements and the way in which communes functioned and commune-dwellers thought about the world. I have attempted to set the scene in which the stories, memories and opinions of my participants will now appear, and to give my reader some understanding of the kinds of environments and practice my participants and I might have lived in, as children in communes, from other people's perspective.

To summarise: communes had agendas, strong agendas, of reforming personal life. These were not always stated clearly or cohesively (as communes were often anti-rational and also often had many vying viewpoints within them) or put into practice through purposeful or formal structuring of social relations (as communes were often anti-structure). Children in communes in the 1970s were living in the middle of a heady mix of debates about how one should live and about how the wider world should be different from the way it was. A strong theme was the dual pull of self-fulfilment and personal freedom and the desire

to look after and include the weaker or more dependent members of society and to be inclusive; and to value connection and relationship; to value community itself in the form of a kind of strong version of friendship. Sexual relationships were sometimes rather unstable in communal environments, and the situation of instability or inconsistency was often exacerbated by a high turnover of membership. That was a significant problem in terms of organising life in communes. Women's liberation formed a strong sub-theme in communes and this dovetailed with debates about perceived failings of the nuclear family. Children were often not categorised as full members or considered specifically in terms of where they fitted into a community's membership or structure. Childcare was rarely organised in a genuinely shared way, but often left mainly to parents, particularly mothers, with some support from others around. Children were often uniquely positioned in a movement between the alternative culture of their communal home and the mainstream culture they inhabited at school or through other attachments, such as to family members who lived outside the commune.

Chapter Two

Method – Mapping the shifting sands

'There are places I'll remember
 All my life, though some have changed
 Some forever, not for better
 Some have gone and some remain
 All these places had their moments
 With lovers and friends, I still can recall
 Some are dead and some are living
 In my life, I've loved them all'
John Lennon In my life lyrics

In this chapter I will begin with briefly summarising the practical process of the research methods used in this project, and then tell the story of how those choices came about and how they relate to methodological issues. Illustrative quotes that I believe would be useful background information to support the unusual methodology I have chosen have been included in Appendix 2.

Practical process and practice

I established in my original research proposal that I was interested in researching a generation of commune raised people who are now adult but spent time as children in intentional communities in the UK in the 1970s and early 80s (See Appendix 2, quote 1). I also established key areas of interest: tensions between communal upbringings as a primary socialisation and formal education; parenting practice; identities of commune-raised people as adults. When I came to approach the research I found that the core of my true interest was less to do with careers and entrepreneurial skills, as suggested in my original proposal, and more to do with the (memories of) experiences of commune raised people as children and the sense-making processes they were now engaged in as adults having had these unusual childhood contexts.

I decided to adopt a more autobiographical method and to allow an exploration my own experience to become more central to the research process. I also decided that I was more interested in qualitative methods and allowed the focus, methodologically, to become more strictly about memory, biography and autobiography. I began using my personal contacts to find potential participants, as well as beginning to approach existing communes looking for ways to contact participants, whilst I began a thorough reading of relevant

literatures (See Appendix 2 quote 2). Key methodological texts were: Cosslett, Lury & Summerfield (2000); Davies and Gannon (2006); Gilgun, Daly & Handel (1992); Gilligan (1982); Griffiths (1995); Kuhn (1995); Maynard & Purvis (1994); Naples (2003); Radstone (2000a); Ramazanoglu & Holland (2002).

Autobiographical writing and finding themes

After becoming immersed in reading, I began writing autobiographical material and exploring my own experience of my memories of my communal upbringing and the issues of relationality and identity involved for me now. From this reflexive practice I honed down some more specific areas of interest to do with resistant or counter-cultural identities and ideologies, gender, parenting, relationship and relationality, a sense of being marginal or alternative as opposed to 'mainstream,' experiences of having to don different performative identities in different social spaces (for example at home and at school), issues to do with divorce and separation and changes in relationships among adults around me as a child, and questions to do with dependency and independence, power and individualism. From my own thinking through of the areas of interest from my autobiographical reflections and reflexive practice I wrote a list of potential questions for respondents.

Allowing key areas of research to emerge from pilots

I then engaged in pilot interviews, five in total, all the people of whom came through personal contacts. I supplied my autobiographical writing and a list of questions along with an introductory letter (all of which are included in Appendix 3). This encouraged participants towards engagement with self-reflexive process and, particularly, towards resistant readings of my autobiographical material, where their marking of different experiences or ways of thinking were positioned as very valuable to the research. This material was supplied to participants at least two weeks in advance of interview: This was in the hope that it would give participants a chance to think about their responses to questions, engage in their own process of 'sense-making' in relation to my work, and decide how they wished to respond; what they wished to engage with or refuse to talk about, and, in particular, how their experience might offer areas of difference to mine as laid out in my autobiographical writing.

In interview, I made an exploration and 'sense-making' mission in collaboration with participants to shape the research's areas of enquiry and to engage in a process of analysis in discussion with participants in the hope that the data

might stand as a kind of first order analysis, and therefore be suitable for inclusion in a fairly raw form. Interviews took place in each participant's home on a one to one basis and were recorded. They were long interviews, mostly around between two and four hours.

Listening back to these pilot interviews with attention to which areas were of particular interest to participants, which things they most wanted to talk about, and which they had in common with each other, I then amended my areas of enquiry and my list of questions in response to the concerns and interests of the pilot participants.

In response to the fact that all the pilot participants were women and they raised some very interesting areas of experience related to gender in their memories, experience and current sense of self, I made the decision to focus only on women participants and their specific concerns and memories. I also made the choice to narrow the focus and only include participants who had been raised in rural communities (rather than urban ones) as a way to create more similarity between the environments of participants' childhoods¹. I decided to keep to my original plan of speaking to participants who had been children in communes with a geographical spread across the UK during the 1970s and early '80s. At this point I also decided that I would change names of participants and communities in the research as a response to the ethical issues involved in participants' disclosures, which I judged might be potentially difficult or damaging to themselves and others.

Interviews

Nine further participants were then interviewed from a total of six original communes. All participants came through personal and family contacts in the end. (Further information about these communes and participants is included in Appendix 4). I used the same method as with pilot interviews of supplying my autobiographical material – an introductory letter and list of questions in advance. I then asked participants to choose which questions they wanted to discuss and if there were other things they would like to talk about that weren't included. I encouraged participants to be active in directing interview processes, and I made clear that I was interested in where they disagreed with me or their experience was different to mine. As with the pilots, these recorded interviews took place on a one to one basis in participants' own homes and lasted between two and four hours. I made clear to participants involved that they and their communities would remain as anonymous as possible in the

writing; that in the writing up I would not be connecting individuals with particular communes (or with each other where it was possible to avoid this). At this point, I decided to present a partial picture based on methodologies of memory work which offered validity to a kind of research that was more overtly based on fragments and impressions than on any attempt to gain a full sense of 'reality' in participants' memories of their childhoods.

Transcription, selection, analysis and writing

Post interview, I transcribed interview material and pulled out sections of transcript/discussion that included themes that seemed common to all or most participants (including the pilot ones), and began to analyse and explore the areas of interest that have formed the data chapters of this research. I used a method of listening to interview material that was alert to hegemonic ideas from both commune ideologies and more 'mainstream' life and engaged in reflexive practice in relation to them. I was by that time firmly engaged with methodologies focused on memory. I was interested, in particular, in listening for descriptions of relationship and how relationship is bound up with identity and sense of self for participants and including these selections of interview transcripts in my writing.

I formed themes of chapters through allowing and encouraging participants at interview to direct what was discussed to where their interest was, and in the process of listening to transcripts for common experiences, issues or memories which participants found important enough to want to discuss and 'giving voice' to the core concerns of participants in this way. I decided to allow my autobiographical material to form a part of the method process and reflexive practice and include it in the appendices, but not to include any of my original autobiographical writing in chapters. I did attempt to include some of the insight that my autobiographical writing had lent me as an author, in terms of reflexive practice, comment and analysis of these sections of transcript.

However, I wanted to include as much of the very rich data material from respondents as possible and to present this material as a kind of collaborative first order analysis in discussion between myself and other participants, and often went for this option over and above including more of my own analysis and reflections. I wanted to include my awareness and reflexive musings but not at the expense of including as much of participants had to say as feasible and I tried to background myself in the chapters to this end.

Beginnings...

'The testimonials of children caught between two worlds? Hippy parents combined with obedient conservative grandparents? The pendulum swing of our parents' chosen lifestyles in sharp, rebellious contrast to the lives their parents chose, and the effects of all this on their lab-rat offspring? Yippee! Throw in a special, soul-sisters-only vibe from the daughters of **the** daughters who courageously said "yes" to living life as the equals of men, in defiance of social norms and authoritarian opposition, and you have sa-weet deal. For me, personally, a chance to not feel like a mutant outcast because I get to discover other girl humans who endured some of the same bizarro shit in their households' (Zappa,1999, p.16)

To summarise the way I set about approaching this research, I need to tell the story of how I originally became interested in it.

I kept bumping into other people who had spent time in communes and finding that we both engaged in an immediate indulgence of swapping notes. 'Finally! Someone who understands what my life was like', we'd both say – a rare find for those from such a minority background. In those discussions there were similar experiences that kept coming through, and I became interested in how others with similar upbringings described differences in how they'd experienced communal childhoods and differences in how they'd made sense of their experience. It was a personal sense-making mission: to find perspective beyond my own limited world-view and personality, my psychic experience, beyond my own situated experiences and circumstances.

I gained an impression that there were some key themes of interest (to others as well as myself): the experience of being in a marginal position whilst also being privileged seemed interesting; the experience of a counter-cultural upbringing, outside of the 'mainstream'. Many commune-raised people I came across seemed to me to be unusually entrepreneurial in their ways of making money and living life, and this seemed to them and I to be connected with their upbringings. Many had serious questions about 're-entering mainstream life' and how they related to that proposition, how they wanted to live their lives as adults. Many had misgivings about communes as good places to grow up in, with reference to their experience of family life and parenting practices; the most common complaint being instability and a kind of nagging sense of being neglected or the parenting being too libertarian. Contrarily, some were keen to give their own children an experience of communality or to form their own version of communal living as adults. Many had a highly developed sense of community as central to life and of relationship as central to their sense of self,

and this seemed to be a self-conscious value for many of them, which they set up in opposition to what they saw as more 'mainstream' ways of life and the values of what they firmly saw as 'the norm'.

These people seemed to me generally eloquent, educated, able to engage with their own experience self-reflexively and with great self-awareness; able to put forward their own opinions quite clearly and reflectively. I became interested in the idea of sharing the experience of my generation of commune-raised people with the wider world, and particularly with those still engaged in intentional community or 'alternative lifestyles'. This was to some extent a process of 'talking back' to our parents' generation about what had and had not been good aspects of the communal experience for us as children, aspects which that adult generation may not have been already aware of. An atmosphere of combined nostalgia, romanticism and critique dominated these casual encounters and discussions. I was interested to explore, helpfully, what might have been better for kids in these environments, and what worked.

I approached a supervisor – Ian Welsh (Cardiff University), who had a keen interest in New Social Movements and communes. He helped me to rewrite a proposal for funding and brought in a second supervisor – Ralph Fevre, a specialist in 'social capital'. The original research proposal focused more on entrepreneurial practice and social capital in those who had been raised communally. I got the funding. I tried to begin the process with these supervisors, reading a lot of the past literatures, thinking about the skills and abilities of commune-raised people and how their unique upbringings might be described in terms of social capital. I got ill whilst travelling. I kept getting ill and ending up back in hospital or unable to work at this time. I was struggling to find a sense of what my particular interest in the subject was about. I deferred my studentship and spent the rest of the year recovering from illness. Whilst convalescing, I thought a lot about the project I had haltingly begun, and I read a lot of the previous literatures about communes in the 1970s and '80s. I realised that I was mostly interested in questioning whether these childhoods were really as utopian as adults involved in communes might have imagined. I realised that this was the question which existing research from the UK about communes had left hanging, waiting to be answered. So, rather than wanting to make a showpiece of the ways in which communes offer their children unique skills and networks (also an interesting idea to pursue), I wanted to ask people about what I really wanted to know – about how they had actually found it

being brought up in these alternative spaces, and how they were making sense of their lives now as adults. These questions were the true core of my own interest. I wanted comparisons for my own experience. As I read through literatures about researching the 'family' and memories of intimate domestic spaces, I have come to realise how such desire for 'comparison' is very common amongst research participants, and put my own desire, and that of my participants into the context of a fairly universal desire to find out if our own family is 'normal' whether it is 'conventional' or 'alternative' in nature.ⁱⁱ

In this period of reflection while I was ill I decided that I really wanted to work with my MA supervisor, Vic Seidler, who had helped me previously to bring personal and autobiographical material into the academic arena and encouraged me to value it. He had also previously lived in a commune himself. This set up an interesting tension in our work together, to do with me 'talking back' to my parents, or their generation, through my discussions and work with my supervisor. Luckily, he is a very experienced supervisor who managed to weather this skillfully! Indeed, he encouraged me to valorise the 'voice' of my own generation in this study, without either attempting to represent (except through second hand impressions of participants) the reality of adults in participants' communes or the adult generations' experiences, choices and practices in communal spaces.

Engaging with supervision...

Vic and I quickly decided that this project was about entering into the experience of the child, of the memory of those participants' childhoods, rather than about trying to accurately represent the social spaces of communal life from the perspectives of other actors (the adult generation) or even portray any cohesive sense of the 'reality' of what those spaces were actually like at the time of participants' childhoods. This placed the research method more in the arena of 'family research' 'memory work' 'biographical or auto-biographical method'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Vic brought to the project an interest in gender and power, and an established interest in enabling academic work to include emotional as well as rational material and responses. He drew from a long engagement with feminist research methodologies, and his experience of being a member of a commune which, like many of my participants' communities, had a strong theme of feminist 'consciousness raising' as part of it's social structure conceptually and practically.^{iv} Feminist engagements with methodology became particularly

important for the research in terms of finding a methodology that valued experience and attempted to endorse the world view of participants as valid and useful social insight, especially ways of understanding identity which were relational and included and embraced emotional experience – for which purpose feminist methods became valuable sources of inspiration.

Being ‘insiders’

One problem with this supervisory relationship that only truly emerged later was that, to a great extent, we spoke the same language and understood a kind of shorthand description of life in communes because of our shared heritage. This was obviously also true of my communication and work with participants too. Once others outside of the supervisory relationship began to read material, it became clear that much was taken for granted and understood without elaboration because of shared experience, between myself and my participants and between my supervisor and I. I have attempted to be wary of this closed language and understanding in this project and asked people with no communal experience to read and ask questions about what seems obvious to Vic, participants, or myself but needs explanation to those without direct experience of what is being described.

Sometimes it was hard for me, or participants, or Vic, to see what was interesting about our unusual experiences or the memories of those communal environments (See Appendix 2, quote 3). This sense of mundaneness was reinforced by the shared knowledge of myself, Vic and participants. Sometimes, in retrospect, what might have seemed fascinating to ‘outsiders’ who had not experienced communal life was taken for granted by all involved in the research.^v This sense of my being an ‘insider’ because of my shared background and the choice to interview only the younger generation also raised particularly strong ethical questions for me as a researcher, questions about how participants’ sense of me being ‘one of them’ could encourage disclosures they might not share with another researcher, and the responsibility of that.

At the same time as wading through all the literatures that might have relevance in looking for theoretical and methodological ways into the project, I began by writing my own autobiographical exploration of my experience, exploring how I might approach the research methodologically. This, along with a list of questions and areas of interest, I eventually formed into the material that I supplied to participants before meeting with them. Issues about the process of writing autobiographically are discussed later in this chapter.

Resistant research?

Vic and I decided that a good way to maintain the freshness of response, and keep a sense of my real interest where the true energy of the project was situated, was to begin pilot interviews very early on. At that time I became very interested in Carol Gilligan's (1982) work on 'voice-sensitive listening' with young women, which involved attempting to sift out internalised normative messages which these young women would give about themselves (because they thought they should be a particular way), from the moments of 'authentic' voice when these young women actually expressed their true thoughts and feelings. In this case, there was a twist on this way of approaching research, because the 'normative' notions of participants and myself were a combination of hegemonic dominant ideologies from 'mainstream' life and those from our alternative, counter-cultural childhoods which were critical and resistant towards such dominant ideologies (as well often unconsciously informed by them or even conforming to them despite efforts at resistance).^{vi}

In my opinion and experience, in the understanding of other commune raised people I had talked with previously, and in the reportage of available research about communes in the UK (as described in the literature review), intentional communities were imaged by many members as escape attempts; attempts to live outside the 'norm', attempts to create something different, but often informed by a reaction against existing societal practices and norms, and often struggling to genuinely get free of the mainstream culture which adult communards were acutely aware they had been shaped and formed within and wanted to resist (Rigby, 1974a, 1974b)^{vii}. (See Appendix 2, quote 4).

I originally approached the research wanting to know whether other 'commune kids' struggled with the same dilemmas that I had faced (and was facing) in my sense of identity and my choice of lifestyle. I remembered many incidences from my own life in which the way of inhabiting myself that had been so encouraged in communal life – namely to be questioning of authority; to be outspoken; to be open or familiar; to be keenly aware of social justice; to be anti-materialist, anti-militarist, anti-capitalist; just kind of anti-status quo – had got me into trouble with people who found such behaviour and identity irritating or troublesome or just downright rude. I wanted to know what 'our' attitude is, as a generation, towards the utopian vision of our parents now that we are grown and living adult lives of our own, and what our attitude is towards conventional lifestyle options and the process of fitting into them, or not.

Importantly, I had also recently turned 30, and was beginning to wonder about how to proceed with my life: a conventional form of family life, or something alternative? What about things like monogamous long-term relationships or marriage, were they a feasible option? What alternatives might there be if not? It struck me that these questions were not only personal and individual, but also related to some of the questions about 'lifestyle' and family life that the communes movement of our childhoods had been attempting to address.

Of course, what I discovered in my conversations with participants was a variety of different perspectives and identities, a variety of experiences, albeit tied by some unifying threads of experience and culture. I had an enthusiastic response from women whom I approached for interview, who have all seemed keen to be offered an opportunity for reflection on and identification of their experiences of alternative girlhood and now womanhood. Many of my generation appeared to be facing similar dilemmas and thinking about similar issues: the transition into a more mature adulthood; the taking-on of adult responsibilities in the form of marriage and children; more senior jobs; buying property, etc. seem to be coming into focus for my generation in their late twenties and thirties rather than in their early or mid-twenties, as was, perhaps, the case for our parents' generation. What should we do with the legacy we have? What aspects should we be loyal to and what should we dismiss? How do we adapt the vision of our parents to a world that has almost entirely given up on the idea of wide-scale social change upon which that vision was built? (See Appendix 2, quote 5).

Commune kid seeking similar...

'I am a young person living in a community in South West Scotland... After a recent discussion with some of the people in my community I was prompted to write this short piece. Because the other residents here are mainly over 30 I sometimes feel isolated. My idea was to get in touch with other people in similar situations...' Message in Communes Network (December 1986, p.9)

Commune-raised adults are not easy to find, because often they and their parent(s) have left the community they spent time in as children - periods spent in community tend to be finite and not for life. The only way to get in touch with them is through social networks that may or may not be connected to the community by the time they are adults. I tried contacting various communities still in existence in the UK, and some adult community members I spoke to were willing to 'put out the word' and see if any of the members or ex-members had 'adult children' who would be willing to talk to me, but there was quite a

high degree of suspicion among existing communities about academics and reporters 'studying' communities. Thus the senior or 'parent' generation acted as the gatekeepers of access to the women I wanted to contact.

In the end none of these 'cold calls' to communities bore fruit, and all my respondents were found through personal contacts, starting with friends who had lived in a different community from me. Then, a new line of contacts was given to me by a woman who heard that I was doing the project and wanted to be involved. Next, I contacted friends I had grown up with in my community, and then, by going through my mother's friends who had lived in intentional communities, to find contacts for their daughters, another line of contacts at another commune was opened up.

I found that the women I wanted to speak to – the now adult children of intentional communities – were very keen to tell their story, and very friendly and open towards me. Every time I got a contact number for a woman and talked to her, she said yes to meeting with me. Perhaps this was largely to do with my having had a similar upbringing. Indeed, this identification and shared experience was part of my motivation for engaging with the project to start with, and every time I met another commune-raised person the connection was quick and easy and comparing notes was entered into with a sigh of relief; someone to talk to who understands what you are describing, and who may share some of the issues that arise from having been raised in the counter-culture! Other people's desire to talk through and make sense of this unique heritage seemed as strong as mine, the process of 'sense-making' being a powerful motivator!

Gate-keeping and protection

The utopian vision of intentional community is dear to the heart of commune members (and ex-commune members). An example of this was, when my sister and I went to see the Swedish film, *Together*, by director Lukas Moodysson, a film about a small Swedish commune in the 1970s which is very much from the perspective of child characters (and which I would recommend to anyone with an interest in what life in 1970s communes was like). We thought it was hilarious, and I told my mother she must see it. To my surprise she was deeply offended by the film, which she thought mocked the vision that she and her contemporaries had held, and betrayed that vision by showing it as ridiculous posturing rather than as a revolutionary attempt to remodel everyday life. The danger of representing 'children's' limited understanding of the choices and

context of their parents is well illustrated by this little interaction in my family, and perhaps in some ways by the film itself.

Some community members of the 'parent' generation had a jaded attitude towards studies of their lifestyle. Most of the attention they'd had from the media and from academia was seen by them as highly critical and judgemental; as trying to interpret a radical lifestyle from the perspective of a conventional world view, and as often totally missing the point as far as community members were concerned. One of the tenderest areas that had previously been opened up to scrutiny was how children fared or were raised or treated in a community environment. Previously implied or overt criticism of parenting in communities cut deep, as it would for any parent.

A typical knock-back came when a participant I had interviewed and got on well with offered to approach a 'senior' member of a community (she hadn't lived in this community but had a lot of contact with it, as her community was close by) to try to get contact numbers for me of women she had known there as a child. She was relaxed and happy to talk about her experiences, and assumed that other commune-raised people would also enjoy the chance to talk with me about their experience. When she asked her 'senior' friend, his answer was sharp – 'We don't want any more people preying on our kids with their studies'.

Having also spent time living in an intentional community did not convince everyone that I would be any safer than the next person to talk to their (now adult) children, and there was some level of fatigue about how often interviews were requested and how much attention communities got from people who wanted to 'study' them. The attitude was that this kind of picking things apart, the intellectualism involved in an analysis of community life, was the antithesis of what commune life was all about. Intentional community was about doing; getting in there and experimenting, and trying to make it work.

From my experience, although many standpoints – some well thought out and theorised and some more vague and responsive or downright reactive - did enter into the process of communal life, a cohesive shared vision or ideology was hard to pin down. Participants echoed this notion in interview as does research from the 1970s (Rigby, 1974 a & b; Abrams & McCulloch, 1976). From my experience and that of other participants there was an ethos in many of our intentional communities that meant that each person was supposed to fight for their standpoint until some kind of agreement was reached, and even then not

everyone would necessarily toe the line and keep to that agreement. Theorising and intellectualising was often too lofty and not practical enough to carry much weight in this environment, where pragmatic solutions to situations were often deemed much more important. Intellectualism was often seen as 'bourgeois' and scorned as ineffectual and wasteful of energy, despite the presence of many seemingly intellectual adult members in the commune movement. This was sometimes a way to get things done (it's always a problem to get a large group finally to agree on something and actually do it) and was sometimes a way to allow powerful members of the group to avoid any challenge to their 'common sense' ideas of how things should be done – a kind of micro-community-hegemony.

I supposed from my previous experience of communes that for this man, and for some others approached, I was part of the academia, with 'The Establishment', and therefore could not be trusted. Perhaps there was also a nervousness about having family life put under the microscope at all – a feeling that might be common to any parent who isn't sure if they really want their dirty laundry (which every family has) put on public view. Maybe also for intentional communities, like conventional communities, the voice of less powerful groups (such as the 'children' in this case) was not likely to be offered assistance in gaining a platform to being heard by more powerful groups (the 'adults' in this case), who do not wish their power or privilege to speak for the entire community to be challenged.

It is the practice of social science to challenge the taken for granted ideas in research subjects:

'In the social sciences our practices are deeply rooted in realist traditions. It is now generally assumed that discourse plays a powerful part in shaping what we take to be real, and that 'the real' is a more or less powerful set of fictions, albeit fictions with powerful effects.' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 2)

This brings up a core tension for me in this work. My desire was to reflect and describe the experience and world view of participants, to simply report what their world view is having been raised in such unusual and resistant environments, amongst such rebellious ideologies and practices. The need to analyse and contextualise what was being said to me, to deconstruct the world-view of participants felt very uncomfortable. It seemed to place my way of knowing the world (informed by sociological theory and practice) as superior in some way to participants own sense-making abilities. I felt very uncomfortable bearing the power of the researcher, armed with theory, to

'know better' than participants how to deconstruct and analyse their experiences and treat it as 'fiction'. I felt very shy of deconstructing the world-view of participants because my main intent was to let them tell their own stories in their own words, with their own understanding and analysis of their experience and themselves intact and treated as legitimate, not as the 'truth', but as a subjective and partial patchwork of memories and understandings offering valid social knowledge.

Methodologically, such questioning can be framed as a legitimate challenge to the elitism of 'the academy' in terms of its presumption to know more about the 'reality' of the social world than the actors in that social world. Because of academics' training, knowledge and presumed ability to be outside the 'myths' of those social settings (but not, of course, outside the myths and norms of the academy!), sociologists can easily fall prey to unconsciously, even with these questions, forming such a core of questioning of sociological enquiry and practice. Feminist research methods (for example DeVault, 1990, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Griffiths, 1995; Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987) have questioned such assumptions about privileging the knowledge and analysis of academics over the first hand experience and direct reportage of participants.

As a result of these concerns, this project was consciously constructed as methodologically wedded to the idea of allowing participants to be active agents in the creation of the research, in the sense-making process and analysis, and my own inclusion in the research as a participant as well as a researcher. I quickly became interested in creating a situation where the first order analysis might take place in discussion with participants and in reference to my autobiographical material, and their engagement with it. These discussions might then to be presented in large sections as evidence of a process of mutual analysis so that the project echoed a kind of 'communalism' - an attempt to make sense of our shared history as 'commune kids', as a group as far as was possible - and present a collaborative attempt at analysis and understanding of my and participants' experience and world-view.

'New approaches aimed at inclusive and ethical research practices, proliferate (Denzin, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lewin & Somekh, 2005; Sheurich, 1997; Stronach & MacLure, 1997). In many of these research practices, the subject and object of research are brought much closer together. The researcher is no longer invisible in the work of research. In work with memories the 'evidence of experience' is no longer treated as innocent or transparent but is seen to be constituted through language, discourse and history (Davies & Davies, forthcoming; Scott, 1992). What can be known is shaped as much by the researcher

and what he or she is able to think as by whatever our 'data' might be. And what can be known emerges not only out of the methodological practices, but also out of what Somerville (2005) calls the spaces-in-between – the contemplative moment where something else, something surprising, can come to the surface and disrupt out thinking-as-usual, calling into question that which we had thought, until then was self evident and not open to question.' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 2)

Because this is also an autobiographical project my own engagement with reflexive practice in the research became particularly important. I become, in this way of viewing the research process, a participant as well as a researcher. In assuming that all of my participants, as well as myself, are active in creating a collective (if partial and subjective) overview of our experiences in common, I have assumed a radical level of agency in my participants, and this can be seen as valid practice. According to David Silverman:

'Construed as active, the subject behind the respondent not only holds facts and details of experience, but, in the very process of offering them up for response, constructively adds to, takes away from and transforms the facts and details. The respondent can hardly 'spoil' what he or she is, in effect, subjectively creating. This activated subject pieces experiences together, before, during and after assuming the respondent role.' (Silverman, 1997, p. 117)

In an experimental take on engaging my participants as fully 'active', I decided to attempt a collaborative sense-making process with respondents at interview. In line perhaps with the values myself and participants were raised with, the effort was an attempt at 'communal' exploration of what sense we had all made of our childhoods, as far as that was possible in the context of an academic PhD. As well as being an attempt to acknowledge the participants as active and create research as collaborative as possible, I would put this forward as an attempt, from the start on my part, to make the research methods suit the values and ways of being – the identity of the participants and myself, an acknowledgement of an ethos of communalism among participants and myself.^{viii}

Once I began engaging with pilot interviews, material emerged organically from participants, and their and my own engagement with my autobiographical writing, rather than from my own theorising or solo direction of the process. This was in line with my reading of feminist standpoint research methods and epistemologies which placed the notion of 'voice' as central (Gilligan, 1982; Stanley & Wise, 1979). The focus only on women, rather than commune raised people of both genders, emerged organically. By chance, all my original pilots were with women. I tried to tune in to what they were saying using a resistant kind of listening, like Gilligan, attempting to resist or notice

both mainstream gender stereotypes, stereotypes about communes and commune kids and adults, which had their origin in that minority culture of communes which myself and participants all knew the shorthand for, and 'mainstream' stereotypes of communes and hippies, which were ever-present with knowing irony in our conversations. I was also looking for what participants were interested in exploring, what areas of enquiry were of key concern to them and important to their own sense-making process, their own identities and life-paths.

There was an interesting issue that arose here, however, as it became clear that participants had some critical views about 'feminism' that they equated with their experiences of growing up in environments that had a strong theme of 'feminist'^{ix} consciousness raising. I was borrowing heavily from my engagement with feminist research for guidance about how to approach the methodology of my work, because it had values in line with my own (DeVault, 1996). (See Appendix 2, quote 6). But there were questions about whether the work could stand as 'feminist' research if it was critical, in part, of feminism.

Feminist research and Appendix 5

In the process of unearthing the experience of one group of women – my participants – and attempting to give voice to what they felt hadn't been heard about their experiences as children, some of their complaints were turned on another group of women – adults in their communities – whom participants described as 'feminist' or on ideas and practices participants described as 'feminist'. Working with personal testimony and allowing, indeed digging for what adults in these women's communities might not have realised or heard previously about what life was like for children in these spaces, the research project became about the children (in this case all of them female) rather than the adult women. Could this research still be described as 'feminist?' (See Appendix 2, quote 6).

There is arguably a cross sectional power relationship apparent in this study which is to do with age – the greater power of older people and parents over children and young people, the more powerful 'voice' of adult women over young women and girls, the dominant world-view of adults that doesn't always stop to ask how children are experiencing the world. This aspect is not directly aligned with feminist agendas in as much as it does not necessarily directly put women or women's issues or even girls at the centre, but a generation of children, and those children's 'voice' in terms of experience.

This situation is further complicated by the fact that participants are not children at the time of interview, but adult women. Nonetheless, it is an interesting thing to ponder that, in my opinion, many of the parents of my participants had a genuine desire to liberate their children from their own power relationship with them, and ideologies such as feminist consciousness-raising made adults in communes very aware of power relationships, inequalities and 'oppression'. Yet, similar issues came to the fore in this attempt as in many other attempts at social change or liberation – the idea of equality or liberation may be romantic and beautiful to contemplate, but the reality means giving up power and privilege to the person or group of persons you are desirous of 'liberating', sometimes at your own cost or inconvenience. Tensions can arise between ideology and practice easily in such circumstances and social tension and conflict can easily result. Children were not exempt from these tensions and power struggles in communal settings. Indeed, often they were central to them.

The focus in this research became hearing and understanding the remembered experience of girl-children, and the women they have grown to be now; the understanding they have come to as adult women of their childhood experience. It was not an exercise in understanding the women's movement in communes in the 1970s from an adult perspective, but a child's eye view of being around in communes that were influenced by the women's movement, and how that experience is remembered and made sense of by participants. With so much 'consciousness raising' in their upbringings participants' awareness did and does include debates about gender inequality and a problematising and questioning of gender identities and gendered practice in their childhood environments. These were areas of interest and concern for participants; things they wanted to explore and discuss. Their ambivalent relationship with 'feminism', which had formed such a powerful part of their childhood environment ended up in a separate Appendix 5. I wanted to include them because they were of such importance to participants, but in the end was more interested in other areas of discussion being centrally included.

Acknowledgement of 'difference' among women, and the sometimes competing interests of different groups of women, as opposed to a universalising notion of homogenous 'women' whose interests are all aligned, is a core debate in feminist academia, and this Appendix (5) has trodden a tentative path through attempting to give 'voice' to my participants. This work

leaves out any attempt to engage with adult women from their childhood environments, through sheer limit of time and focus. This makes the research very specific and intensely meaningful to the people involved in it – myself and the participants - and hard to make more general in terms of saying a great deal that's defensibly 'valid' about the adult or more general realities of participants' intentional communities at the time of their childhoods beyond this tight subjective window. This is true of participants' notions of feminism.

'...both public silencing and the feminist focus on interiority unsettle the production and composition of women's narratives, leading not to "composure" but to "discomposure", as subjects confront the conflicting discourses of femininity.' (Cosslet, Lury & Summerfield, 2000, p. 7)

Girls in communes faced some strong opinions on and role models of what being a 'good' woman/girl was all about, from both inside and outside their communities. As a part of the women's liberation movement's attempts to find new ways of structuring social and domestic life to allow women (and men) less narrow roles and life opportunities, communes provided an experimental domestic space for such attempts to put these ideas into practice. The ways in which gender identity was shaped in the unconventional settings of intentional communities formed part of the questions I had about how commune-formed identities interacted with mainstream hegemony.

I wanted to know whether these commune-raised girls (now women) had in some ways managed to have a different experience of growing up female from what was available in mainstream culture, and in what ways – and, once outside the unconventional bosom of community life, what happened to these women and their identities with reference to gender? Did they have genuinely radical models of being women to draw on because of their background? Could they sustain such models once outside their original communities? From my experience and my review of relevant literature about communes of the 1960s and 1970s, many of the adults who were involved in the communes movement were looking for alternatives to (gender-prescribed) nuclear-family set-ups – hoping that domestic duties and childcare could be dealt with differently and that less restrictive roles and lifestyles might be available to women within intentional community life.

'Gender identity is, then, an important constituent of the women's life-story in many ways. It intervenes in the main structures of the narrative: the life course, the key patterns and the anecdotes, and finally, the closed meaning system (shaped by the thematic configuration and the connotation system), as part of the

identity conveyed and taken up by the subject, in reference to accepted models of female identity.' (Chanfrault-Duchet, in Cosslet, Lury, & Summerfield, 2000, p. 74)

Throughout our discussions sometimes participants seemed to speak as 'women', often with fairly strong feminist values, sometimes they spoke from memories or a position of 'child'. In this space of remembering and reporting, their interests and concerns were sometimes quite different from when they were in a more adult 'woman' space of engagement with making sense of their childhood environments.

Talking back

Despite the project's interest in a certain kind of childhood context and experience, I did not speak directly with children. I wanted my participants to be able to speak for themselves, engage with this research as participants in meaning making in a very engaged and direct way, and assumed that their process of making sense of their childhoods would be interesting, and I wanted to record an era which had passed. Talking to children in contemporary communes would have uncovered a very different generations' experiences. In some ways I fell between camps, dealing with memories from a child's eye perspective; issues and mythologies of childhood, but also with adult participants and their process of sense-making as grown women. In some of the interview material there is a beautiful quality of remembering from a child's point of view that I loved and wanted to retain as experiential reportage that is immensely valuable.

Respondents' engagement with analysing and making sense of their memories and experiences, in response to my attempts to make sense of my own autobiographical material and material from literatures (which they had been supplied with see Appendix 3) and the questions I raised with them, giving them time to consider and think through their own opinions and reflections in response to issues raised, meant that what was recorded at interview was a combination of child-like memories and relatively sophisticated interactive analysis and debate between participants and myself. Supplying this material was an attempt to empower participants as much as possible, to deal with the power imbalance inherent in social research and often debated in feminist methodology, particularly in ethnography (Scanlon, 1993; Stacey, 1988). There is no perfect solution, and no way to totally level the power imbalance between researcher and researched, but this seemed to me a good attempt to give participants agency and for the research to be as collaborative as possible,

echoing and honouring the communal values of our upbringings, and the values of research practice which had become important to my engagement with trying to tell the story of my generation of commune raised women.

I wanted to allow participants as much agency as possible, to position myself as much as possible in service to the group, in telling our stories. I wanted to allow them as much space to express their concerns and interests, to have their say, as possible. I wanted to leave as much raw material from interviews in the study as possible to those ends. I wanted participants to become engaged with the process of unearthing what was suppressed and not recognised about the experience of communal life for the children of those communities. I wanted to 'talk back' to hegemonic ideas in our childhood environment, to undermine adult assumptions when they did not tally with our experience as children. I wanted to know what participants loved and hated about being raised in those environments; what worked for them; what they valued, and what was problematic. I wanted the material to emerge organically from the process of our meetings rather than be dictated purely by myself or by theoretical or methodological concerns.

In methodological terms, I was interested in engaging my participants in reflexive practice in collaboration with me to allow some 'second order constructs' to come through in my discussions with them, as well as our shared 'first order constructs' and our different ones (Shutz, 1971). I was aware that I needed help from my participants to seek out my own blind spots, preconceptions and preoccupations. (See Appendix 2, quote 7).

I was keen to acknowledge my own experience, my own subjectivity, to be reflexive about how I was shaping the research due to my own concerns, experiences, questions and prejudices. In my upgrade process I was warned that the material I had written so far was too focused on my own reflexive ponderings. I had become caught up in trying to unpick my own subjectivity and not left room for that of other participants. I sought to remedy this problem by allowing my autobiographical material to form part of the process of the project – to inform participants of my own experience and concerns and to help direct or shape the interviews – rather than being central in the writing. I wanted help, in effect, from respondents, to point out where my experiences and concerns were 'in common' and where they were very personal and minority. By disclosing my own material and supplying questions in advance, I hoped to gain this help from participants, to be more fully reflexive through

their feedback and our interaction. I also hoped to engage participants in shaping and designing the project as a collaborative effort, to allow the group to decide what the focus of the project would be, for it to be born from common concerns and areas of interest rather than mine alone. I wanted a lot of the work already done by the time I was looking at transcripts, for the data to speak for itself, to do the work of analysis collectively in the interview process and present what we discussed there as a first order analysis.

In pilot interviews I asked participants to choose which of the questions from the list I had supplied they would be interested in discussing. I allowed their interest, disinterest and resistance to shape their interviews. When supplying them with my material and questions I asked them to think in advance of our meeting and talk about anything they'd like to add, anything that was important to them to mention or talk about that wasn't already included in my list of questions. After the five pilot interviews I adapted my list of questions to include concerns which had been raised by participants that had not previously been included, and left out questions which pilot participants did not show a great deal of interest in engaging with, taking this to be evidence that these concerns of mine were less common and more specific to myself. When I interviewed the other nine participants I followed this same process of supplying material and questions in advance and asking them to choose which questions they would like to respond to, and add anything they felt might be missing.

In practice, post pilot interviews did not throw up too many new areas of discussion or questions - there seemed to be enough to talk about covering what was already being enquired about! I did not push respondents to cover questions they did not want to engage with, although I did ask further questions in the interview process to attempt to uncover or clarify descriptions of experience or opinions and perspectives that participants held. I attempted to create opportunities for Somerville's (2005) 'spaces-in-between' to emerge as much as possible. I positively wanted the process to be messy and organic to this end; to allow myself to flow with a collectively shaped and non-linear process of collecting a (of course, partial) picture of the groups' communal childhood experiences and their process as adults of making sense of those ever changing and evolving stories, memories and understandings.

Originally I had thought of interviewing about 30 people from a geographical spread across the UK, and from different types of commune. As I progressed

with finding people, and continued to interview, it became apparent that I'd need to consider how many participants I could really include. Interviews tended to be long! I wanted them to remain long so that I could be responsive to the material that emerged as it came through. I decided to limit the number of participants but allow these very in-depth qualitative interviews to continue.

I was keen to maintain a sense of the memories and opinions of participants as partial fragments, coming together to form a kind of loose map of impressions and memories; a way of 'getting a feel' of the commonalities of these childhoods, and the women they produced, rather than to pin down what was said to 'real' places and spaces – actual communes of participants' childhoods, or bound life narratives of individuals. This was an attempt to point out and maintain the difference between participants' memories and any claims about what their childhood homes were 'really' like. It is also paying homage to the collective nature of this project, that this is an attempt to access, through individual memories, discussion and analysis, a collective sense of childhoods in communes, rather than a set of individual life histories. For those who are new to the basics of what communal spaces might have been like practically, or curious about who is speaking in this work, the introduction of participants and description of their childhood communes will furnish a flavour of the basic set-ups of participants' early lives, age, stage and basic information about participants' current lives . This is included in Appendix Four.

Biography and Autobiography

The most directly personal issues arising from this research have been to do with finding my own 'voice' and exploring my own identity and agenda that has often seemed to evade my own grasp or analysis; becoming infinite as I try to unravel and follow a sense of myself as a culturally embedded subject. Sometimes I have been mired in my own feelings about the material and issues of the research, or brought up short by painful or romantic memories about my own childhood experiences. Sometimes it felt inappropriate to indulge my own responses too much, as they far exceeded the scope of the project. Sometimes it seemed unsafe to relay comments made or make my own analyses that might seem critical of my 'parent' culture (of communes and/or my actual parents!). Sometimes I have taken spaces in the research to attend to issues arising in my own subjectivity and my own familial relationships because of the research process. Sometimes it has worried me that I am being a whistle blower in exposing aspects of criticism from participants towards their communities or

parents because the partial nature of the research means that there is no balancing explanation about why/how those practices and people were as they were, and because these lifestyles were/are marginal and therefore always/already under suspicion from the mainstream. These are all deeply personal concerns and have been integral to my wrestling with this project.

As I have discovered, engaging with memory work, biography and autobiography is messy work, and very destabilising to ones' sense of a cohesive self from which to speak, or a cohesive sense of other's selves or their memories or sense of their own life narrative. As I pulled at the threads of the lives of others using theory to think through their way of knowing themselves and of me trying to know and think about what they told me of themselves, the whole fabric of identity and all the philosophical issues involved also unravelled before me. It was hard to not get sidetracked into simply exploring these theoretical and philosophical ideas and lose sight altogether of telling any of the stories I had originally longed to collect and record. But these stories, these collected memories, and the discussions, analysis and meaning-making truly are more interesting to me than the process of analysis of the very idea of identity, and in the end, despite a strong engagement with theoretical and methodological issues around the project, what was most important to me was to include as much of the raw data as possible, to maintain a sense of participants telling their own stories, in their own words, from their own understandings.

Others have engaged with these debates and formed similar attachments to allowing an organic and partial sense of what is being researched to have 'validity.' Gillian Swanson says of engaging with memory work that it is in locating memory in 'spaces of intimacy' that we uncover 'the coincidences of being and becoming.' (cited in Radstone, 2000a, and p.121). (See Appendix 2, quote 8).

Ethics and Resistant Cultures

'Feminists seek a science that minimizes harm and control in the research process... feminist methodologists have searched for practices that will minimize harm to women and limit negative consequences.' (DeVault, 1996, p. 33)

This is particularly true for my research where I felt keenly the position of trust I was placed in by participants who might not have been willing to talk to a researcher who did not share their experience of communal living. Kerry Daly writes that the important ethical considerations of family research are:

'...respecting families boundaries of privacy, and the need for researchers to constrain their judgments about participants' experiences. In addition there are at least two other ethical dilemmas faced by qualitative family researchers: informed consent and unanticipated self exposure.' (Daly, in Gilgun, Daly, Handel, 1992, p. 10)

This research was obviously exposing to members of participants' 'families', whether that definition is taken as a narrow group of intimates or the wider communal group, who were not included in this research. The notion of unanticipated self-exposure was more of an issue due to my 'insider' status and the intimacy of my autobiographical disclosures to participants.

My changing ways of understanding my own personal experience and my family's history, my immersion in my autobiographical material, and emotional responses to it, set off a chain reaction of response among my family, which made progress with the material more painful. This was compounded by the death of my paternal grandmother, which unsettled me and the family still further. This work became, at times, difficult to sustain because of its impact on my self-image and the knock-on effects of talking, writing and thinking about my early life. Bell Hooks, whose candid and accessible writings have been an inspiration towards finding the courage to investigate my own biography, echoes some of my feelings about this:

'...as a writer staring into the solitary space of paper, I was bound, trapped in the fear that a bond is lost or broken in the telling. I did not want to be the traitor, the teller of family secrets...' (Hooks, in Smith & Watson (eds), 1998, p. 429)

This experience of my own responses being experienced by other family members as disruptive made me (rightly or wrongly – I am unsure in retrospect) very sensitive to protecting participants even beyond where they felt they needed protection. Most participants were not concerned about being named and having their communities identified, but I was concerned about how they might end up feeling. These notions of loyalty are not just to real people but also to a whole culture and set of ideas (a counter-cultural paradigm in this case), which exists always alongside the need to be intelligible in terms that people outside that experience, lifestyle or paradigm can recognise.

Morwenna Griffiths describes similar issues in relation to her own autobiographical work thus:

'None of this anxiety was related to acceptance by any group of real people. That was a separate, if analogous, issue, where different things counted, and which led to its own tensions. My problem stemmed from a personal need to do with my construction of self. I wanted to belong to an abstract grouping: real women' (Griffiths, 1995, p. 22).

In a similar fashion, my central 'problem' (and that of some other participants) could be seen as negotiating whether I wanted to belong to an abstract grouping which could be either (or both) 'mainstream/conventional' or 'counter-cultural/resistant.' These musings formed a core part of what I brought to discussions with participants, or the 'questions' I asked of them. It also formed a strong tension in the writing-up of this research.

The 'openness' of participants in relating to 'one of their own' was also implicit in my being considered an 'insider' and could be seen as a shared value coming from our upbringings:

'A property of communal life that seems to go hand in hand with the belief that "what happens, happens" is a sense of openness, a sense that the process of happening can and should be naïvely displayed. Candour and spontaneity are valued in relationships within the commune.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 12)

But my agenda was also being prescribed by the academic nature of this work and this placed me in a position where some analysis, deconstruction, challenging and potentially undermining of participants' world view and experience was likely to become part of this process. This didn't sit easily with the trust participants granted me in assumption of my sharing of that value of openness and sharing of the self, common to us all.

I have been very aware, as I have discussed these issues with other commune-raised people, that encouraging the telling of autobiographical tales can be destabilising, because the more you think about it the more elusive and complex any sense of 'self' becomes. 'Autobiography constitutes a suicidal genre since it "presents the writer with an empty or discursive 'self' – an 'I' never his own because it makes present what is past to him' (Renza, 1977, p. 9)

'Autobiography inevitably undoes itself, since its attempt to inscribe subjective coherence paradoxically reveals that coherence as illusory.' (Radstone, in Cosslet, Lury & Summerfield, 2000, p. 203)

Add to this my framing experience in terms of inclusion/exclusion, which can make people aware of processes of rejection of or resistance to them, as well as putting focus on their own choices concerning wanting to belong or not belong with various groups or ideas.

These ways of framing their own personal narrative might not be part of how participants had thought about their own lives previously. If a person feels quite happily part of mainstream life and not in conflict about it, or quite happily still ensconced in the community of fringe, alternative or counter-culture, drawing attention to potential issues of exclusion or rejection might not be a helpful thing to do for that person.

The process of exploring biography or autobiography makes people's own lives strange to them as they distance themselves from their experience of being who they are and look at the choices and environment that have shaped their lives and their sense of self. The concepts people may have built to deal with being happy with who they are can begin to look precarious under sociological inspection. If a person has decided (very positively with a sense of agency, as well as in line with the myth of our time – the rational choosing actor who makes his or her own luck and decides his or her own identity and destiny) to think about their position as freely chosen, then a sociological analysis can feel disempowering.

I decided to share with participants as much as was feasible about my own thinking and the issues I was dealing with in my research in order to give them the most potential for engaging in a resistant way with my take on things, for disagreeing. Most if not all of my respondents seemed willing and able to do this (to 'correct' my apprehension of something if they did not feel I had it quite right) when I approached them with my thinking in full view in this way, and I felt comfortable about this being a more 'honest' way of working than asking questions 'blind' with an undisclosed agenda. There are questions about how this immediately influenced the focus of participants and of how my position as 'expert' (as well as fellow commune-dweller, which put us more on a level) may have given my ideas more weight in our conversations.

This has felt like a major responsibility for me during the interview process, asking about these sensitive experiences and negotiating my way through decisions about 'how far to push' a way of looking at things that might be disruptive to the person or might excessively disrupt how they began to explain themselves. The imperative to be as open as possible about the context their words were being placed in seemed to me to outweigh these concerns in the light of their willingness to engage, yet I tried to tread very carefully and sensitively when I met resistance.

In the community I was raised in, the 'kids' – a group who had our own identity and whose title 'kids' was a marker of our gang's being very unlike conventional notions of vulnerable, shy 'children' – we sometimes had a slightly sneering attitude towards the commune and our elders. We took the, let me say, Michael out of the adults and their weird ways, but of course that didn't mean we didn't love them or feel allied to their practices. Indeed, we were fiercely loyal to them! In my interviews the common currency between

myself and participants was often this humour about being brought up in the 'madness' of the adults around us, and the loyalty and love we all had towards our communities, our parents and the people we grew up with was inferred and less explicitly stated, but, I believe, understood to exist.

I consider this humour to be a defence mechanism which commune kids use/d to distance themselves from the responses that communal lifestyles got from the mainstream –the 'crazy hippies and their dirty unruly children' type of stereotype. It has been hard sometimes, when writing, to not lapse into some of these defence mechanisms without even noticing, and I have a degree of concern about how some of my extracts from discussions/interviews may come over, because my participants were not speaking to an outsider; someone conventional with whom they might well have been more defensive and gone to greater lengths to portray communal life in a positive light. In discussing things with me, a kind of 'we loved 'em, but didn't they drive you mad when they...' atmosphere was created, so that this research becomes a window onto discussions between insiders – where it's OK to have a moan because we are all on the same side. We are not judging each other's communities or parents from a conservative perspective. I have done what I can to mitigate the worst excesses of our getting into having a good moan with an eye to how this reads in the absence of too much counter-explanation from the adults involved. I am aware that this tone may still arise in places in the research, however.

I am also aware that I have failed to wrestle the beast into shape completely in some places, that my ongoing sense of being part of a rejection of 'The Establishment' through my identification with being an outsider or a rebel as a commune 'kid' creeps into my writing, despite my own awareness of how the line between 'mainstream' and 'alternative' is extremely blurred, and possibly imaginary in sociological theory. Despite this in me, and seemingly in many of my participants, this notion is alive and well and gives me/us a sense of being different, of being radical or rebellious in a very fundamental way, and in some way forms part of a sense of identity or 'voice' which perhaps is best not completely ironed out of this work (I am not sure!). I openly struggle sometimes to find ways of expressing what I think is important to say with reference to this idea of being 'outside' a 'mainstream', which is too simplistic a way of describing my real position or that of other participants, but I find myself falling back on language or concepts that do not quite work for me, in a space

between the naïve language of the communal life of my childhood and the hegemonic language of the academy.

I carry some language from my time in community that is far from neutral but seems entirely natural to me; for example using the word 'commune' (rather than 'intentional community', which is now more acceptable as a description because of the way it avoids the 'hippie' labels), or 'kids' (rather than children – we were always 'the kids' at my community), and a particular notion of what the 'straight' world is that is caught up in language, such as my way of understanding 'conventional', which possibly still echoes the rather scornful way communards viewed what they knew and imagined convention and conventional lifestyles to be.

Engaging with the elitism and closed nature of academic language, theory and writing has been something which I have loved the stimulation and learning of, and also felt my own resistance towards, and I believe there is a relevant point to make here: I was brought up surrounded by people who were somewhat suspicious of 'the academy' and its normalising ways of perceiving, and downright hostile to anything that reeked of 'elitism' – if it can't be expressed in ways that ordinary human beings can understand and relate to, what's the point of it, what use is it? These might be the kinds of question some of the adults around me in my childhood community might have raised about producing academic work.

My salvation in academia has been feminist and post-structuralist methodologies and epistemologies, with their undermining of dominant perspectives and encouragement of voices from the margins, and these perspectives have been central to my way of approaching making this work, not only because the emphasis of some of my analysis is a focus on gender in people's life narratives but also because it feels a lot more comfortable to me to work in this way, as I retain a sense of my integrity.

Another important part of academic research that has been difficult for related reasons is taking up the position, the authority, of 'the author' of this work, this could be seen as a somewhat manipulative or naïve stance on my part, as Maynard and Purvis say:

'It is easy too for feminists to deny that they have knowledge and skills in order to minimize differences between women.' (Maynard & Purvis, 1994, p. 16).

My sense of 'collectivism' and a sense of the validity of all voices, despite their relative eloquence in academic terms, is again, I believe, a direct result of the

particular life experience and taught morality of communal life. It has been a hard habit to break, and my compromise has ended up in being an insistence on leaving as much as possible in the words of participants, with as much of their original expression as possible. I must confess here to a form of hiding, of refusing to own the power I quite clearly had in my position as researcher and author, and perhaps my discomfort is a little coy or dishonest. It prompted me towards a very strong intention of letting participants speak for themselves and giving authority to their own perspectives about themselves and their childhoods, and this is something I have struggled to keep even though it has seemed increasingly complex to justify the more I engage with the post-modern and post-structuralist notions of the 'fiction' of the real or essential self (Stanley, 1992, p14). (See Appendix 2, quote 9).

There was an issue here about how much of my own subjectivity I included in the writing. In attempting to use an auto-ethnographic approach my own ponderings and exploration of my subjectivity tended to take over the whole show! This seemed complex to me; other people's contributions could be seen as being 'used' simply to back up my subjective feelings or theories if I spent too much time analysing myself, and if I exposed myself enough to feel anything like I was undermining my 'invisible authorial authority' and attempting 'transparency' then the whole point got lost, as the actual material from participants did not have space to co-exist with my musings. As it was at least mainly in order to avoid drowning out other people's voices that my interrogation of my own position was undertaken, this exploration of the power of authorship became worryingly self-obsessed rather than focused on being sensitive to representing other people's experience.

These key senses: that of attempting to retain a sense of 'collectivism'; that of eschewing complex intellectual language in favour of accessibility; that of attempting some equality of 'voice'; and that of being visible or declared, were important struggles for me in this research project. This made the project less neat and tidy than it might have been, and my own struggle with my autobiographical involvement and the way that affected my sense of self made the project sometimes truly amorphous and difficult to contain.

Webs of identity, power and relationship

'Acknowledging our own power to listen and name and potentially distort the words of others, we sought to create a responsive and resisting practice that was tied to a way of listening to others... Out of what could be seen as a collapse in form – a letting go of our planned research design for the messiness and

unpredictability and vulnerability of ongoing relationship – a way of working emerged which felt more genuine and mutual, precarious at first, disruptive, unsettling to those of us used to our authority and control.’ (Gilligan & Mikel Brown, 1992, p. 15)

As I am a person exposed to such ideas about the centrality of relationship as an important ongoing process in my own childhood, it is hardly a huge shock that I might take an interest in relational models of research; neither is it surprising that my participants responded well to an interactive process in which I was disclosed as well as asking for disclosure, for these kinds of ideas and practices to do with relationship are likely to have formed part of their experience also. Interest in relationship as central to human experience is of course a personal response, but also a value judgement about negotiating power in the research process and how this might be done with awareness and good reflexive practice.

I have been very taken with what I read of Morwenna Griffiths’ (1995) models of ‘webs of identity’ and the role of inter-subjective relationships in the formation of ‘self’. Her ideas have remained a strong influence on how I have attempted to understand both the subtleties of identity and the process of creating life narratives as I talk with participants. Griffiths’ description of the formation of identity, understood by her as a fragmentary collection of ‘selves’ rather than a cohesive essential ‘self’, but a collection of ‘selves’ that are firmly embedded in human relationships – the role of belonging and wanting to belong in groups, real and conceptual – proved extremely useful to me in guiding how I might start to think about how commune-raised people negotiated a sense of identity from their unique position. It was important to me to pay tribute to the ways in which identity is not flexible, not only a set of signs to be donned at will, but bound up with deep emotional responses to the world and the other people in it. Right at the start, the notion of community and its place in how we know who we are was high in my mind. These ideas were central to the questions I asked and how interviews were conducted, the kind of way in which I invited participants to engage with thinking through their experience, memories and current sense of self in relation to their childhoods. (See Appendix 2, quote 10).

I found it enormously productive in interview to discuss and analyse with my participants how they and I remembered being placed in the relational landscape of our original communities, as well as in mainstream spaces and how this way of understanding the forming of our subjectivities, our various

'selves' was still present as an influence in our current lives. This notion informed the way in which I led discussions towards participants' sense of loyalty and belonging, and not belonging. This formed a theoretical 'in' to unravelling participants' memories and sense of themselves in a relational way. Walkerdine's (1991) work about schoolgirls' inscription as appropriate subjects within the social order was also a useful source of inspiration about ways in which to think about how commune raised women might begin to deconstruct their own experience. This was combined (somewhat uncomfortably perhaps) with a loyalty to a version of 'standpoint' method that valorised myself and other participants as being valid 'knowers' about our own lives.

'Defined by some as 'confessional modes of self-representation' (S. Bernstein, 1992) using the first person point of view and centering ones own experiences as a basis for knowledge claims – once a privileged strategy for the production of feminist scholarship – is now viewed with suspicion by many. Those theorists critical of this move to discredit experiential theorising argue that the decentering of women's experiences in feminist scholarship is a consequence of the growing acceptance of certain feminist projects within the academy thus diminishing the necessity of taking an oppositional stance with regard to knowledge production. In contrast I believe that the process of critical reflection informed by the theoretical insights of feminist standpoint epistemologies can help uncover the complex dynamics involved in the production of everyday life.' (Naples, 2003, p. 44)

In practice, of course, this was not simply an autobiographical piece of research, and the attempt by myself and other participants to be reflective about our subjectivities and our lives and memories of childhood trod the thin line between common sense 'realist' approaches and the application of self-reflexive methods, which engaged an analysis of the group's subjectivities and memories based on a disruption of such common sense notions of the self. This was particularly true of the work of analysis that I brought to the data post interview. Speaking of the 'dangers' of 'an epistemology of experience based on the stand-point of the self-reflexive individual in the world,' Davies and Gannon (1997) talk about the paradox of self reflexive practice:

'While Denzin is critical of these slippages into realism, he nonetheless claims that these various forms of reflexivity 'cannot be pulled apart; every text exhibits features of each (Denzin, 1997:223) such that the self both is and is not a fiction, is unified *and* transcendent and fragmented and always in process of being constituted, can be spoken of in realist ways *and* it cannot, its voice can be claimed as authentic *and* there is not guarantee of authenticity' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, 94-5 – original italics)

I was interested in Judith Butler's (1997) notion of subjection and drew from collaborative biography methods that used her theory as a basis for method.

Davies and Gannon write of their work with memory and collective biography that:

'Self regulation is generally understood now, as it was then, in terms of the contradictory humanist discourses of individuality, of choice, of consequences, of autonomy and responsibility... Our own position differs from the humanist position, since we focus on the paradox that while self-regulation is the condition of possibility for the subject itself, the mastery of self regulation is at the same time an act of submission.' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 19).

In practice, however, the complex nature of deconstructing identity so thoroughly outside the humanist/ realist paradigm became very difficult to achieve at the same time as involving participants actively. Their self-reflexive practice, and mine, had more in common with what Davies and Gannon were critiquing here:

'The practice of reflexivity may be used in a (tacitly) realist fashion, as Denzin (1997) observes, where the researchers use their own experience of being subjects, becoming the legitimate ground of exploration, as well as the legitimate explorers of that ground, striving for a kind of authentic account of some aspect of everyday life.' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 89).

The method of this research was not strictly collective biography, in the sense that Davies and Gannon use this term. My understanding of the use of their term Collective Biography is that it means a group of academics working together using their own memories, writing and experience as material for analysis and the group as a support for reflexive practice. My group were not academics and were much more 'realist', 'humanist' and 'common sense' in their way of understanding their own experience. I did not choose, in the end, to make this work purely about my own subjectivity, experience, reflexivity, my own memories or autobiographical material, either. If I had done that, then the Foucault or Butler inspired work of this kind of practice would have been much more easy to use. The strong desire that I had to hear the 'raw experience' and the ways of making sense of that experience that others with a similar background to me had overrode my interest in interrogating my own subjectivity at such deep level.

I engaged the group of participants in gaining an understanding of our shared experiences from our own perspectives, but I was so interested in just hearing what those experiences were and how others had made sense of them in their common sense, non-academic way. I chose to focus more on this level of reality than on pursuing a more rigorous deconstruction of subjectivity, autonomy or

identity such as these kinds of methodologies might have offered. (See appendix 2, quote 11).

In all honesty, my own involvement in the stories of my participants, and my own story, made me very prone to both allowing the research to report in particularly specific and individualist ways.

‘To repeat and describe what women might have to say, while important, can lead to individuation and fragmentation, instead of analysis.’ (Maynard, 1994, p. 23)

Perhaps also I didn’t manage to break free enough of my own loyalty to those humanist notions so core to my upbringing and sense of self to truly have the courage to disassemble myself and my participants’ selves with the post-modern scalpel of theory, so keen was I to assemble some sense of valid self or to both validate and critique that counter cultural experience in some way. Perhaps a valid critique of this research would be that I did not have the courage to create enough of a sense of separateness from my ‘commune kid’ identity to fully deconstruct the subjectivities of myself or other participants in analysis.

‘The achievement of autonomy, then, is based on an illusion of separateness from a system from which she can never float free. She is dependent on the recognition of others, which may or may not be bestowed.’ (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 31)

I did, however, keep listening for and exploring the power dynamics inherent in participants’ sense of themselves, and in their recounted memories and descriptions of themselves and their lives. I highlighted and drew out where participants’ subjectivities were formed in relational ways in their memories of their original communities and how that continues to inform their sense of self and ways of being now as adults. The dual lives of commune kids, gaining mastery of their identities in both their home ‘alternative’ and school or social lives ‘mainstream’ was a rich source of reflection about this phenomena specifically in these participants’ experience. I became fascinated by ‘the conditions of possibility,’ the context of identities formed in childhoods in communes, and tried to convey and communicate an essence of that context and some of the results of it in terms of participants’ subjectivities now.

‘...we have focused on the work the child does to constitute herself inside the conditions of possibility made available to her. At the same time, running *within* and *against* the grain of available/ correct practice is the desire to be recognised as someone who is worthy of notice.’ (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 29 – original italics)

It could be argued that this group of participants and my work’s interrogation of subjectivity were less thorough and rigorous than a group of academics

might have managed and so that it sits in a more 'standpoint' tradition. As Davies and Gannon say of their approach:

'We are interested in our research to understand the process of selving, rather than to discover particular details about individual selves.' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 7)

That said there were still useful notions in their method that resonate with what I did usefully adopt as an approach:

'The remembered moment details discursive habits that we peel away, not to find the 'real' embodied self hidden beneath, but in order to see the movement, the flow, the working of 'organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 7)

This looseness and focus on flow, energies, and desires formed a way of approaching discussions with participants for me and also of thinking about the subjectivities of myself and other participants in analysis.

Another useful label for the type of method I adopted is a more collective take on 'auto-ethnography' (Ellis, 2004), a form of relational biography perhaps? (Davies and Gannon, 2006, p3). (See Appendix 2, quote 12).

Our discussion became very focused on issues of power in our childhoods as this related to the intersections of inside/outside, mainstream/marginal, and resistant, alternative, gender and adult/child relations.

'Feminist researchers can choose not to abandon investigation by knowing subjects of specific power relations, their intersections, histories, materiality, morality and effects, and can dispute claims that these are unknowable.' (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 103)

In the end there was also such a strong ethical problem with how the data could not make the claim to represent 'realities,' not only of participants but also of (their view of) their parents and the 'adult' generation of communards of their childhoods, that I have come to a place of being quick to put disclaimers around participants' experiences, memories and experiences representing 'truth' or 'reality' simply as a device to avoid critique. This approach borrows from memory work methods but also from feminist attempts to wrestle with how to give voice or authority to their research or their participants and yet acknowledge the epistemological issues involved with those claims:

'Temple's solution is to abandon any general attempt to connect knowledge and experience to reality. She suggests that each researcher should declare their own hand, and each reader should compare what they read with their own views.' (Temple, 1997, p. 5.3). This attempt at reflexivity is intended to avoid the problem of limited academic communities silencing the experience of others (particularly

through a 'booming voice of reason') by specifying what can constitute proper knowledge (Temple, 1997, p :5.1)' (Ramazanoglu & Hollan, 2002, p. 136)

Memory work and biography...

'Although we take stories of childhood and family literally, I think our recourse to this past is a way of reaching for myth, for the story that is deep enough to express the profound feelings we have in the present.' (Kuhn, 1995, p. 1)

Within this narrativisation, later events are understood as a culmination and actualisation of prior events. Hence, childhood is the ground and the foundation of adulthood, and adulthood is made coherent through invocations of childhood. The autonomy that selves are supposed to evince is held to be laid down in childhood... the child has come to embody the concept of 'interiority', the internalized self:

'The search is for the self and the past that is lost and gone, and some of the ways in which, since the end of the eighteenth century, the lost object has come to embody the shape and form of the child" (Steedman, 1995, p. 174). When selves are to be sought out, understood and actualized, when the 'true' self is both constantly in danger of being lost and always able to be re-found, childhood takes on a special significance. Explicitly in texts which promote the search for 'the child within' more implicitly in a range of sites which promote self inspection and self actualization, the wellspring of selfhood is held to be found in our own pasts our own childhoods.' (Lawler, 2000, p. 35-6)

The practice of evoking and recording memories of childhood poses many complex issues in terms of processes, myths and desires intimately bound up with a current search for self.

'... the desire to discover the childhood of another can be the desire to rediscover and possess one's own childhood – a search or want that is bound to lead to disappointment, loss and dissatisfaction.' (Radstone, 2000, p. 136)

This is even more so when a jointly biographical and autobiographical project is being undertaken. For myself and for participants the desire to make sense of our feeling that our childhoods were unusual and had a strong effect on our current sense of self was very strong. A strange mixture of memory work took place, a combination of child like recollections of places, times, spaces, relationships and experiences we remembered and a sense-making process where we jointly wrestled with what we thought these things meant to us and about us as adults as well as the lost child we once were.

Looking back at childhood is, of course, not the same as being a child. The agendas of our adult subjectivities were strongly at work on our perceptions, particularly when we began any kind of analysis or sense-making of what we remembered about our communal childhoods.

'Adults are in a different place, bearing different pressures, and facing social and emotional challenges. From this place we can misunderstand, disavow or idealise childhood experiences.' (Radstone, 2000, p. 136)

Fantasy and feelings are of course totally central to memory work, and cannot be filtered out of the process of remembering, reporting nor analysing childhood memories. What we remember, how we remember it, and what meaning we make of that, as well as what we forget, are arguably functions of our current subjectivity working on itself:

'...memory and forgetting are closely intertwined as the individual, overwhelmed by feelings, fantasies and memories, uses available defences in order to forget. The dynamics of repression, denial and splitting are continually in operation. There can never be remembering or forgetting without fantasy, emotionality and unconscious motivation.' (Radstone, 2000a, p. 137)

One of the issues in this research was the difference between our remembering, or trying to remember, the sense we made of things as children, and the meaning and definition we were now imposing on those experiences as adults. We could not become children again and think how we thought then. Some of the data did, however, seem from tone and quality to provide some beautifully 'child's eye' stories from participants about experiences of their childhoods. I allowed and encouraged participants to switch quite organically from these kinds of memories, and then into more adult sense-making processes and back again, flowing with their process, tracking and keeping up with them.

We often sparked each other's memories of being a child in communal spaces in very visceral ways in our discussions and sharing. In our sharing of our memories and experiences participants and I did much to prompt each other's remembering as well as begin to unpick and analyse the meanings of those memories for us. A process of unearthing, as well as analysis, took place in a two way exchange in interview, with participants' prompting my memory and expanding my understanding and analysis and also, with my autobiographical written material and on the spot memories and thoughts at interview prompting the process of memory and analysis for participants in relation to their own subjectivity:

'Each memory that is told in response to the agreed question inevitably leads to the generation of new memories. Sometimes these memories are of moment that had until then been completely forgotten. Often those who arrive with 'no memories' are amazed at how quickly stories begin to come to them once the storying begins. In this sense each memory is threaded on to the last. As we each tell our stories, the others of us listen carefully, probing for details and images that could help us imagine and bring to life in our bodies each other's remembered stories.' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 9-10)

It has been important for me to recognise that the data from interviews included in this research is partial, not only in my and participants' selection of what we wished to focus on, but also in terms of the particular age and stage we are at when interviews take place:

'Descriptions of experience are always revisable. I am assuming that I can recount my own experience without claiming that I am simply describing something independent of the description. This follows from my first assumption that there is no transparent language. I start from this situation and this situated self. I can recount my experience as it feels to me now, with my present level of understanding. It is quite possible that, as I continue to think and theorise and observe, that I will understand more and my situated self-understanding will change accordingly.' (Griffiths, 1995, p. 14)

Writing about the process of this research entails this shifting perception that Griffiths describes. Throughout my engagement with this project, my perspective has shifted and been enriched, and it has also been irreparably moulded by sociological paradigms of knowledge, so that any 'naïve' sense of the subject matter, any unselfconscious engagement with my own sense of self or identity, is long behind me as I attempt to explain the process of this work. In my engagement with participants' memories and analysis of their own experience with me it has been important to keep in mind that their current preoccupations and ways of understanding are also temporal. They are of the moment, a snapshot of where they are at in their current lives and the issues they are facing, and hence what comes through strongly as areas that are of interest to them about their childhoods and their lives in the interviews. For example, all the participants were of an age range between 20–40 and this created a particular interest in notions of family, children and how to do (or not do) family and childrearing because these were important to these women as they tried to navigate their childbearing years, and to place themselves in terms of lifestyle, identity, community, career...

It is hard to float above your own life rather than be immersed in it. The pull towards different available (fragmentary and often conflicting) ways of viewing my history have been very undermining to my sense of having a stable self from which to choose which options to take, conceptually or actually. In everyday life, as well as in academia, I have experienced this as confusing. A choice of many ways to frame experience, focuses differently situated selves even within one larger self, but with some of these different ways or selves reinforced as more 'correct' than others... In some ways, the elusive sense of self, which I feel that my communal experience lent me, disappears gradually

as it has no reinforcement in my current circumstances – away from that time and place, and in the light of stronger orthodoxies, more powerful ‘realities’. This was a common experience for my participants too, and there was a definite pleasure for all of us in having the chance to revisit the memories of childhood communal spaces with an ‘other’, who could imagine and identify with us and prompt further memories.

‘Recalling old cognitive maps is like shaking the roots of a person. The stories come down like leaves from a tree. Not only do they represent “the facts”; they also tell how a person has been working on the story of her life. Even in less traumatic interviews I have been impressed, as a researcher, about what we inflict on our respondents when we ask them to tell “their” stories for “our” research.’
Michielsens, in Cosslet, Lury & Summerfield (2000, p. 185)

This is not a new experience but an exaggeration of something I have been familiar with, of my ‘home’ culture being overpowered by other realities with the weight of dominant ideology behind them. Also, of that sense of having a strong culture, but one that had few rules and boundaries, and hence was hard to grapple with, to find a sense of self in relation to, or to defend against other orthodoxies – because little about the belief system of communes seemed that explicitly stated or explained. Moon Zappa wrote the following about her experience in her introduction to Chelsea Cain’s book about women who had girlhoods in the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s in America:

‘At my house we were exposed to everything, because knowledge is power. At my house there was no supervision, so there was no reason to sneak. At my house there were no rules, so there was nothing to rebel against. I hated it. It always left me with an awful floating feeling that most, if not all, of these lovelies experienced, of too much space, of too many choices. I felt very often (and still do) like I was doing a moon walk and my cord came loose from the ship. Ick. I craved rituals and rules like my friends had. I prayed for curfews and strictly enforced dinner times. Uniform and organized events and people with **goals** amazed me.’
Zappa, in Cain (1999, foreword, p. 17)

Each newly recovered memory, each new theoretical perspective, each new person whose story and perspective I entered into, swayed my attention this way. At stake is what kind of direction and personal narrative I might settle on in the end – one I must then live with, as is potentially true for participants involved in deconstructing their/our experience and identities. The swirling mass of impressions, memories and feelings are the raw material from which I attempt to fashion a picture that is intelligible and therefore tellable. Applying theory and methodology does not always help to close down a more certain story but often opens up new vistas of potential viewpoints and perspectives. This process can be disturbing, because beyond making stories there is the

burning question of whom I belong with, and how I belong with those people, and how I might make sense of my self in order to move into the future more powerfully. Complex and awkward as this process is, it seemed to me part and parcel of what is necessary to write a methodologically rigorous and ethically defensible piece of research.

The questions that participants and I began to ask in our discussions were similar to the ones that Griffiths talks about, reflecting a strong sense of conforming to social pressure, of wanting to know which 'I' to keep faith with over the years, particularly when our constant experience as children from a marginal home culture was that it was necessary to have different 'selves' from an early age:

'The "I" seems to be unitary?, But can it be?, and If it is, how? The questions for women bypassed this, focusing rather, on who or what am I? That is, how did I come to be myself? And 'Is what I take to be my self, my real self?' and, 'What can I do about it?' (Griffiths, 1995, p. 72).

This sense of watching a 'performed' self and knowing it to be 'not real' was very common among my participants, and I believe it was not only a product of being female, but was reinforced by being a female raised in a resistant way, and in a marginal lifestyle. This brought a certain self-consciousness to such questions and raised notions of 'fitting in' with 'mainstream' life, but also being loyal to the ideals and practices participants were raised to believe in.

This process is bound in time, or, to put it another way, at any given moment in a person's life the particular focus they have, the things they are thinking about, the context they are currently in, will shape where their attention is placed in the present and how things are interpreted. With my participants, trying to remember the past was always/already a process of explaining current understandings and preoccupations, and participants for the most part were very aware of that. Several said to me, 'I can only tell you what I remember right now. Sometimes I remember different things, or remember it in a different way. My focus on the past changes as I, and my concerns, change in the present'. This is an awareness of an important methodological issue for this project concerning memory and recollection and its partiality.

Another issue with remembering childhoods is that it can be so difficult to get a hold of describing the surrounding culture and context of our childhood memories – the adult world and how it thought about children at that time. How children were thought about in the 1970s and early 1980s is different from now, and how adults in communes thought about children at that time remains

to some extent a mystery to this research. Being children ourselves at that time we may not have adult knowing about that wider culture - only childlike memories of being in it:

‘...it is only ever possible to write the most partial and localised history of children as they are the most temporary of social subjects, not just because they grow up, but also because ideas of childhood and children – developmental, historical, social and cultural – seem to be ever on the shift.’ (In Radstone, 2000a, p. 135)

Trying to remember the power dynamic of being a child can be difficult from an adult perspective too, and this was one of the areas that I particularly tried to focus participants’ attention towards.

‘There are aspects of psychic life which move to deny the parental relationship and the reality of ones’ own position of limitation and dependency’ (Radstone, 2000a, p. 148)

This is also true of remembering what it was to be in that position, where it is possible both to not remember fully how that position felt or to deny it’s powerlessness, or to dramatise and make larger than life those childhood experiences. These omissions and dramas, fantasies and stories which come from memory do not invalidate this work, however, but simply point to a way of understanding the process of ‘selving’ that participants are currently engaged with in relation to their childhoods. They offer signs that show us those areas that are ‘hot’ and those which are not for participants at this time in their lives. The map of the territory is a snapshot of these ‘hot’ issues and memories, and when there are commonalities between participants a group map with ‘hot’ areas emerges. This is what I have aimed to produce in the process of collective remembering and sense-making, and later selecting and writing.

‘As experts on their own experience the individual women are both ‘producers of ideology’ and the only ones who ‘know’ how they did it. Their memories have stored up the information that explains how they came to choose a particular path and why, what meaning they were looking for, what compromises they acquiesced in and what alternatives might have existed.’ (Radstone, 2000a, p. 156).

This process becomes more complex if one admits to a difference between adults and children, their social positioning, capabilities, perceptions and concerns. It is beyond the remit of this work to fully investigate the difference in the subjectivities of children and adults, or to challenge where the remembered child of my participant’s memories had the agency or autonomy of adult participants, and where this might have been different for them, because they

were children at the time of the memory. But it is worth flagging this point nonetheless.

As adults now part of the process of this research was to engage with participants in mapping her current sense of self.

'This means that an individual constantly constructs herself anew from history; she privileges certain experiences as relevant, creates herself from them and discards everything else as irrelevant.' (Radstone, 2000a, p. 157)

In throwing light on what experiences participants currently feel as relevant and important to them, this research has attempted to get some picture of what children in communal contexts were particularly affected by, what had and currently has particular relevance to commune raised women about their childhoods in communes.

With more time...

If I could adapt the method I used I would still do the autobiographical writing and present it to participants along with questions before interview. I would still allow areas of interest to emerge from pilots and then adapt areas of enquiry to what participants were interested in. I would still interview participants on a one to one basis. I feel it would have been interesting to add on some further steps after this, however. It would have been interesting to gather all the participants once they had been individually interviewed, having given them the transcripts of each other's interviews to read through, and conduct a group process of remembering, discussion and sense-making. I would also involve participants in the process of selection and of deciding about chapter focus and also perhaps of conclusions. This was simply impractical due to time limitations and the problems of geography – having participants spread around the country. It also would have stretched my demands on participants in terms of time, energy and commitment much further than I already had. My requests also, were already fairly large asks. If I had been able to do exactly as I wanted I would have offered to include participants as paid researchers of their own experience, despite their not being trained as academics, and made the work genuinely a work of collaborative biography.

It would also be interesting, of course, to talk to 'adults' from participants' childhood communities, men who were commune raised there, and possibly a larger sample of participants from each community or a larger number of communities. Realistically, this puts the work on a much, much bigger scale,

breaks many conventions of academic work, raises questions about participants' unpaid labour, and presents a lot of logistical and time issues. But it would be great!

Endnotes for Chapter Two

ⁱ Rural communes tended to be less integrated with the local community (who tended to be more conservative and homogenous than in cities), and there was also the whole enterprise connected with many of the large rural communes, which often had large houses with grounds to keep up and also often had dreams of self-sufficiency or living from the land, and so had farming and gardening enterprises to run. As my own experience, and that of the majority of my interviewees, had been rural, I decided to narrow the focus down further by not including urban communes. I kept a geographical spread across the UK in order to gain a broader picture of communal childhoods.

ⁱⁱ One important thing to mention here is that for commune raised people the temptation to believe in a mythological 'normal' family is particularly strong, because of the strong ideologies of communards as being positioned 'outside the norm' on purpose. '...participants may be less concerned with the research process as a scientific endeavour than they are with researchers as professionals with answers and resources. Quite often this emerges in the form of a question of normality: Are other families like us?' (Daly, in Gilgun, Daly & Handel, 1992, p. 7). For commune raised people the unusual nature of 'the family' in its communal context made comparisons of this kind hard to find, and dichotomy of comparison – normal and communal or alternative – formed a strong essence of the sense I and other participants had of ourselves and our childhoods. Comparing with other families from communes was part of the picture, but this merged with a questioning of this kind of experience versus a myth of 'normalcy' in 'the mainstream' which pervaded my own thinking and that of other participants. This question of comparing communal and other family experience proved absolutely beyond the scope of the project because the diversity of 'other family experience' made any simple dichotomy a nonsense. This didn't stop this dichotomy being very present in the thinking of participants, however, and this notion has been one I have struggled to both include in the work because it was so pervasive and also to question or contextualise with an awareness of its mythological nature.

ⁱⁱⁱ Researchers into communal life in the 1970s (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976) treated communes as a kind of family group using a loose description of that notion, but also recognised family groups within the larger 'family group' of the commune as discussed in the previous chapter about literatures. 'Although legal and biological factors are parts of the general definitions of families, three other themes related to definitions emerge: a) persons mutually define themselves and each other as members of families b) members make enduring commitments to each other and c) members have a sense of shared personal history.' (Gilgun, in Gilgun, Daly & Handel, 1992, p. 23). Participants had different relationships with how much they experienced their communities as 'family' but all had a more narrow sense of 'family' within the larger group. This flexible and somewhat dual sense of 'family' in the minds of participants became important in the research, the exploration of inner and outer circles of intimacy and how they were conceptually and actually navigated by participants as children.

^{iv} Many would agree that as a method, consciousness-raising was at the heart of this women's movement. In various settings, small groups of women began to talk together, analyze, and act. The method of consciousness raising was fundamentally empirical; it provided a systematic mode of inquiry that challenged received knowledge and allowed women to learn from one another.' (DeVault, 1996, p. 30). This quote refers to a description of the second wave of feminism, in the 1960's and 1970s in Europe and

America, both in academic circles and in wider society and is provided here as a description of the kinds of feminisms which were informing and shaping life in participants' communes in their childhoods. This author goes on to say 'Though the women's movement began outside the university, feminists in nearly every discipline soon began to apply it's methods to their context and work, embarking on a collective project of critique and transformation.' (DeVault, 1996, p. 30)

^v Another potential problem with my sense of being an 'insider' (and Vic's too) was the potential for both of us to assume we 'knew' about what participants were describing to me, when in truth very real differences might be present. I was keen to maintain as far as possible a sense of participants' sense of reality in the work and had a strong awareness of how my own assumptions might distort how I heard and understood what was being said to me. Having said that, I know that inter-subjective understanding is slippery and hard to grapple with effectively so there will inevitably still be elements of my own assumptions and experiences colouring this work. I remain it's author despite all attempts to be as collaborative and inclusive, open to hearing difference and conscious of listening for difference in what I hear, and my own perspective inevitably colours all that is contained here strongly.

^{vi} Later in the research at the point of listening through interviews, transcription, selection and analysis, Carol Gilligan's work informed a resistant reading of common myths and belief structures within communes, as well as influences from the mainstream present both inside and outside communal spaces and influencing participant's world-view in my analysis of interviews. For me, as I engaged with participants, and with data, this was important to remain aware of, as if looking for both the hegemonic and it's opposite, radical twin, the reaction against the 'norms' of 'mainstream' culture. I was also very keen on Morwenna Griffiths' (1995) theoretical work about identity as a starting point to think through this dual identity, and in my autobiographical writing her ideas about the web of identity, about the importance of relationship and the desire to belong, or to not belong, being granted or not granted 'belonging' as structuring identity and sense of self, as well as social positioning of the self, helped me to begin to think through how to approach discussions with participants skilfully, so that I asked the right questions and shared information about my own concerns and preoccupations, which opened up the possibility of an engagement with participants being active in the sense-making process of the research and also offered me a framework to think through some kind of analysis of my discussions with participants.

^{vii} Contemporary post-modern or post-structuralist sociologists (Butler, 1997) might see this struggle as an obvious outcome of utopian idealist attempts at resistance, seeing identity as always already socially constructed and resistant to fundamental change (except in response to what is already in place culturally and socially and therefore formed of and from what already exists). 'Postmodern thought opposes the various Enlightenment and humanist approaches to truth being discovered by individual, autonomous subjects.' (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 89). It is obvious from the research about communes in the UK and from my own and participants' memories that was not how (adult) communards thought. However, and I am not prepared to automatically take a stance from post-modern theory which assumes communards were deluded to believe in the possibility of something new and 'outside' the cultural and social box as individual autonomous subjects. The ideological climate that myself and other participants were raised within had a utopian flavour, a belief in the creation of the 'alternative' and this strongly flavours participants' world view. It comes through in the material collected in my discussions with participants strongly and, although I have attempted to get outside this world view as a common sense 'reality' in my engagement with this work, I am aware of my own attachment to the values and ideas inculcated in my childhood communal experience coming through as resistance, a kind of defensiveness. Certainly in the research project there was evidence in myself and other participants of a desire to validate some of the ideas and practices of our communal upbringings, as well as to critique them and work out

how we felt about them in relation to more 'mainstream' ideas and practices (real or imagined by us 'mainstream' norms). A desire to defend the project of doing something genuinely different or 'outside' was common, and the sense of potential for change and for individual choice in life sometimes didn't sit easily with the sociological analysis required, which tended to lead me back to this whole idea being utopian in terms of being impossible.

^{viii} One of the key problems of the research became the incongruousness of applying current social theory and analysis to utopian communal experiments with a twenty-five year elapse of time. This could automatically make such attempts at social change as intentional community seem ridiculous or impossible in the light of current sociological thought. The hindsight of participants, from a perspective of the now looking back at the thinking of the times could also add this sense of cynicism about such attempts. But participants, and I include myself in that, also held a fondness for the ideas they were raised with, and had formed their sense of self in relation to those utopian ideals and practices. So there was a dual 'bias' in our explorations of our childhood experiences (and possibly also that of my supervisor because of his communal history) both in our critical awareness of what went on in the communes of our childhood memories and our awareness of what feels to myself and other participants like an experience of speaking from the margins to a 'mainstream' which (in our imaginings or experience) often assumed or assumes now that such attempts were/are doomed, romantic, ridiculous or irrelevant. There is some investment in proving such (real or imagined) judgements from the 'mainstream' as (at least partially) wrong, as well as in speaking back to the adult generation about our experience and how it may not have been as 'utopian' in all instances as they might have hoped or believed.

^{ix} There is an issue about descriptions of 'Feminism' gleaned from participants' recollections and opinions and how these memories do not and cannot represent what was actually going on in their communities amongst adults. This is a problem for the research I have had to accept, that in this research project there is no way to get a grip of what was going on in participants' communities beyond what participants can remember, or ever knew, their view even at the time being partially informed by their being children in these spaces and not necessarily party to, nor fully understanding or engaged with, adult practices, thinking, debates. This is covered more fully in Chapter 4.

Chapter Three

Libertarian parenting and alternative family scenarios

'All the weary mothers of the earth will finally rest;
We will take their babies in our arms, and do our best.
When the sun is low upon the field,
To love and music they will yield,
And the weary mothers of the earth will rest.'

Joan Baez, Weary Mothers – People's Union # 1' lyrics

In this chapter I explore some of the common notions and experiences of being parented in the participants' communities, and I also begin to outline some of the difficulties with drawing general conclusions from this study. I begin with an exploration of participants' recollections of notions of liberal parenting in their communities, and participants' ideas about the tension between the dependency of children and the ethos of personal freedom and autonomy, which they remember from their communal childhoods. The anti-authoritarian feeling to which many communes ascribed (according to participants) is discussed as a potential problem within relationships between adults and children. The way in which this anti-authoritarian feeling was experienced is now being thought through by participants as adults is examined.

Being a commune child?

Being a commune child did not come to light in this study as a simple definition of a cohesive experience. A summary might be to say that, according to participants common themes, they remember from their childhood environments varying blends of liberalism or more radical political stances, child-centred child rearing, personal (adult) seeking of individual fulfilment, and a kind of mission to improve, change or be outside of a perceived 'mainstream' status quo. The attempt to live self sufficiently from the land, as well as individual family relationships and individual characters and experiences came together to throw up a plethora of different childhoods for the participants. How much attention children, or the issue of children in the community, was given varied a lot between communities, according to participants who lived in them:

"I feel my parents really thought about and considered my education and what kind of life they wanted me to have, that was a very important thing to them, which I think is a kind of privilege. And they were really interested in the development of a child, and supporting a child in how they developed, that was

given a lot of thought. It was a beautiful place and we had a lot of freedom to roam; we could go anywhere in the fields and always felt safe; I felt very loved and very supported in whatever I did. Although in some ways it's a double-edged thing, in some ways I feel that as a child I was exposed to a lot of things that were quite scary, a lot of strange people, a lot of weird energies, which in some ways was a weird thing. In that way it has given me more life experience really early on..." – Jody

Lucy – "...there was space away from parents?"

Bridget – "Yeah, space to go off alone, but not a lot of space with them holding you, kind of thing, keeping you safe."

As nearly all my respondents said it would be, it has been hard to draw strong generalised conclusions from individual experiences of being parented or of parents in a commune setting, as Jody cautioned me:

"...everyone had their own parents and their own situation; you can't group everyone together."

Different communities also had widely varying views on how parenting was to be organised, ranging from very structured involvement with childcare duties from all commune members, through very child-friendly and child-centred communities with less formal structures, to communities where responsibility remained largely with individual parents or step-parents rather than the wider community. In some communities, children largely cared for themselves and adults were fairly uninterested in engaging with them, whether parents or not, according to some participants.

As a possible illustration of the variety of potential experience of participants from the perspective of an adult/parent in the 1970s, this mother, writing in *Communes Network* (a self published magazine which was circulated amongst British communes and published/edited by a different Intentional Community each issue quarterly) describes her experience of visiting a wide range of communities while looking for a place to live with her children:

'Communes with children differed greatly in their attitudes to them. One place we visited seemed quite strict, with rules about times for eating and going to bed and playing (in contrast to the principle of self-regulation which I expected communes to follow), and a strong sense of adult authority. Adults sometimes showed warm affection towards the children but rarely if ever a sense of delight in them.

Another place was much more libertarian, though never to the point of neglect. The children (apart from babies) shared a life that was largely separate from the adults, consisting of school, television and games, and probably closer to the world outside than that of their parents. In a third commune great importance was placed on providing high-quality communal childcare. Every adult took a turn at being responsible for one or two small children, playing with them, changing them, doing their laundry. Each shift on childcare was less than a day

and was often shared with another adult. Everyone involved, adults and children, showed obvious affection for each other, and the adults seemed to enjoy and be stimulated by the children here more than anywhere else.' *Communes Network* (June 1985, p. 17)

Of my participants, only one had spent her whole childhood in a traditional nuclear scenario with mother and father both present. In the reportage of participants, traditional notions of motherhood and, perhaps to a lesser degree, fatherhood, were contested to some extent in their communities. This challenge to perceived 'mainstream' norms occurred with more or less vehemence and conscious political framing depending on the particular community and the choices and position of particular parent(s) as participants remember it. This doesn't mean that family units didn't exist, marked out from the wider community, or that those family units were not similar to ones outside of intentional community but it does mean that in the experience of participants conventional notions of the family and roles within it were open for questioning and reassessment in their memory of their childhoods in these spaces.

Participants described a scenario where feminist ideas, which challenged the role of women in the domestic sphere as well as public life, and Marxist ideas, which questioned women's role as unpaid workers propping up capitalist systems, the psychoanalytic ideas of people such as R.D. Laing (1971) and David Cooper (1971) had been disseminated widely in these circles and produced some suspicion of the whole notion of family (at least of nuclear family) as being viable or psychologically healthy places for human beings to be inside, whether mother, father or child. According to participants, the chief problem with family in this world-view was the problem of power and authority, the necessary repression of less powerful family members or parts of the self in order to make a nuclear family function.

Many participants described their childhoods as having an emphasis on empowerment of those seen as 'oppressed' i.e.: women and children in their home environments. Yet the situation was not one of straightforward equality or freedom for all, as one might expect, it was more complex than that:

"I mean I think I was quite lucky in terms of the amount of attention my parents gave me but definitely I grew up really quickly and in some ways I did kind of miss out on some of the frivolous, you know, for the hell of it, childhood stuff. But on the other hand it was both, because on the other hand we did get to, because of the freedom side of it as I said earlier we did make camps in the summer 'til midnight so there was, there was an intense amount of amazing fun you wouldn't

get to have as a child 'cause just because it's not safe where you live or you know, whatever. Umm... Coupled with more responsibility than is normal..." – Hazel

According to participants, a strong aspect of the experience of the liberal 'child-centred' childhoods in communes in the 1970s and 1980s was the notion of encouraging the authority of the inner self, this 'pure' self. This was seen as naturally healthy if the needs and desires of the person were expressed, and that in these communities part of this 'natural' (one might say perceived as pre-social) self was seen to be a 'natural' desire to be co-operative and therefore to respect the needs of others too. If this is true of communal environments it was indeed a utopian vision, and could easily fall in direct conflict with more conservative models, which could be described as seeing the pre-socialised self as necessarily self-interested and selfish.

Rigby (1974a) described communes against a backdrop of the growth of a mainstream culture of competitive individualism and how this culture was a rejected identity and ideology in communes, whereas he talks about notions of 'creative individualism' as a dominant identity and ideology in communes. Both these ideologies are described in hindsight by Beck (2001) as having played their part in the creation of a kind of 'me-culture' which valorises narcissism on many levels – from obsessive interest in appearance through to the shamelessness encouraged when 'winners' in any area of life prioritise their slightest whim or desire and debase and disregard 'losers' and their needs, to the militant demand for self-expression and a sense of entitlement which brooks no self-restraint, compromise, sacrifice or balancing of one's own needs with those of others.

Therapy culture, described by participants as still an alternative lifestyle at the time of their childhoods, although now recognised by them as prevalent or even dominant in 'the mainstream,' was influential in many participants' communities, with all its attendant notions: emotional and sexual freedom of expression were valued; boundaries and restrictions shunned. From the descriptions of participants, radical left-wing politics brought to the table notions of entitlement and demands for equality. Repression and oppression were the sins to be avoided, and distinctly un-cool. Participants described memories of this melting pot as open to wide variations of interpretation. Many issues were contentious and hotly debated: a simple summary might be that the hedonists and narcissists wanted a Utopia of formless pleasure and self-expression in which their needs and desires would always be given expression

and satiation, whilst the old school left-wingers were looking for hard work, sacrifice, duty and loyalty to a greater good. According to the recollections of participants, both camps thought the other was oppressive to live with, but there they were, trying to make it work living together.

In the experience of participants, children in communes were in a limbo world halfway between being equal members of their communities and being kept in traditional 'child' roles, and their precise status and treatment depended on both the particular community and their particular parent(s). Some commune-raised individuals felt that they ended up without the full power of adults but with many of the responsibilities, both practical and in terms of self-regulation and life-management, as well as of management of relationships, and in some cases domestic duties.

Pure children, hung-up adults

According to participants, a common idea circulating in communes was the idea of children as pre-social, resilient and carefree, and adults as 'repressed' and 'hung up' (having been socialised and therefore messed up and moved out of contact with the natural goodness of the essential pre-social self). In his book about his childhood in various communes that had a religious focus, led by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (commonly called 'the orange people' as they wore orange clothes), Tim Guest sums up this notion beautifully: "As the children of the commune our role was to run free, to be uninhibited, to say yes, to look beautiful, innocent, uncorrupted. For our hair to billow out in the wind as we ran. But some of us were not always like that" (Guest, 2004, p. 108). Of course, my participants and I were not in 'orange' communities, but there was an echo of this type of sentiment throughout the counter-culture which our communities were part of.

In the reportage of participants the focus in childrearing tended to mirror the concerns of adults in communes - to be autonomous and fulfilled – children were to be free, not to be tampered with; adults were contaminants who would interfere with the pure process of development by introducing restrictions, hierarchies, authoritarianism and repression into the child's world.

"I guess that was my parents' downfall in a way... the fact that they made us aware that we are our own people with our own choices in life and then they couldn't force their own decisions and choices on us; we had already been given that freedom; I always see it as being given the freedom to become your own person, to grow, be a person in your own right, rather than being told how to develop, and I guess that was the problem that Mum had bringing me and [my

sister] up; she taught us to be our own people and then had to live with it; she could never enforce her own choice in the matter after that.” – Ariella

Relationship as central to life

A common story told by participants was an attempt in their communities to manage meeting everyone’s needs flexibly. This was not to be prearranged through ‘traditional’ roles but was meant to be negotiated more fluidly and flexibly through dialogue and discussion. This dialogue and discussion did not, in any of the communities my participants hailed from, include the children in any formal way. ‘Meetings’ were adult arenas, as children were (perhaps correctly) assumed to be uninterested and not equipped to deal with the conflicts involved in them. This lack of inclusion seems to me also symbolic of the limbo land that children often occupied in intentional community and of the unclear role they played, an expectation of their ability to manage and express their own needs and wants and sometimes little guidance in achieving this feat, and less genuine power than adult community members. Children were sometimes left to represent themselves without much thought being given to whether they were capable of doing that very effectively, and without any systems in place to facilitate them expressing their needs and wants formally. From my observations of participants’ common stories, this unclear way of dealing with how children were to be placed and included in communal life could result in children not getting much of a look-in and relegated to the bottom of the ‘needs’ pile. Some became narcissistically grandiose and difficult to deal with as they tried anxiously to get their own needs met in situations where they were outgunned on all sides in the communal power stakes. Adult disdain for authoritarianism meant that rules, guidelines and boundaries were often fluctuating and hard to grasp. Arguably, from my observations, some commune kids did not learn to be sensitive to the needs of others, but became used to the practice of self-assertion, in a context in which ‘he who shouts loudest gets his way’.

A common story from participants was how the social relationships of communal life were the central ‘work’ of daily life and provided a rich field of many potential experiences and relationships, to which participants firmly believe they might not have had access in more conventional settings. This common notion is illustrated by Megan’s idea of what conventional life, or particularly family life, might be like for her as an adult, which echoes her idea

of the kind of sentiment that prompted her parents' generation to form intentional communities:

Lucy – "As an adult, how do you feel about the idea of living conventionally?"

Megan – "A bit caged. I would feel very dependent on the person I am living with because I wouldn't have enough, just them, and I think it's a very insular way to live, and I'd worry that I wouldn't have enough social interaction with people. I love the concept of a commune because of the social aspect, not necessarily the ideology which is secondary I think to the social aspects, the contact with lots of people is definitely the prime ingredient."

This practice of relationship as central to life is a very strong similarity between all participants. Most of the participants recognise this practice as being valuable and important to them in their adult lives, perhaps the central value they/we gained from their/our communal upbringings. Despite the difficulties of navigating the (sometimes unclear) social spaces of intentional community, participants were obviously skilled in such navigation, and they themselves put this down to their early experiences with communal living.

It is interesting to consider the physical spaces of participants' rural communities and the kinds of identity and practice such spaces facilitated or made necessary. Jasmine describes how the physical space of her community made a kind of self-sufficiency a fact of life:

"I mean it's like all parents really, you have this freefall time, it's just in the community it's... the expanse of it is massive, so you come home from school and you wouldn't necessarily be picked up, so I might walk home from school and then couldn't find them, so there'd be absence in that way was extremely real, and I remember a lot of times walking around for hours shouting 'Mum, Mum', really having no idea at all where they were. And also meetings, they'd be in a meeting, the door would be shut, you couldn't go in, so in lots of ways they weren't available, and perhaps were evading parenting, yes. But in many fundamental ways they were making stop-ins which I think if they hadn't it would have been disastrous, whereas it was just confusing, and most childhoods are confusing I think, but it wasn't like there was replacement, it wasn't like 'go to this person', we were quite often left just doing our own thing."

As well as the sense of physical aloneness in this description (which was echoed in other participants' experiences), a common sense emerged of how participants as children felt they were largely left out of their communities' decision-making meetings and full participation in the work and running of daily life therein, and lived a separate life of school and peers apart from the adult community which was busy with its own social and practical concerns. This feeling represents not only an interesting glimpse into participants' sense of their exclusion from full power or participation in communal life and

decision-making, but also an illustration of how in their experience, the demands of communal life could impinge on family life or childcare, with adults busy elsewhere, so that children ended up feeling somewhat marginalised and left to their own devices rather than included.

An illustration from the adult perspective of this marginalisation comes from this mother writing in *Communes Network*, describing the problems of the inclusion and exclusion of children and adults with childcare responsibilities in communes:

‘Living communally should in itself reduce the degree of isolation but it may make the experience of isolation more intolerable. I have felt the bitterest sense of loneliness and powerlessness when I spent time with my crawling baby in one of the safe rooms in the house while everybody else seemed to be working and talking happily a few feet away in the kitchen, where my infant couldn’t crawl and screamed in frustration.’

Here, once again, the particularities of communes as physical spaces come to the fore as implicitly shaping social practice and experience as well as ideology and attitude. The mother goes on:

‘Also, adults are usually much more interested in each other than they are in children. So children in communes can easily get less rather than more adult attention than in nuclear families. Older children seem to thrive on this lack of attention but small children can suffer if people are not reminded of their special needs. Some courageous parents worked hard at increasing awareness. Others were pulled apart by the conflict between the worlds of children and adults. Others, usually those with older children, seemed to have abandoned them almost entirely to their peer group. Or a parent might feel she has to protect and fend for her children because no one else gives them a thought. New habits have to be learned by all adult members of a household with a small child; such as opening doors gently to avoid knocking over a toddler on the other side, putting away dangerous things or precious fragile ones. If the other adults don’t, or won’t, learn to be more aware, then someone has to watch the child constantly to protect him and everyone’s property. If it is always a parent who plays this role, feelings of anxiety, loneliness and bitterness may poison her relationship with other adults.’

Dependency and individualism

The dependency of children meant that, despite notions of self-assertion and self-expression, which were rife in communal life according to participants, children’s experience was not straightforward in terms of finding (or constructing) or making claim to an independent sense of self, or expressing that self, as Bridget describes:

‘The whole idea was that you were free to make your choices and do what you wanted to do, express it, be an expressive person, but actually the opinions that you were allowed to have were kind of only their own values, so feminism was first and foremost a prerogative, and umm yeah materialism, capitalism was very

wrong and the whole idea that, you know, in a commune it's a collective and you grow and produce your own food and it's all organic, that was the right way.'

According to participants, the adults in their communes held a strong ethos that relationships should not be binding or dutiful, but rather expressive and fulfilling. They described how they thought many adult commune members were searching for freedom to develop a kind of 'creative individualism' (as Rigby (1974a) would call it) that invoked a demand for a sense of equal exchange in serving others' needs, and a prioritising of individual needs and wants being allowed expression, and how child centred notions of child rearing were commonly attempted or talked about. In participants' perceptions, children in intentional-community settings were often given unusual amounts of decision-making or individual power and determination and engaged in relationships where adult authority was mitigated against, in favour of negotiation between equals, and different ways of being emerged from communal environments. Leah describes what she sees as the very different 'rules of engagement' that she has carried through from her experience of a communal upbringing, different to her experience and imagining of more 'mainstream' childhoods that is:

"I would definitely have a different outlook; my friends who have been brought up in unusual family structures definitely have different outlooks to other people; some of my friends who were brought up like me have a more similar outlook to – say – people from traveller sites than they do to normal people. I have some friends whom I don't have to explain my weird hippy upbringing to, no... y' know, not weird, it's not even about upbringing, is it? It's about kind of things like, everyday things, my outlook on like – what happened on the bus coming here [Leah was very late for interview], and rather than it being like, a terrible sin, my timekeeping, which to me seems perfectly natural [giggles] but to some of my friends is bad."

Lucy – "What, you think that's to do with..."

Leah – "I think that's to do with, well it is, I mean, there wasn't a set time structure, no set meal times or bed times or whatever, so from being really young I just slept if I was tired, stayed up as long as I wanted to stay up... So I am sure that reflects in my timekeeping now..."

Lucy – "So was that, like, a conscious ideology of your parents or the community as a whole; were they consciously allowing you to decide what to do with yourself?"

Leah – "I don't know whether it was, or it wasn't a matter of them not being in control as parents, because they certainly are, and were, in control, but um... So it must have been a conscious decision, but, then again, my mum is from Israel, and children there aren't excluded from things like if you go out for a meal in the evening then the kids are taken too... So it could be a kind of cultural difference thing. It could be partly down to cultural difference but then the other kids around

[who didn't have an Israeli parent] had much the same kind of thing... It must have been horrible for the parents!

I don't know whether the community bred precocious children or whether the fact is that, as a personality I have always been very adamant about what I want and don't want. I was brought up in a way where I was allowed as long as I could justify why I wanted, to do what I wanted. That was always a very strong thing, particularly from my mum, and still is, that as long as you can give a thought-out reason why, as long as you didn't do it 'just because'. I've definitely got a very strong sense of being responsible for my own actions or my own decisions, which may come from my communal living experience. I find situations, like now, where I am living in what is effectively a shared house with my sister and some really close friends. I find it very strange that out of the five of us living together three of us share everything: the food, the cooking, everything like that, and the other two opted out of that. The three of us that have kind of – that find it strange that the other two don't want to share. Those two were both brought up in kind of 2.5 children environment, whereas all three of us, my sister, my friend and I were all brought up in communes, and thus it seems unnatural not to have everything belonging to everyone."

Leah describes a looseness in social relations and individual self-management, and a self-directedness that she sees as characteristic of her communal childhood experience and this sentiment is echoed by many other participants. At the same time as this relocating of personal boundary setting as the responsibility of children rather than their parents, and this openness to negotiation in relationship, participants described their experience of strong moral concerns and a kind of alternative orthodoxy, which created a tension between libertarian impulses and moral imperatives. Bridget describes this tension:

"They [adult communards] wanted freedom of speech and expression and the idea that you can be who you are and live however you wanted to live, but I think that was a kind of smokescreen because the reality was that they were a collective of people who all had the same ideas and were pretty intent on forcing that on everyone who was there, or at least on the kids because I guess all the adults already agreed on it."

From my discussions with participants, I gleaned an image of their communities where the care of children fitted somewhat uncomfortably within this wider goal of 'creative individualism', as in these terms was sometimes seen as somewhat thankless, or unfulfilling tasks. In participant's reportage of their communities, there were attempts to co-opt other adults (non-parents or other parents in communities) into taking a share of that burden. An endless process of negotiation was common to participants' experience of commune life, with childcare forming an important part of those ongoing debates.

Participants described how individual adults had a different take on how 'free'

children should be, and on how 'free' adults should be, to either take part in or refuse responsibility for children, including thinking through how behaviour might be modified when children were present.

Some participants remember some adult commune members having some disdain towards the needs, concerns and culture of children in communities, and finding them difficult and annoying to have to accommodate. This humorous song from Communes Network illustrates such sentiment from adults towards children:

'What sort of things do the kiddy-winkies do,
In an English country commune?
Everyone thinks it's time that they grew,
Or pulled their weight or left soon,
Birthdays several times a year,
They would like a computer,
'Don't pick me up, I want my mum,'
We must become gay or get sterilised today,
At an English country commune."

(Song from Communes Network, 1982)

The intentional communities of participants that did place an emphasis on communal childcare made up, and learned how to live with new rules and practices. Power and responsibility were negotiated between parents and non-parents as well as between adults and children in this area. As Kanter noted in her study of communes:

'While communes seek to become families, they are, at the same time, something different from families; they are groups with their own unique form, something between communities, organisations, families, and friendship groups, and they contain families in their midst as well as generate family-like feeling throughout the whole communal group' (Kanter, 1972, p401).

As participants describe it, non-parents as well as parents faced challenges from trying to live a communal childcare lifestyle. An illustration of this sense that participants had about the difficulties of non-parent relationships with children in their communities is this impassioned plea from a non-parent, who suffered grief after three children for whom he had taken on a major parental role, were removed from the community by their blood parent, and shows the complex emotional context that commune-raised children were at the centre of:

'The non-parent is less free than the parent. I cannot afford to tell a child to go to its mother when I feel shitty. I cannot afford to shout at it so much. I must give – and be confronted with rejections of 'I want Mummy to do it'; 'I don't want you.' I have

to fight with that pain... [The parent leaving] is not the first to walk out the door with her kids on an invisible biological string trailing behind... I as a non-parent do not have that power in the legal sense. If I took a child from here without the parents I would be hauled in for abduction' (Communes Network, 1984, p.21)

It was a complex situation and unclear set of social relations. In addition to the power that parents had, but non-parents didn't (legally, even if in other ways power as well as responsibility was fairly equally distributed), according to participants children themselves were not always willing or happy to be parented by adults other than their parents. Participants described how as children they did not want close interaction with some adults, but had no particularly effective way of enforcing this boundary except through childish displays of temper or rejection. As children participants often simply did not have the physical space, emotional skills or power position to assert their boundaries or desires in socially skilful ways, despite the idealistic assumptions of adults around them. Bridget goes on:

"You are exposed to such a wide cross section of people [in an intentional community], ideally I guess they are all going to be nice well adjusted people [giggles] but, umm, I can remember certain adults that creeped me out, or I felt very uncomfortable with or who weren't very children-oriented... So there were rarities that were kind of curve balls in that you saw them on a daily basis but it's like having a weird uncle, that was one of the down sides..."

Participants' experience of communal life was strongly affected by the parent or parents who raised them, as in even the most child-friendly of these communities children remained primarily the responsibility of their parent(s) when push came to shove, and all the women I talked to described a much stronger and closer bond with their parent(s) or step parent(s) than with other community members. When describing their own experience, in comparison to other children with whom they grew up, variation was generally explained with reference to the particular parenting individual children received; the state of mind or quality of parenting, the status within the community, or general situation, of parent(s), as well as the nature of children's relationship with other parent(s) who remained outside the community. One must add to this specificity that each community dealt with children differently, had members who contributed differently to the particular environment that that community provided, and had different physical set-ups and levels of comfort and child-friendliness, so the context of those specific relationships did vary too.

Jasmine describes why she liked one community more than another larger one, with awareness of social as well as a restatement of the importance of physical factors:

“It was smaller. I mean, maybe it was different for me anyway because my parents were in that very central position there. It might have been different for other kids coming in, but the ceilings were very low. It was a friendly house with only one big room, whereas [the other community] had a ‘food area’ it was so big and umm... and it was cosy, my mum got loads of Laura Ashley stuff donated, so it was all decorated in a really conventional way; with flowery curtains and soft sofas. It was really an easy place to be comfortable, like a normal house, you know?”

In contrast to hedonist utopian dreams or myths about layabout hippies, living in a group or community (particularly in a rural setting with a substantial house and grounds and a drive towards self-sufficiency, necessitating work on the land) is very hard work. This was borne out in the memories of participants. They talked about their experience of witnessing and taking part in communal life meant work; relationships with a large number of people involving a kind of emotional or social work; the physical upkeep of a community with maintaining the house and grounds to liveable standards; organising the running of the place (which often involved farming or food production in these rural communities). In participants’ memories the community living added a new version of ‘community work’ to a parent’s load if he/she chose to live in a commune. In participants reportage this added significantly more duties to those that people might have had in more conventional settings and domestic structures. For many parents in communities the utopian ideal of equally shared childcare and housework did not materialise in reality, because whilst varying degrees of help were on offer to supervise and care for children, the ultimate responsibility for childrearing often still lay with the parents. The result of this was that many parents found themselves struggling to manage all their responsibilities – in a situation from which they had expected less work and more support. According to participants their parents may well have actually found more work, more interpersonal conflict and difficulty than in previous more conventional scenarios.

Most commune members had to find the money to pay bills. Although costs were often much lower than in a traditional nuclear household because of shared bills (and mortgage payments) among many, producing food within the community, and in some communities, a commitment to work inside the community meant that only part-time jobs were ‘allowed’ for members. All the

communities my respondents lived in allocated private as well as community space, for which adults were privately responsible for cleaning and managing, along with communal areas, communal life and community projects. Parents juggled these demands on their time and energy alongside parenting with or without the help of a partner, depending on their circumstances. Often children were involved in 'work' in the community, arguably in contradiction to mainstream myths of childhood in modernity or post-modernity. Nearly all my respondents were expected from a young age to take part in domestic work, such as cooking and cleaning, and many who were older took a lot of responsibility for looking after their younger kin, sometimes including younger children they weren't related to by blood.

According to most of my participants, many mothers in intentional community carried a particular responsibility for their children's emotional care and general well being above and beyond that of fathers or male partners, as well as of other adults in the community or the community as a whole. This was seen by participants as often to do with the demands made by children and their unwillingness to accept care from other adults (children's attachment to parents over and above other adults), as well as to do with the difficulties of getting childcare, awareness, help, or support from other adults.

The attempt to liberate oneself, as a mother, from the perceived limitations of the traditional maternal role was not without its problems, as this mother expressing herself in Communes Network illustrates:

'The problem of childcare in a nuclear family is that it is a relentless 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week responsibility which can isolate the child-caring parent from adult company and stimulation. If the burden can be shared, ideally it should cease to be a burden at all... The trouble with childcare in some communes seems to be that it treats looking after children as a chore. People don't expect to enjoy it... Also, adults are usually more interested in each other than they are in children. So children in communes can easily get less rather than more adult attention than children in nuclear families... New habits have to be learned by all adult members of a household with a small child... If the other adults don't, or won't, learn to be more aware then someone has to watch the child constantly to protect him...'

(Communes Network magazine, June 1985)

Participants report their memories that there was an aura of anger, resentment and repudiation when women either chose to do, or ended up doing, the lion's share of childcare (despite their attempts at negotiation to prevent this from happening), and when other adult members of communities would not play ball and adapt to the needs of parents and children. Some participants described their understanding of a power struggle taking place that sometimes

left parents, particularly mothers, in intentional community having to choose between their own needs and those of their children, without necessarily sharing the responsibility very successfully with other adults (or male partners).

As Leah describes to me:

Leah – “Mum was a staunch feminist and was outspoken about everything – whether you wanted to hear it or not – she definitely had a very strong feminist ideology.”

Lucy – “And how have you responded to that – have you taken on board your mother’s ideas?”

Leah – “I think it’s very difficult not to, so yeah, I don’t know, sort of. I’ve never looked at marriage and keeping an immaculate house as somewhere to aim to be, but having said that I don’t have anything against marriage; I think I would get married if I were in a situation where I wanted to...”

Lucy – “So would you be happy in a role as a traditional woman? And by that I mean home-keeper?”

Leah – “I don’t think so. I have moments when I think it might be quite nice, but realistically I think not.”

Lucy – “Why not?”

Leah – “Because there are so many more interesting things to do than make sure dinner is on time for anybody – I am sure that might be different if there were children – but grown men should be quite capable of feeding themselves as much as grown women are [giggles].”

Lucy – “Do you think [your parents] had an equal relationship? I mean, you say your mum was full of feminist ideology, but do you think they actually did have an equal relationship?”

Leah – “No, I think that Mum would have liked it to be, but when it came down to it, she kept the home going a lot more than he did, although he [giggles] theorised about it a lot. But she still had to be the one who actually made sure it worked...”

Despite some negative feelings about the unfairness of the division of domestic labour in their communities, there was a general feeling among participants that it was better inside than outside in the wider world – for women in particular. Heather’s image of motherhood has been strongly influenced by her perception of her own mother’s experience of conventional family life (before moving into the community), so that she feels worried she may end up facing similar dilemmas to the ones her mother faced if she attempts to have a family in a non-communal way:

“I think that’s part of the reason why my parents went into community in the first place. I think my mum wanted to. She was lonely, with three children under school age. My dad was out all day working. She needed someone to share the burden of us three and not just share the work, but also if she wasn’t going to go to work, then how did she live with the fact that she had no adult company, no intellectual stimulation? She basically just had to spend all her time with us. I think that’s what

led her to looking at living life in an alternative way. It turned out it didn't suit my dad, he didn't like it, but from my mum's point of view the reason she went there worked out fine and she got what she needed. She did share the burden of bringing up three kids. I live in fear of the day that I wake up and feel like my mum did and I think, please don't let me feel like she did – totally isolated and alone and, you know, basically lonely yet, surrounded by the three people she loves most in the world. Us kids, but kids just aren't enough, as an adult, an intellectual person. I live in fear of having to leave and the fact that that might happen to me, having the option of living in community and not knowing what to do with it, or worse, wanting to and my partner not wanting to. I mean, I don't think I could live in community again, but if I decided I could and my partner decided he couldn't, that would cause problems. If I decide to have children, which I probably will, and my life has changed significantly by that time enough to make me want to go and live in community again and my partner doesn't, that'll shake our relationship to the core, because I know how nice it can be and I'll know why but they won't know or understand why I would want to do that because they won't have lived it. We discuss it amongst our group – what would we want to do? Should we set up another community? I always say 'not unless it's in London' and other people say not unless it's this or that, but it doesn't feel like something that will actually happen. Far more likely is that we go off and meet partners and live our nuclear family lives – which is quite a terrifying thought. If I had kids I wouldn't dream of doing anything but staying at home with my kids, you know? I suppose I would expect to go back to work, but ultimately I suppose I am conventional in that way. I suppose I would want to be a mother and a wife; do what I would consider to be the woman's role. I wouldn't want to be out at work all the time, which seems the alternative unless you go and live in a community and do both."

This dilemma about how to move forward in their own lives with regard to family and children was common among participants. Many felt they did not want to live communally again for many reasons, but many also felt that bringing up children in other environments would be harder. Those participants who had already had children were not living in communal settings, but still wondered and worried about what their children might be missing out on that they had had from that childhood experience of communal life. Although they also felt that it was easier to keep control over their children's environment not being in a communal setting, they missed the 'mucking in' of communal life in terms of domestic tasks and childrearing. A contradiction emerges: on the one hand participants felt that the attempts towards more equal sharing of childcare and domestic duties did not succeed (in communities), but on the other hand they felt their communities were better places for their parents, particularly their mothers, than what they imagined life might have been like in other family forms.

Conclusion

These examples show how participants imagine that communal living was often sought consciously by their parents as a solution to the perceived or experienced tensions of nuclear-family life, as a move towards adults, particularly mothers, being able to both parent and live more fulfilled lives. Participants describe a scenario where children's needs were considered, but with conflicts between the needs of children and adults. Much of the time, child dependency and attachment was problematic to deal with. Many participants felt that this was a tricky conundrum and one that wasn't necessarily explored very consciously, or dealt with very well by adults. Participants explored the ways in which they felt their needs were overlooked in communal situations, and attempted to point out how they felt that some of the assumptions regarding children made by the older generation were not necessarily true of their own experience. The images of being a parent, particularly a mother, that many of my participants ended up with seem to me to be quite negative – being all about restriction of individual autonomy and being 'stuck with' only children's company. I wonder where this strong impression came from as it was so common, and would venture to guess from my own experience that the childcare and children in communes were often a 'problem' that was wrangled with amongst adults. This may have been taken on board by commune raised children emotionally, as themselves being a problem for adults when they were children, which then transmuted into the whole idea of children being rather negative for them once they were adults. This hasn't stopped many participants having, or wanting children, but there was evidence that many participants were rather wary of this experience and how it might be done in a way in which the adults involved (themselves) didn't end up too unhappy in their lots.

xx Arguably these changes followed hot on the heels of the change in divorce laws, making it possible to have a 'no fault' divorce and, therefore, making divorce easier, as well as an emerging culture of individualism. (See Muncie et al, 1997, p. 20/21). Yet others argue the form of families has always been adaptable and subject to change throughout history, never truly achieving the stable 'nuclear' model which is popularly mythologised as 'normal', yet acknowledge a rapid shift in how acceptable deviating from this mythological 'normalcy' has become over recent decades. (See Beck-Gernsheim: 2002, p. 16-30)

Chapter Four

Parents, partners and 'splitting'

'You say you're lookin' for someone
 Who'll pick you up each time you fall,
 To gather flowers constantly
 An' to come each time you call,
 A lover for your life an' nothing more,
 But it ain't me, babe,
 No, no, no, it ain't me, babe,
 It ain't me you're lookin' for, babe.'

(Bob Dylan, 'It ain't me, babe', lyrics)

In this chapter I explore participants' take on the underlying thinking about adult sexual relationships in communes, and their feelings about the many changes in configuration of family, as well as the parental break-ups that most of them experienced in their lives. The chapter also addresses the ways in which relationship between children and their parents is affected by insecure attachments between adults in communal spaces.

'The commune is not seen typically, as having an existence of any meaningful kind other than that contained in the personal relationships within it. But these are constantly changing and change anew with the addition of each new person.'
 (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 10)

National nuclear-family strife

'[The women I work with]... they have discussions like about getting married and stuff and I say 'That's ridiculous, you'll only get divorced.' I am not sure if I would be with someone for that long; to me it's not possible to be with one person all your life; I don't think I'll ever get married. My vision of parenting is as a single parent, hopefully with some support from the dad.' – Megan.

In the 1970s and beyond the divorce rate was skyrocketing all over Europe (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), and the radical settings of intentional communities, with their allegiance to self-expression and self-fulfilment and openness to anti-status-quo ideas and ways of organising social life, were unsurprisingly no exception; indeed, all but one of my participants had parents whose relationship had broken up - they no longer lived together or counted themselves a couple - and that one exception had parents who had broken apart and engaged in extramarital affairs but had then come back together and remain together in the present. None of the participants had parents who ventured outside hetero-normative structures of relationship, although many

participants mentioned the openness of communes to homosexual relationship and some talked about their relationships with adults who were not heterosexual. The predominant norm in participants' communal spaces seems to have been conventional nuclear family structures, blended families, and single parent units. This does not mark their experience out very clearly from other liberal middle class individuals of their generation, and one of the core issues of this topic in the research was trying to tease out what made the experience of participants different because of the contexts of communal living that their families were in.

It is worth noting the language participants used to describe the changes in configuration of relationship: divorces or separations were not given the weight of those kinds of title and changes were referred to more as 'splitting' – people would 'split'. A common theme in participants' descriptions of their communities and larger social networks of like-minded people was how sexual relationship ties were sometimes purposely kept light in order to avoid 'repressive' or 'dutiful' 'dead' relationships that were bound together by the social order rather than by an 'alive' connection between those involved. This notion of 'aliveness' versus 'duty' was one which many participants seemed keen to validate and champion in their adult lives despite their misgivings about a relationship between these ideas and an experience of tenuousness in relationship they had in childhood. These notions are arguably fairly common notions in postmodern life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) but I would argue from participants' descriptions that their childhood experience of such mores was unusually developed for that time. In their descriptions and experience the communities surrounding their communities were more conventional and traditional in their view of marriage, family and relationship by a long way, and this discrepancy had a part to play in participants' experience.

It is interesting to consider the idea that a possible result of the attempt to keep relationships 'real', 'flexible', 'alive' and 'vital' might be seen as the relationship between a child and a parent ending up being, or being seen as, the only solid and lasting social contract in a scene in which all other relationships are accepted as being more transient. These ideas are echoed in a wider context in Anthony Giddens' (1992) writings about relationship and family. As some participants described it, the older generation (their parents' parents) had been rejected by their radical offspring and 'didn't understand' and were thus

removed from the picture of viable social or familial support. Peers and contemporaries were not to be expected to be dutiful, constant or reliable, which could leave a heavy load of expectation and focus on children and parents' relationship with them. What effect might this have on how children are viewed by individual parents, or on what children have to 'carry' in terms of their importance to those parents and the way they view them? And what effect might this have on how children are meant to conduct themselves, or on how parents are meant to cope with parenting and maintaining these constant parent-child relationships in the context of an ever-shifting sea of adult relationship changes?

The feelings and attitudes of people involved in the communes movement and their response to the times they lived through may, to some extent, be seen in the memories and impressions their children have of the sexual relationships of their parents and other adults around them, both inside their communities and in more mainstream settings, and through the sense that those 'children' are now attempting to make of those experiences and impressions. However, this work, of course, does not attempt to give real substance to the actual adults involved in communities, or their relationships, only to the now-adult commune childrens' recollections, experiences and sense-making processes.

In discussion with commune-raised women, I found images and views repeated often enough to tell a story of common impressions and strong perception of a dichotomy between 'conventional' (in this case traditional nuclear heterosexual monogamous) family and relationship arrangements and 'unconventional' (in this case blended, single parent, non-monogamous or serial monogamous, but still heterosexual) family and relationship arrangements as perceived by commune-raised women, based on what they picked up and carried, currently remember or are focusing on. There was a sense that in having the unconventional experiences of communal living their experience of family was radically different from other children around them. Whether this is 'true' about society at that time or not, it was a strong impression of participants. Idealised images of conventional nuclear family life and its prevalence as a norm outside communes were common among participants, but so also was a suspicion of nuclear family life and a negative imaging.

Cath made strong statements about her image of traditional nuclear-family life (which she had experienced with her mother and father before they split and

Cath went with her father and his new partner into an intentional community) when pondering the idea of a potential future family for herself, and her comments also show a crucial difference between commune raised people, who had that childhood experience of living with many adults not just one or two parents, and the experience of other familial contexts, her focus on diversity and community as important being very telling:

“I would feel happier living in an environment where I had the freedom to not be with my kids every moment of the day, and I think it’s bad for them, as well as driving me mad. For them too, I mean I think they need lots of adults, you know, that richness, lots of wonderful people around all day, so you can encourage them to go out there and talk to people. You know, I’d have to say to my kids, “I have only got what is in my little head; other people have a lot to offer you, different things to offer you.” Plus, in a community like the one I was raised in those kids wouldn’t hate me because I am on their back all day, telling them what to do, I can say “You can come and go as you please,” for everyone’s mental sanity I think it’s slightly unhealthy to live in that cramped position [in a nuclear family]. Even physically there’s not enough safe space – most people’s gardens are like a pen for their kids; I wouldn’t want to put my kids on a tiny patch of grass and say they are not allowed to go outside it.”

This reflects a theme that runs through many of my discussions with commune-raised women, and represents a view of nuclear-family life (as well as urban life in an industrialised capitalist society, and current strong cultural assumptions about the lack of safety for unsupervised children) that I remember circulating in the community I lived in. In her comments Cath associates a sense of lack of freedom, of containment, authority, oppression, closedness and limited resources with nuclear family life, and highlights the importance of wider relationships. These notions resonate with my experience and that of many of my participants. For them, this image of traditional nuclear-family life as lacking freedom, and in particular the ‘oppression’ of women in nuclear-family environments, was often raised as being a core issue for participants in how to approach being a woman and (for some) having children. Gender issues and an awareness of them come strongly to the fore again, as for many of my participants having kids in a traditional nuclear set-up is something to be feared if you are female. My participants definitely felt there were other options; the potential for realistically doing things differently from this nuclear family model being part of participants’ lived experience.

Leah, while talking about her own future in terms of relationships and family, echoes a vision of men expecting women to be pliant and to meet men’s and

children's needs before their own which was common among participants. She says:

'I would say I have relationship problems relating to that, a lot of boys, men, there's a definite response to me from guys; they meet me out and about and find it fascinating, interesting, but if anything develops with that person in terms of a relationship, a sexual relationship rather than friendship, then they quite often later on become threatened... by the things that they probably liked in the first place, which is the fact that I am outspoken, won't ummm... I don't believe in being unquestioningly adoring [GIGGLES] and I don't know whether this is to do with my upbringing or just me, but I see it that you can love someone and still not like the way they have dealt with something or what they have said or done, not just be silent; I think there are still expectations of women in relationships that once you are with someone you should be mindlessly uncritical and accepting.'

A conflict that many of my participants seemed to regard ambivalently was the juxtaposition of this kind of vision of conventional heterosexual relationship as implicitly involving female subservience with the idea that children would more ideally have consistent and constant family relationships. This dual notion sets up a conflict at the heart of their images of family life – leaving them both wanting and not wanting that kind of traditional nuclear set-up – which participants did not necessarily resolve either way, but lived with somewhat uncomfortably. The spectrum of these women's views ranged from attempting to 'do' nuclear-family life, but 'better', all the way along to not maintaining any kind of stable attachment in sexual relationship, and preferring it that way, and assuming that any children would be taken on by them as a single parent with no expectation of conventional family life. Some participants were fiercely unwilling to consider motherhood because of its perceived dangers to autonomy and integrity. These kinds of conflict are, of course, present for women not raised in communal settings of participants' generation and perhaps all that is shown in these ideas being put forward is that participants are typical of their generation of young women as a whole, rather than their take on such matters being specific to their communal upbringings. Participants themselves put great weight on how their communal backgrounds had affected their views on family life, marriage, the position of women in traditional nuclear family life etc.

Many participants talked a lot about how difficult they found it adjusting to changes in their parents' partnerships, and there was some sense of this not being taken seriously by the adults. Participants described how they felt adults and parents in their communities sometimes assumed that it was only their conditioning as grown-ups that meant they were 'hung up' and unable to feel

OK with a more flexible attitude to relationships and, as children were not yet 'conditioned', it was sometimes assumed that they were resilient, able to 'bounce back' and 'adjust', or that such things simply wouldn't register with them if they were accustomed to them from an early age. In contrast to this kind of viewpoint, most of my participants found themselves uncomfortable to some extent or another living with the changes in adult relationships that they encountered in their lives as children.

Often viewed as problematic by participants were issues to do with parents' changes in partners, and with trying to adjust to and live with new adults involved intimately in children's lives because of becoming a parent's partner or lover, or losing intimacy with lovers and partners when relationships changed or broke down. Beyond this intimate 'immediate family' circle, participants encountered problems to do with the politics of the whole community – the way that changes in sexual relationships made necessary new closeness with or enforced distance from other members in the community. For example if my dad 'splits' with his partner and starts a sexual relationship with your friend's mum, your friend may be taken out of the community by her dad, or feelings of resentment may mean that the friendship becomes frosty – that your friend, or your friend's dad, cannot help but resent you as your father's daughter... Such very close and tangled webs are easy to imagine as relationship minefields for children, as well as adults, to negotiate.

Participants described their recollections of their different communities' ways of conducting adult sexual relationship as ranging from fairly stable forms of monogamous relationship (although it is important to remember that all but one of my participants' parents had 'split', so these were still often not traditional 'marriages'), through to interest in non-possessive sexuality and, for some, all the way to open or shared sexual life (open partner-swapping, even organised by rota in one community that I was told about). Tim Guest describes, at the most extreme end of this type of spectrum, the ideals that underpinned notions of flexible relationship and non-attachment in his Bhagwan-led community thus:

'Bhagwan's proposition for sannyasin children was simple; they were children of the commune, not of their mother and father. "In a commune a child will have a richer soul," Bhagwan once said. "He will know many women, he will know many men, he will not be attached to one person or two persons. In a commune you will not be too attached to one family – there will be no family to be attached to. You will be more free, less obsessed. You will be more just. And you will be

getting love from many sources. You will feel that life is loving.” (Guest, 2004, p. 93)

The communities from which my participants came were nearly all from the more conservative end of that spectrum, and some of their stories about more sexually ‘liberated’ environments were through contact with other communities more radical than their own. But sexual relations, even in these milder socio-sexual climates, presented participants with, what seemed to me, an acute awareness of the instability of attachment, which they experienced as children and into adulthood, with their parents’ changing relationships, and flux in attachment and relationship seemed to be something all my participants experienced (to a greater or lesser extent) and had been worried about.

Jody and I discussed this aspect of her experiences of sex and relationships:

‘I guess until I was about ten [my parents] were quite solid, I mean yes there were other people, but they were quite solid, and that was quite safe, when that changed, ever since then, I have had to deal with constant new partners with both parents; that’s something now that I am kind of used to, but it’s funny, yeah I think that my mum did really want, she wasn’t going to just be subservient or just that mother thing, and she was going to do what she wanted to do, and maybe at the time I felt slightly threatened by people and umm... maybe a bit jealous. I think she always made me feel – we always had this strong relationship – it was just OK. It’s an odd thing seeing them with other people, for almost as long as I remember now I have had to get used to both my mum and dad having numerous partners; I have grown to have quite strong relationships with these people, and then they’ve split up and I’ve been like “Oh, where does that leave me?” and then they get together with someone else and I get to know them and then they split up, so that’s been a kind of ongoing thing for me since ten. I don’t know if that’s about the community as such or more about them as individuals, I dunno. So that has been quite weird in a way having to sort of... on one level it has been great; I have met all these people and had these parental relationships with all these people I wouldn’t have known, but it’s not easy, it’s having to constantly form relationships and let go, form relationships and let go, and that has been quite hard. They’ve done what they wanted to do; they’ve lived their lives.’

The aversion to, and attempts to avoid, authoritarian parenting practices that participants reported as common in their communities did not always mean that children automatically had a ‘voice’ that was heeded or listened to, particularly with regard to having a say about their parents’ relationship choices, as one can easily imagine. Jasmine describes the play of powerful personalities that commune life involved, and the disruption that was caused to the lives of all, including children, with the introduction of a new character, and the ensuing shift in the constellation of relationships:

‘A lot of people were quite charismatic in their own way, they would be quite radical people in their own way so... They kind of had a dangerous energy about

them sometimes, people who were a bit feisty and a bit off the wall, they'd come in and suddenly kind of take over the atmosphere of the place... I mean this one guy came, and I think everyone in the whole place fell in love with him; he was a complete arse as far as I could make out, but Mum was head over heels, my dad was indifferent; I mean this is all going back, but ninety-nine per cent of the place thought he was the bee's knees, and I just remember me and [my cousin] going "He's such an arse; I can't believe he's such a plonker" but we had no voice at all, it was completely this stage show going on, it was just like, what? Really pissed me off...'

This man went on to become Jasmine's mother's lover, the remembered resentment of a young girl who can spy disruption moving into her world from some distance seems to me to come through strongly in this description. The insular nature of communal life has a part to play here, perhaps, with adult affairs and flirtations taking place within the community which children are present in (and therefore witnessing these adult relationships up close), rather than in wider communities or workplaces, as might be more common in non-communal settings.

Not all participants experienced this witnessing as problematic for themselves. Heather separated her experience as a child from the difficulties she perceived adults had with their relationships, break-ups and infidelities, and did not put such emphasis on the sexual configurations among adults as affecting her as Jasmine did:

"Really, I think the merits of a community are definitely felt most by children. I think as an adult they can be extremely destructive places for your relationship – people often end relationships in communities because it's all so close, you can't do anything without someone seeing it, without it being discussed, by 50 other people, you can't argue without people knowing. It must be quite claustrophobic and damaging to a relationship and then there's all the people who think they can have an open relationship, and it doesn't work, and I think you have to be really very convinced of your relationship to survive."

Lucy – "Were you conscious of adults' conflicts over sexual jealousy and break-ups, or getting together with someone else and all that stuff when you were a child?"

Heather – "Yeah, I suppose I was, in that my mum had an affair with [my friend's] dad so it was something that was very much in my life. He became at times a more important and a less important father figure to me, but I didn't really understand what was going on. I knew he was more in my life, but I didn't really know he was with my mum or whatever, but now I kind of know, I know it's all disgustingly entangled and incestuous."

Lucy – "You say you're 'conventional' about how you want to have a family; is that partly to do with this 'tangled mess'?"

Heather – "I don't think so. I think I want to be in a partnership with one person because it's what I like doing. I like having relationships on a one-to-one basis. I

don't think I have been damaged by how it all was, I think I was too young to understand then, and now I just look at it and go 'Ooooh I just wouldn't wanna go there as an adult' in a relationship, it's too frightening, because no matter how strong you think you are you'll end up terrible. I mean people do go there and their relationships survive, but it's not common."

All but a couple of my participants expressed a strong desire for conventional monogamous, long-term partnership, and many were in fairly long-standing relationships and felt this was important to them. Heather was particularly concerned to express how this seemed to her a more 'natural' or 'normal' way of engaging in sexual relationship than other less conventional options she felt she had witnessed in her community. There was a strong mythology among participants about how communes were hot beds for relationships to flounder in terms of long-term monogamy, and a corresponding notion of this being a less common phenomena in 'normal' or nuclear family set ups outside communal settings.

Some, for example Jody, explained this concern with long term monogamy in her own adult sexual relationships with direct reference to the way that parents and other adults in the community conducted / conduct their relationships, and the multiple senses of gaining a relationship but then losing that person whom she had formed an attachment or intimacy. Yet, she also describes how she felt that going through such break ups was easier for her in a communal setting than it might have been in a non-communal one because of the support of other adults around her:

Lucy – "Are your parents still together now? [Jody shakes her head] When did they break up?"

Jody – "When I was ten; we were still at the commune. It's funny, there was a point where my real dad, my step dad and my mum were all living in the same house, there was a lot of partner-swapping going on, it wasn't about monogamy. And I remember thinking when I grow up I'm going to have one partner and prove you all wrong, and I have done that so far. I am with this one person and it's long-term; I have consciously done that as a rebellion. That wasn't always easy as a kid, and I have somehow chosen something quite different, the "one partner" thing. Maybe that is a reaction against what I grew up with, against that "do your own thing, man".

Lucy – "What was that like, living through your parents separating but still living together?"

Jody – "[My dad] moved out pretty quickly after they separated, really. Well, divorce, what's it like going through a divorce... Well, it was heartbreaking. The funny thing was that before they split I did know that he was my step dad and I did have a 'real' dad; I guess I was ten. I don't know what to say except it was hard. I think the community was changing as well; it had been an adult education

centre, and it was becoming freer; people would just come and stay. I guess in a normal divorce you would be just left with one parent, but in this scenario it wasn't like a typical nuclear set-up, not that that made it any easier really but there were still a lot of people around and a lot of support, a hell of a lot of support, that maybe other people wouldn't get, from other adults. I don't know if that made it easier but that was really lovely to have that support."

Lucy – "So your mum was with other people after the divorce..."

Jody – I think I gave my mum a harder time about that than my dad; maybe that's because he left, so I had to live with [my mother's lovers], and I had a stronger relationship with my mum. I found it quite hard at first. I think because I have lived through that [serial break-ups of her parents with a succession of partners] as a child I don't know if I want to go through that in my own relationships, maybe it's just a bit too much, I can't cope with that in my own relationships as well, you know. I needed something different, perhaps something more grounded, more rooted in one thing, because even now as an adult I still have that going on [parents continued changes in partnership] you know so yeah perhaps I need to root myself in something solid while I have all that going on around me..."

Jody expresses a common sentiment among many but not all participants – that the emotional energy involved in riding out parents and other adults relationship crises and changes was hard work for them as children, and that a more stable set up would have been easier to cope with for them. Connected to this idea was an often very romanticised view of nuclear family life among many participants, who seemed commonly to feel that they had not experienced a 'normal' family life, and that such a 'normal' family life did exist elsewhere. Participants often carried an idyllic notion of nuclear family life as stable and supportive places for children to grow up in, even at the same time as being suspicious of nuclear family life as a place in which adults (particularly women) were un-free and unhappy, and children were necessarily subjected to authoritarian practices which they would not have wanted to experience. These seemingly opposed notions co-existed and surfaced in conversation with participants often.

Mopping up the mess...?

Participants reported their experience of adults' sexual relationships and partnerships in their communities as being fairly unstable in many instances, and in participants' memory of these situations there was some emotional fall out from changes in relationship in their parents' and other adult's lives. The picture that emerged was not one of idyllic free love or non-attachment among adults, at least from the children's perspective. Participants described many scenarios where adults in their communities failed to respond to changes in their sexual partnerships with ease and grace, and were perhaps even very

upset by them. This brought up an involvement for children in communes, just as in the mainstream world, in a kind of emotional labour helping to comfort adults in crisis and absorbing some of the duties of care for adults who felt abandoned by significant adult lovers or partners.

This, unsurprisingly, was more acute for participants when the adult involved was a parent, although other adults in the community were reported by participants as being people they did feel a duty of care towards. Despite the notional 'support' of communal living, some participants described scenarios where the closest ties their parent had after relationship breakdowns were with their children, and in those instances some participants ended up trying to look after their parent or alleviate their loneliness and distress. Some participants did describe their memory of being in a community as providing adults with adult support during break-ups, but added that everything was experienced in a very public setting, which sometimes made break-ups very socially political within the community, and added complex dynamics within the wider community as an extra dimension of what adults and children had to deal with during and after relationship break downs.

A common theme in my discussions with participants was about a loose attitude towards break ups and relationships that they thought was quite particular to communal or counter cultural spaces. In some cases participants had strong feelings and expectations that break ups would not have been so common in more 'mainstream' scenarios and would have been taken more seriously or given more weight. Participants talked about their experience of a prevalent expectation in their communities - that relationship break-ups and 'splits' were not unusual or catastrophic, but rather part of the life course and of developing as a person. For some participants this seemed to create a scenario where only children witnessed the true feelings of parents or adults (as there was no need to pretend or be 'cool' with children). Participants talked about feeling that they were sympathetic to a parent or adult's feelings of loss and sometimes rage post break up and could offer some validity to the adult's suffering which other adult members of the community could or would not. Thus, participants, in some instances, became the resource some adults pulled upon to share feelings that were socially unacceptable or unacknowledged in the wider community.

Megan tells the story of her parents' break-up inside their community, and her story typifies similar ones told by other participants who had similar kinds of experiences:

"My parents split up when I was eight; they separated but continued living in the commune for a while in separate spaces, but it didn't work very well because my mum began a new relationship and my dad didn't take to it too well and he couldn't really move out so she moved out when I was eleven. She continued to live in a town nearby until I was about 19. The separation was in my memory pretty horrific, because it's your parents splitting up. I think most of the people living [at the community] at the time, most of them were families, the majority with children, relatively young families, so I see it as relatively inevitable that most of them would split up, statistically it's just the way it is, although I think it was quite a high rate at [my community], and usually one partner stayed there; it wasn't unheard of for it to happen, it had happened before my parents, but I didn't really understand what had happened; I just knew that families left, I didn't really know why, didn't quite grasp who was leaving with who or who should have been with who, I was a bit too young, so umm... in terms of their separation, it was, I am not sure whether being in a community was very helpful; it should have been, but I am not sure if it was because people tried to be very liberal about things so they couldn't really understand why my dad wouldn't really want my mum living in the same house with her new lover. My gut reaction was to stay with my dad because I thought he needed me."

Lucy – "Did they break up because of the new fella?"

Megan – "Supposedly not, I dunno, God knows. They [her mother and this guy whom her mother ended up with after Megan's parents split] were friends and he lived there as well. It could have happened before, but apparently not..."

Lucy – "So the other[adult] people in the community were – what? – judgemental of your dad being upset, or what?"

Megan – "I think so, ummm, sometimes; some people, I think funnily some of the men, were very supportive. Some of the women – I think women generally go with women despite the fact that my dad hadn't done anything to provoke my mum leaving other than perhaps not being loving enough – dunno, but I think my mum had a lot more support than my dad did."

Lucy – "What about you and your brother?"

Megan – "My brother was 16 and his reaction was to stay away from it and for a little while he moved into someone else's house, a friend's mother who was happy to take him in, for him he had space to be away from it, whereas I was with my dad... I don't remember my mum being really hard-core feminist – she wasn't aggressive at all – but you know, her opinion was as valid as my dad's, if not more so at times, and while we were at [the community] she was the main breadwinner. She worked as a copy-editor, whereas he didn't earn money for a good ten years at least in that period. They shared the responsibilities of childcare – very much so. I can recall being on my dad's back in fields, and apparently on a number of occasions I was left in my buggy in the paddock, so perhaps he didn't always do such a good job, but I was with him a lot, as much as her. They were very into sharing of responsibility as far as childcare and the home was concerned, although

as far as my dad was concerned he was a bloke and he did man's things like chopping down trees and driving tractors and things but at the same time he is quite a tender person – I can remember he did probably more of the housework than my mum did, more washing up; he changed my nappies, washed my clothes, it was quite equal...”

The experience of a relationship breakdown remains to some extent insular and ‘private’ in Megan’s description, despite the surrounding community. Megan, like many children in ‘mainstream’ as well as communal settings, felt a sense of responsibility for the parent who was ‘left’ or who was more devastated or unable to recover from this change in their life:

‘Many young girls voluntarily move to fill the vacuum created by parents who collapse emotionally, and sometimes physically, after divorce. The caregiver child’s job, as she defines it, is to keep the parents going by acting in whatever capacity is needed – mentor, advisor, nurse, confidante. The range is wide depending on the parent’s need and the child’s perception... Such children soon sacrifice their friends, school activities, and most important of all, their sense of being children – childhood itself... The child may become trapped into feeling that she alone must rescue the troubled parent. When she attends to her own needs and wishes, she feels guilty and undeserving. This happens if the parent’s unhappiness goes on for years and years and the parent comes to rely on the child for comfort or when the child herself assumes the role and won’t give it up. Whatever its origins, the child feels obliged to care for the parent in whatever capacity is needed – as caregiver, companion, mentor, or the person who keeps depression at bay. Karen [a research subject] said, “My mom has no one. Only me.”’ (Wallerstein et al, 2002, p. 18–19)

Unlike in Wallerstein’s description, which focuses on conventional nuclear families becoming one parent or blended families, in her communal setting Megan described a scenario where she did find spaces to ‘be a child’ and support for herself from the wider community she lived in, despite taking on this caretaker role or attitude to some extent with her father. This was enabled by her close contact with other children and adults in her home environment, in a way that would be difficult to replicate in a situation that was not communal. Megan was also allowed or facilitated to exercise a level of choice about her fate after the break-up, and expressed her rebellion against the breaking apart of the familiarity of her living arrangements, and she saw this as being a result of the liberal ‘child centred’ nature of communal spaces, although the fundamental change to her life, which was the result of her parents’ separation, was beyond her control. She was ambivalent about how much power of choice she had, how authoritarian her parents were, describing a situation where she both felt she had more choice than many children would have had and less choice than the libertarian rhetoric promised:

Megan – “I don’t really recall being given an awful lot of choices, but we probably were really, we were probably included in an awful lot of choices, and I think the separation... rather than being told “You’re doing this” I suppose most mothers would have assumed that they would take the child with them and that was that; that didn’t happen with us, that demonstrates that I was given options, but I don’t remember other instances when I was really, and they were quite, you know, it wasn’t “Do as I say” but, well it was quite “Do as I say”, although everything was explained to you, reasons were given.”

Lucy – “Did you stay in the community after the break-up because of wanting to stay in the community or just wanting to stay with your dad?”

Megan – “Partly it was definitely wanting to stay, certainly wanting to stay in our unit; I didn’t want to be in another space, I knew [Dad] would be staying in it. My mum bought two rooms to live in [the community], and had one set aside as a bedroom for me, but it wasn’t my bedroom, you know, to me it wasn’t my bedroom... My bedroom was in our family unit. Once [my mum] moved out of the commune I don’t think she could have taken me; I would have probably started my own custody procedures if she had tried to [giggles]. I don’t remember being quite as horrible to [my mother’s new partner] as I apparently was – apparently I was really horrible to him. I obviously didn’t like him very much at the time, so yeah that would have been a factor as well, being in a strange house, in a strange town, at a strange school with a strange man in the house. My dad was very depressed for quite a long time, he wasn’t able to give me the love – in a funny way he was, because he loved me so much, but he couldn’t be a parent to me and I felt a lot of bad feeling towards my mum, despite the fact that she did everything she could: she phoned every day, I saw her every week. I didn’t like having to visit her every time; she did try to give me a lot of attention every time, and when I did go to visit her she was keen to do things together, and I wasn’t [giggles].”

Lucy – “You were quite angry with her?”

Megan – “Yeah, that was much more to do with the dynamics of us, my parents, their separation and what followed that, rather than the actual commune. There was support in some ways. I can recall other people must have heard them arguing, two occasions I remember really clearly: one time I was told to go downstairs and get some milk while they argued, at which point the people who lived above us saw me and took me upstairs and I had breakfast with them or whatever, and other occasions when people took me to their family when similar things were going on, but I don’t think we really talked about it; I don’t think I would have been able to talk about it.”

The emotional experience of relationship, divorce and separation is, of course, very subjective and is presented here as such, as participants’ recollections of their own experience rather than as a factual report of their parents’ or other adults’ thoughts feelings or actions. Common themes did emerge from my discussions with participants about adult relationships and break ups, mainly focusing on a common assumption among participants that relationships were less stable and more prone to break up in communal environments. This idea is borne out by the opinion of Abrams & McCulloch (1976) about the instability of

relationships in the communes they studied in the 1970s, who commented that, in their opinion, women in communes (and therefore their children), often suffered from being in a position where they had both the lion's share of responsibility for children and less access to earning power in the world. They also had less reliable support in relationships with the men in communal spaces, who were rejecting the role of being primary breadwinners or stable patriarchs of family units.

Another common theme was about how communal settings mitigated against the upheaval of relationship break ups by providing some continuity of environment for children. Yet, also common were participants' descriptions of how difficult it was to experience a break up in a 'closed' community and how nearly always one parent or partner ended up leaving the community post break up. This does not mark out participants' experience particularly from other children who experience divorce and, thereby, experience the loss of not living with one parent or the other, but the utopian ideal of all managing to live harmoniously together, despite changes in sexual relationships and partnerships, does not ring true with what participants have described in their experience.

Coming into a community from a break-up

Individual participants' memories of how supportive their community was towards both children and adults involved when break ups and reconfigurations in relationship occurred varied. And the actual circumstances of their parents' break up did not always take place inside communities. For example, my mother brought my sister and me to our community in the process of a break-up with my father. In hindsight, my assumption is that she was seeking support and community and had high hopes that communal life would provide like-minded company and perhaps support and a sharing of domestic responsibilities. In my recollection, hers was not an unusual scenario: single mothers (and fathers, but mothers were more common, according to participants and my own experience) often applied to join communities for similar reasons. Other participants described similar recollections of single parents coming into community and looking for support as did Abrams & McCulloch (1976). According to Abrams & McCulloch and my participants' memories, such people did not always get as much help and support as they hoped to, but, according to participants, in some cases the trauma of separation

was mitigated by communal life for both parent and children, as Charlotte describes:

“There were a couple of kids: one was called [John, name changed for privacy], and his mother, I can’t remember her name now, she was very very needy and she arrived on her own; he was just very disruptive, but again I can remember someone telling me the situation and probably not even telling me how to behave, I just would kind of allow, give him a wider berth and try to not be so reactive to his kind of... behaviour. There was this little kid and I think she must have been really messed up; she came with her father, and he was a single father, again yeah, it was just that kind of, my attitude was that you kind of take in their environment and their background and their history and make allowances, try and be more supportive I suppose...”

Lucy – “Do you think other adults chipped in to help parent those kids?”

Charlotte – “Yeah, I do, yeah, probably on quite an ad hoc basis; it’s quite fuzzy in my memory, I am trying to think of something specific... I can’t really think of anything specific, you know, if adults from the core group (and when I say the core group I mean eight to ten and they kind of ran it, it was like the management group), and if there were kids around then, I am thinking the core group because they were the ones who felt confident in giving directions or reiterating the rules to people, then, you know, they would apply that to any child in that space, then there would never be a question of asking the parent of that child if that was OK; I think it just happened, children were minded by any responsible adult around. I remember there was this one woman, she had loads of boys, sons, and they were just mental, but they were really nice kids, and she was having a really hard time and there was no way that she could parent her boys. I remember one of them swinging on the rope swing which went out from the balcony of the house, ground level but this kind of balcony thing, and somehow he had put this thing round his neck and he had hanged himself, but he didn’t die, thank God, but she was round the corner, shelling peas, totally unaware that her kid had just hanged himself, and if he hadn’t have been taken down really quickly and given mouth-to-mouth you know he would have died, and all of us were watching this kind of frozen to the spot, totally shocked; I think it was my older brother [who was adult at this time] who gave him mouth-to-mouth and brought him round, you know, his mum wasn’t keeping an eye on him, but she obviously felt comfortable that someone would; I think it must have been horrendous for her coming back around the corner with her bucket of peas and seeing that her kid had nearly died. But there was a lot of that you know and we were very much, look, there was a kind of umbrella of responsible adults, most of them tended to be parents too – the other adults who didn’t have kids tended to be on a kind of different focus; they didn’t need to be looking at the kids particularly.”

Lucy – “Did some of the adult women do some filling-in for other women...”

Charlotte – “Definitely, I mean, this boy, [John], I reckon he left a much happier kid, and to be honest I think the single parents who came because of that, not just for themselves, not just for themselves, but knowing that they didn’t actually have the strength to bring up this child on their own at this particular time in their lives, and they knew it would be good for the kid to have some support and guidance from some adults who perhaps weren’t quite as wobbly as their parent was, who

was on the verge of a nervous breakdown or whatever it was that was going wrong for them. I suppose it wasn't something I thought about because the support was there and it was given when it was needed; it was recognised that it was needed and given."

Charlotte's memory of this support in her community runs counter to the findings of Abrams & McCulloch (1976), who suggested that communes could sometimes be somewhat suspicious of single women with children who might be demanding or drain the resources of the community. In their research, they describe that many women like my mother, who came looking for support and safe haven, found instead an expectation of serious contribution and hard work, with little allowance for their particular circumstances. I have vivid memories of one single mother in my community (who was perceived as vociferous and troublesome by other adults in my recollection) being disliked and excluded to the extent that she left.

In my memory of events, my mother, having left her marriage to reach for what she hoped might be a more fulfilling life in intentional community, had not bargained for the level of conflict and struggle and the amount of 'relationship work' involved in such a large group-living arrangement and enterprise. From my perspective now, it seems that she swapped being locked in a power struggle in a single relationship – with my father – for attempting to negotiate and manage a complex web of relationships with many adults, a situation that was far from free of power struggles or 'bad,' self-serving or dominating behaviour. In my child's perception (with my now adult analysis), my mother seemed to be seeking some level of sanctuary and support that she did not experience in her marriage. I remain unsure whether she feels she gained greater support through being in community than she had previously had, although she has maintained many very strong friendships from that time up to the present day. In my recollections of that time, I was hyper-aware of her vulnerabilities, so, perhaps, my memory of that child's perspective is somewhat skewed by my awareness of her distress and wanting to fix that distress, as children often do.

For me, the community provided some opportunity to be away from the trauma and pain my parents were going through post-separation, to disappear off and spend time with other adults who were more robust than my mother was at that time, and to have fun with other kids. There was space away from the emotionally charged and difficult time I was experiencing around my mother and in my father's household, with all the grief of losing him and the

dynamics of having to negotiate having another woman in that space (his new partner). Living in the community didn't take away the pain of loss that I felt about not living with my father, nor did it 'fix' my mother, but it did allow me some other relationships and some space away from the difficult processes my parents were going through emotionally.

Bridget also found that her community allowed her more space to move in than she found in 'the mainstream', once her and her mother moved out of the community into more conventional living arrangements. A basic level of acceptance and similarities between her mother and others involved in communal life allowed an experience of a less judgemental atmosphere which Bridget was very sensitive to in her recollection. The community provided safe places to go outside her relationship with her mother and a closer comparison of what might be 'normal' or acceptable within unconventional or libertarian families:

'Yeah, regardless of other parents bringing their kids up their own way, not exactly the same, it was almost like having a sort of play-off card – there being other families, other people, who were part of a greater unit, and you could use them as allies kind of thing. Whereas out of that environment the other families in the neighbourhood were just so completely off the mark that there would be no way of using them as allies or referencing, or reassurance; it was more alienating. So even though our mum was always bringing us up it was radically different because before there would always be that other support, if Mum was pissing you off you could run down the hall to someone else and go "I'm not coming out", whereas it was harder to do that later [once they had moved out of the community] in the neighbourhood with other families because they'd be really judgemental about Mum and her situation or way of life. They didn't understand it.'

Of course, dealing with and negotiating the power that parents have over dependent kids and how their life decisions will effect children is tricky because, even with the best will in the world and a genuine attempt at awareness, there is an implicit power imbalance in a dependent relationship, and children are very dependent on parents. Participants described to me a new formulation of adult needs dominating the psychic space of the household in these communities. Most participants marked how they saw their home lives and the way power dynamics played out there as different from what they imagined or experienced of more conventionally authoritarian households they experienced outside their communities. But the dynamic of unequal power between adults and children remained in intentional community, according to participants. In participant's memories of situations of upheaval and shifting relationship, and sometimes intense conflict, children, as the (often) most

dependent or powerless members of communal households, could end up with their needs being rather sidelined or unrecognised. Again, this does not mark their experience out from other children in more conventional scenarios, but, rather, aligns their experience with more authoritarian set ups in a way which, perhaps, undermines the claims of some of their home communes to be egalitarian or 'child centred.' As far as many participants' recollections are concerned, these kinds of egalitarian claims do not match how adult-child relationships were experienced in reality, although the rhetoric of empowering children, equality and lack of hierarchy and the attempts to be less authoritarian and embody these values in practice were seen as positive and appreciated by most participants. It was a question of falling short of the mark or not realising how the rhetoric and practice didn't match up in children's experience that many participants earmarked as an issue.

Bridget described the decision to adopt an alternative lifestyle and move into a communal setting as an example of the confusion around adult and child needs and how they are not always the same, nor do they carry equal weight despite any cherished notions of being 'child centred' or attempting an equality between children and adults. Talking about this scenario as a clash between her needs and her mother's and how adult needs won out in her opinion, she said:

'I'd be so bloody careful about who I had kids with, if I would at all. I don't think it's an easy choice; I don't think Mum had easy choices to make and I think she was very unhappy, and I very much understand that she thought her choices were for the best; I don't think she was consciously self-orientated about that, but I think she was possibly slightly blinkered in it. I think she thought that she was doing right by us by taking us out of that situation [the nuclear household], but I think it benefited her more than it did us in the end.'

Bridget's mother might well have a different version of this story from her perspective. What is interesting is that it highlights a more general feeling amongst participants that there was a lot of talk about children being equal, about getting away from 'adultism', and children being encouraged to be self directed, rather than controlled by adult authority or adult choices about their lives. But many of the important decisions which really affected their lives deeply – moving in or out of communal settings, break-ups and new relationships – were not areas they were really consulted about, nor were their needs in the situation brought to light or considered very fully. A theme emerged, which focused a lot on these areas of decision making in participants' childhoods, whereby many participants felt that when push came to shove and major life changing choices were in play adult authority was suddenly re-

imposed in order to privilege adult needs over children's. The discrepancy between talk and action, and between usual practice (which attempted to give children as much autonomy and say as possible in many cases) and what happened around these major life changing decisions was the source of some disgruntlement and ironic amusement (about perceived adult hypocrisy) amongst participants.

Staying together

Participants reported their impressions that some parents believed living in community might be a way of taking the edge off difficult relations within their partnerships, perhaps in the hope of enabling the family to stay together when life as a nuclear unit in isolation had seemed impossible. For example Natalie's parents had reached crisis point: domestic violence was a real threat for both Natalie's mother and at least one of her siblings and moving into community represented some degree of safety to them, a way to water down a volatile domestic situation. This was an attempt with mixed outcomes from Natalie's perspective:

"There were things that I'd lived with my family, and I, I'd sensed my own I suppose utter confusion of the way my dad generally behaved but I didn't know quite how bizarre it was because I didn't have contact really with other families and that was partly because where we lived had quite a big stigma attached to it and other families weren't keen to have their kids make friends with us so I wasn't invited back for tea. So I didn't actually sort of have other family models but I knew that what I saw was pretty awful and as my mum's more detailed revelations later seemed to explain more to me or make sense of it and it was really domestic violence. Um... of which I saw acted out in various ways against my siblings and I can't say I saw the actual domestic violence against my mum, maybe... well I know that they happened, or in my mum's stories they happened after we were in bed or in school, but I saw violent rows, and I can't even call them rows because a row to me is when two people go at it. What I saw was my dad losing control to the point where he would attack something and if it was public enough it was going to be an inanimate object and if it was private it was going to be a choice between my mum or an inanimate object or my siblings. It was a very volatile situation 24-7. For the first 13 years of my life really, and although we weren't at [the community] until I was five and a half but prior to that, you know, I have, I don't have clear memories, but I have clear sensations, sensory memories that I couldn't really rely on there being a safe, calm, friendly atmosphere when my dad was about; when he wasn't, everyone breathed a sigh of relief for a certain amount of time and then we all got very tense with his imminent arrival and we all waited and it took the temperature you know like to some kind of , like it was, our lives depended on it for any of the time he was around, really."

Lucy – "Do you think that your mum's choice to go to [the community] was a strategy to deal with this situation?"

Natalie – “Yes, yes it was. She’d left him and there was about a six-week period where she was living with her parents and the job at [the community] came through. My dad went to look at it on his own and then invited my mum to come and look at it. And I mean I don’t know again whether [the couple who were running the education at the community] played a large role in this; I don’t know how honest they were; I suspect that they weren’t actually that honest but I know they were incredibly astute and they would have probably seen exactly what was going on and they probably encouraged, although my dad would think it was for other reasons, that probably encouraged them to take up the post because they could see that my mum was extremely isolated and was in need of some... something that was really going to allow her to start putting the pieces back together so she could put herself first and put her kids first. You know, she was extremely isolated and I think that my mum, she did, she saw it as an escape route. It meant staying in the marriage but she could, she could put any number of people between her and my dad most of the time, and she did.”

Lucy – “Did that work? I mean, was it better once you were at [the community] than before?”

Natalie – “Yes, yeah it was; I think it was, yes; I mean I dread to think what would have happened had we not found it or not been offered the post as a family... who knows? It might have been even better and my mum might have stayed [near where her parents lived] and started afresh there, and I would have had a very different but conventional twist in my life. I mean better, better for my mum ‘cause she was safe, but I don’t think it was very... in some way I think it was very isolating for us children, incredibly isolating, in fact not, not any different to the kind of isolation we were experiencing in the middle of nowhere [where we lived previously] without a car and with very few friends who could give support, who also had children, who were also trustworthy. I mean there were one or two very vital people but that was it. So yeah, I think it solved half of it; there were more people about and, and people who were I think... could offer some real help, not just be there to make safety in numbers sort of thing but actually be... have some skills, some tools. And I think also, my mum being around people whose emotional needs were, you know, more difficult in many ways than her own, and more explicitly difficult, could have helped her.”

The community Natalie lived in was based on a centre for young people who had fallen out of the mainstream education system because their behaviour was seen as too difficult to be dealt with in school. For Natalie, this focus meant that, although a strong community was built among the adults, for their children, like her, who went out to mainstream schools and were not fully part of the work of the community, inclusiveness did not extend to her and her siblings. Although Natalie experienced some mitigation of the situation, violence did not cease for the family inside the community, and in the end her parents’ relationship broke down completely and Natalie’s mother and siblings left the community. Natalie’s experience remained one of isolation, because she lived outside the world of her peers at mainstream school but was not fully part of

the community at home, and she spoke with some vehemence about how it felt to have her father's 'secret' violence go unchallenged in the community. Her situation as a child experiencing domestic violence was not adequately catered for by the community in her opinion. This again does not mark out her experience as particularly unusual or different from other children in more conventional family scenarios perhaps, but her example does dispel some myths about communal living as a place where such experiences are less likely to take place or go unchallenged than in more mainstream settings. A childhood in community does not equate to a childhood with adequate support from a community or exempt from abuse or dysfunction in this example and her situation was not unique amongst participants.

Jasmine's parents' relationship was both supported and challenged by living in community:

"I had a nuclear family there, brothers and sisters, mum and dad, so it was more centred, I think, than [my friend's] experience, although with its own difficulties. The interesting thing, I thought, when I read through the paper with your ideas on it, was where do the sensations of lost-ness or various negative, slightly adolescent experiences that people have had come from?"

Lucy – "Did you identify with that experience of lost-ness?"

Jasmine – "I did, very much so, and I've been thinking about it... I knew a lot of it was [the community] actually, but it was Mum and Dad as well, and the extramarital stuff in particular. My mum and dad [moved to the community because they] weren't ready to be on their own; my dad wasn't ready to be a father with children, two kids at that point, one of whom was premature and very young. I think that as a family there was a really powerful ideology around about family and homemaking, and other members of the [extended] family were in the community... People would come [to the community] and be very "free" and everyone was hippies in the sense that they wanted to grow vegetables but I don't think... there wasn't sexual freedom; it wasn't... I mean it happened, but I don't think it was kind of nurtured as kind of part of the way to be; to be sexually free wasn't that condoned – it wasn't condemned, but it wasn't promoted. I mean, my mum and dad had quite a rocky time, but retrospectively (I mean we've been to family therapy) they were just too young, they just weren't ready; I mean my dad had never had another sexual partner in his life and wasn't ready to take on my mum's needs and the kids and everything else, and my mum needed some love from someone so she went and found it and my dad did what he needed to do, but it wasn't a kind of "ethos" even though it happened; it was... I remember overhearing conversations of "You've got to sort it out" – it wasn't accepted that this sort of thing was happening, but the lack of respect for my... I mean, I needn't have known any of it, I mean they were always rowing in the middle of the night, which normal families do, but it was just like, that's what I mean about being confused because a lot of it wasn't so overt and a lot of it was just purely parents who were in a mess. And whether that mess was made worse by living there?"

They probably wouldn't be together if it had just been the two of them, actually; they needed to act it all out in a relatively safe environment and then once they were on a more level place, move out."

Lucy – "It kind of absorbed their conflicts?"

Jasmine – "It allowed them to be separate but live in the same place, with us kids."

Lucy – "What about you, did it mitigate the situation for you?"

Jasmine – "No, no, I think my experience would really be identical if I was in a nuclear family not in a community. There was only one time, with this friend of [my mother's lover] actually, and he was blind, and my mum and [her lover] had gone off for a walk, and I had been crying because I wanted to go, and I think I was eight, eight was a bad year, and he was a stranger really, but just with a pair of ears, and I think he just talked with me and I just had a chance to say how disgusting I thought they were and how angry I was and how unreasonable they were and so in that sense I guess in that moment when I was really angry and upset I did let it out, but I umm... I got appendicitis and shortly after that became bulimic, when I was about twelve, and again, people get that all over, it's not communal living really, but living at [the community] didn't help that at all, and in fact it probably made it undiagnosed for longer, if you like."

Lucy – "You're kind of giving me an image of being quite invisible, or people not taking the time to notice what on earth was going on with you..."

Jasmine – "Yeah, absolutely, and probably I would have been more in their face if we'd been in a normal house. There really is this sense of being lonely and isolated and abandoned a lot of the time, of my parents just being busy elsewhere and not noticing me, although Dad would come and for short bursts we'd have discussions, real intellectual interesting talks about things, but then he'd go off again, and Mum was kind of a mystery; well she still has that, in some ways, but very distant, really distant."

There is an ambiguity in Jasmine's description of her family life in community that was common among participants: the sense that a lot of the difficulties experienced by participants as children could equally easily have taken place in their family lives in different circumstances and were really to do with the dynamics of conventional nuclear family life. Jasmine disputes the idea that being in community as a family made such dynamics any easier for her as a child, contrary to what adult commune members might have claimed to researchers like Abrams and McCulloch (1976). Jasmine also says that she thinks it gave her parents a chance to be supported and allowed space from each other, whilst still living in the same place and co-parenting. There is an echo of other participants' experience in what Jasmine says, and the common theme was a sense that, although adults got more support and freedom to explore relationship and self development, children did not necessarily get much attention to help them through shifts in adult relationship which did actually affect them quite deeply.

Jasmine raises the question of stereotype around 'free love' in communal spaces within her description, refuting an implied implication of that stereotype that her parent's extra marital activities came out of such ideologies but more out of common or garden marital dissatisfaction that might be experienced in any number of more conventional settings. There were mixed feelings among participants about this subject. On balance, the consensus amongst participants' impression of the situation in their communities seems to be a sense that communes provided opportunity and temptation away from life long monogamy, and less judgment of this than more 'mainstream' spaces, but were rarely places where a non-possessive or non-monogamous type of sexual relations or ideology of such type were the norm or specifically sanctioned or practiced by all.

The specific nature of the relationship between parents and children and between partners seems to have been far more important than the communal setting in setting the tone of participants' experience. The parent(s) and their partner(s) were the microcosm within the macrocosm of the communal setting. That said some scenarios were made possible by a communal setting which might have been hard to replicate in other circumstances. With good relations between parties involved fairly unusual set ups were allowed a chance to flourish in communal settings. For example, Hazel's parents had already separated before they moved into the community, but the community gave them a chance to live together and co-parent Hazel:

"I moved there when I was six, and we were, my family was, one of the families that, you know, helped start it. My parents separated when I was two but they both moved there with their partners, so I had, you know, my mum's flat and my dad's flat right next door to each other with my step-mum and my step-dad and my stepbrother and sister and my real brothers and sisters were born at [the community], or my mum's kids."

Lucy – "What was it like for you to be living with both your... both sets of parents next door?"

Hazel – "I just thought it was brilliant. I thought I was the luckiest person in the world, because I had both my parents and they were both happy because they had the partners they wanted and I didn't have to choose between them, because I really loved both my parents, so I thought it was great."

Lucy – "And what about the fact that you were then having to deal with the, kind of, extra partners on both sides and the other children?"

Hazel – "My step-dad I, on the whole, really loved; you know, I had a few step-dad issues but on the whole I just thought he was great. And my step-mum I had a pretty hard time with, and I didn't think she was so great."

Lucy – Who were you living with before [moving into the community]?

Hazel – “Well my mum more, but most of the time we had actually shared flats so that’s how I had lived with [my dad’s] other girlfriends [whom Hazel had not found so difficult to live with as this new one, and was comparing her to earlier in the interview]. So they, you know, because of me they did very often live together but not all of the time so probably maybe two-thirds of the time I had actually lived with both of them. Before we moved there we lived in London and, um, my dad was at film school so I didn’t see much of him and like I said sometimes we didn’t live with him; it was sort of on and off, and we were sort of in flats and stuff and so moving to [the community] was like suddenly having loads of space and countryside and, you know, freedom to run around ‘cause it was safe. Um, and knowing that it wasn’t a short-term thing, that I was going to be living with my mum and dad not just sort of on, off sometimes. So it was, yeah, I was really excited about it.”

The flexibility of relationship structures and the space within a communal context here quite obviously provided the opportunity for Hazel to have an experience of being co-parented by two parents living together but also not together, as they were in new partnerships, which seems to me unlikely to be a feasible arrangement in many other contexts but a commune. Hazel’s story is one of the success stories. As she experienced it, she was truly able to go through her parents break up without her having to lose a day-to-day relationship and contact with either one. Her description of the communal space as providing continuity and long-term stability for her is a useful counterpoint to other participants’ experience of communes as inherently unstable places in terms of membership and relationship and is echoed by some other participants. Where some other participants described a scenario where their parents found a community too small a place to continue to live together but with other partners, Hazels’ were comfortable with this situation. It is worth noting that her parents had not moved into the community together and then broken up but had broken up some years previously and found the community as a viable solution to wanting Hazel to live with both of them, so it is possible to tentatively suppose that perhaps they had had a chance to move on and mend before trying to live together (but not together) again. Whichever, Hazel’s story is one in which the child of the piece got what she wanted (i.e. both parents living with her) and where a communal environment and the unusual family living arrangement possible there made a huge positive difference to that child’s life in her own estimation.

Breaking up inside a community

The community context added quite unique elements to a break-up, as home for many participants and their parents was not just the family but also the

community. This had a variety of repercussions for the involvement of the other adults and children in the community in a family's personal life, intimately involving a whole network of people who were all living together and relatively intimate. The personal politics of break ups, new relationships and shifts in relationship sometimes left participants feeling that they were ostracised as a result of changes in relationship amongst adults or caught up in their parent's relationship dramas in the community. For some who remained in their community after a break up, this meant a sense of being separated from the community as well as a parent (one parent often left when there was a break up), because of the personal politics, involved which compounded their sense of loss of relationship. For others, this meant that the child was literally taken out of the community due to a parental break up and experienced a sense of loss around the missing parent and the missing home and the lost community. For yet others, the community remained a resource of relationship which helped with a sense of continuity, despite changes in their parents' relationships.

After her parents' break up within their community, Charlotte was initially pulled away by her mother to live with grandparents, and in the end she was put into boarding school, visiting her father and the community in holiday times, when she would also have some contact with her mother, who had moved abroad. Charlotte describes her memories of that time as including a sense that adults assumed that children were flexible and would adapt and 'bounce back' and felt strongly that this was not the reality for her, that although she did learn to adapt it was far from easy for her and that this was not recognised or acknowledged by adults around her at that time. She also feels that her relationships with others in her community were affected by events with her parents and other adults:

' My mum and dad's separation was quite amicable really, and it was when I was ten that I knew that it was happening; it did get a little bit yuk for a while..., it was more my mum's relationship with people at the community, particularly [my friend's] mum: they had quite a strong clash, and mine and [my friend's] relationship was affected by that, which in a way has probably made us closer now, but the clash, the tension between those others, had a direct effect on my relationship with [her]. I was taken away by my mum to stay at my grandfather's house and went to school down there, while Mum kind of decided what she was doing, I think, and she obviously felt it was right to take me down there, and I don't know if it was – it was kind of weird having to go to a conventional middle school from being taught at home – again, it's that kind of thing of having to adapt, having been thrust into so many weird and alien situations and having to learn

how to cope, and I'm like, OK, I'll be like this and then they'll like me and accept me and all like this, and then I went to boarding school, and Mum and Dad's separation... at the time I didn't see how it was affecting me; it's only with hindsight that I really can see: Mum did try to be there for me coming back in holidays but it wasn't enough; like I said it was kind of long-distance care which doesn't really work and there was this kind of... I gave off signals that I was happy and OK and most of the time convinced myself that this was the case but I would hope that I as a parent [Charlotte has two children of her own] would look a bit deeper than that and say "Are you really? How are you coping?" and probe a bit more, you know. I just, I think I have turned out alright, but I think I could have done with a lot more support, and they don't really know what I went through; I have had to tell my mum about so many experiences I had from the age of 13 to 18 she was completely unaware of. The other aspect: I don't think at the time that I acknowledged that I missed my mum – I have since been quite angry with my mum for going, and never really acknowledging that that is what she was doing, trying to pretend she was still there for me in the holidays and when I got back from school, but at the same time never really there enough to know who I was becoming, sort of admiring me from a distance type of thing, and the other thing: with my dad, I think my expectations of my dad were less; I can remember being quite jealous that [my friend in the community] and her family made a concerted effort to have family suppers in their room (they had a big family room and their kids' rooms were either side), and I felt really gutted that we couldn't have that, and I said to Dad that I wanted to do that too, and he made a really half-assed attempt to umm have a "family" supper with me; I must have been 13 or 14 and he was drinking Carlsberg Special Brew and I remember him giving some to me and it was like, oh my God, <SHE SHRUGS> because he drinks a lot, my dad, still does, and just being, at the time I probably thought it was alright, but looking back it really disappoints me the lack of acknowledgement of what I needed in those years, sort of ten to 18.'

There are two themes in Charlotte's description that were common to many participants' descriptions of their experience of parental break up in communal spaces. One was the theme of the needs of the child not being very well considered or asked after and their perception of an expectation from adults of children's adaptability, of them not being too affected by break ups. The other was this theme of how children were affected strongly by what was going on amongst adult commune members, particularly their parents, and how children's relationships with other commune members, both other children and adults, were actually sometimes made difficult by their parents actions and the communities response to them and how much this affected participants emotionally and socially.

Finally – they're breaking up!

Of course, it cannot be assumed that children always experience the separation of their parents as a bad thing. Some participants clearly remembered a break-

up as a positive thing, and some relationships with a parent's new partner were seen as a gift to participants (as with Sue), which counteracted the strain of adjustment. This fondness often developed over many years and came more to the fore in retrospect or from an adult viewpoint, long after leaving home. Emily described her parents' break-up in these positive terms, although with regret about losing her home, the community:

'I remember sitting on the settee next to my dad when the final speech of "Your mother doesn't love me" came out, and thinking "Why am I sitting here?" And him giving me a hug and me just thinking I just wanted to jump up and celebrate. I was so fucking relieved that they were eventually going to separate, purely selfishly, because I did not get on with my dad. I had no desire to spend my childhood with him; we bickered from the moment I came out, you know, so for me it was like "Oh thank God for that." Um you know I was desperately sad when the ponies came to be sold and desperately sad when we left [the community] but we did a couple of years of part-timing so that was fairly gradual. You know like it's still the place where my heart is and I visit about once every five years. So and I remember Mum and my step-dad getting together and that was tough; it was tough not because I didn't like him but mostly because I was sort of 12-13 and we'd been homeless for a few weeks and had lived in two B&Bs and the whole thing was stressful. No house, no nothing, and then I remember getting the council house and Mum and my step-dad getting together and it was fine. Um it was a lot more fun, and they were happier and I would genuinely say at that point, yeah it's funny, I would say I was happier. All that sort of stuff of "Do I want to go to Dad's this weekend?", that came a couple of years later. On the whole I think things got better for me. I left the place I loved but... I think Dad went through hell but we weren't with him so we didn't see it; we heard about it and I know now, um... You know, I know he did things like he took us [away] and you know he threatened on the telephone to write the car off with us all in there. He did awful things, so he must have been bad. I don't remember the journey, I don't remember thinking he's really losing it, he's really sad and he obviously was in a really bad way. Its not, either it's a blanked-out thing or he didn't show us; either way I don't know, um. And the weird thing is I really truly believe that if they'd stayed together I would not have trained as a dancer - I would not have been allowed to be so expressive. So my actual line of chosen career would not have been allowed by my father.'

Cath also found life easier after the divorce and the move into her community, although not because she did not want to be near her mother or had a difficult relationship with her:

"I was really happy about the divorce; I remember it was all just wrong there, and I was really happy that the atmosphere was better and people were happy, people who were happy I wanted to be with them, and I still do. I was passed around as a kid and got support from wherever I could; it was easy: I was a girl, quite warm and huggy. I guess the kids who couldn't do that, who wanted to just be with their mum or whatever, who needed more help, they struggled. But for us [Cath and her siblings], well, me and my dad and [his new partner], we always had each other,

and we [the children] didn't really get any of their problems. We never saw them struggle much; they were always solid."

There were many stories from participants of how life changed for the better post break up, both in and out of community. The wider community was often mentioned as important in these stories. For Emily there was regret about losing 'the place I loved', even though life became easier for her once her parents split and she was taken out of community as a result. For Cath the whole experience of coming into community post parental break up was extremely supportive and loving and allowed her to gain a lot of support from adults (including her now much happier parent who was in the community with her), which wasn't previously available in her experience of conventional nuclear family life.

The loss and gain of significant others

Sue's parents broke up years before the family came into their community; the children had lived with their mother as a single parent with various boyfriends, and in the end her mother moved into the community with Sue's younger sibling, leaving Sue behind with another family, because she did not want to move there (and in the spirit of autonomy for children and child centred child rearing she was allowed to choose not to accompany her mother going into communal life, at least to begin with). For many of my participants, people other than parents (stepparents or parents' partners, but also older friends and grandparents) played a significant role in stepping into gaps that parents did not fill. As with Charlotte, Sue's story exemplifies the complex position many of my participants found themselves in with respect to power and decision-making, in which power and responsibility were handed to her in some ways but withheld in others in her relationship with her mother and with other significant adults around her. Sue explains:

"Before we actually went there [to the community], I hadn't been in school for a couple of years and I was actually living with [an older woman with whom Sue was friends who lived near their old family home] for a bit. 'Cause things between me and [my mother] were so crap and sort of, yeah, my memory of it, I mean it might be totally my memory of it, it might be completely distorted and not [my mum's]. Um, it might not be how she saw it at all but I don't remember being consulted on it at all, which was like [my mum] met [her new boyfriend] and he lived in a commune and we were moving there and that was it so I was completely like 'I'm not going to fucking live in no fucking hippy commune' you know?"

Lucy – "So how old were you then, when she met him?"

Sue – "I was trying to work this out earlier with Grandma earlier from the photos, 'cause I thought I was younger, I thought I was twelve but actually I must have

been 13 nearly 14 by the time we actually got there. [My mum] went when I was 13 but like I said I stayed [in our old house] for it must have been six months after she'd gone. And then she kept the house on, that was it. There was a couple, quite a young couple, who moved to [the community], I can't remember exactly, but for some reason they ended up at our old house. With me still living there, sort of looking after me, which was a bit weird because I didn't even know them. But that was all a bit, it's all a bit of blur actually, that period. But I went from there, yeah, to, to how I actually got to [the community], 'cause I refused to go, stayed [at our old house] for a bit, I think all the authorities got a bit involved 'cause it was like here was this 13-year-old left in Wales really and not going to school, you know, being half with [this older woman friend] and half at [our old house] with this couple. So I think it got to the stage where actually... I mean, you know, when you're a kid you don't actually know what's going on with adults, do you? You're just there and they make all the decisions, so... but I do remember it getting to the stage where it was like actually "Sue, you can't stay here any more" and I remember actually not wanting to be there with these people, and I can't remember their names anyway. And so it was like it got to be like an option of [the community] or somewhere else and I went to [this alternative] boarding school for a bit, do you know about that? So it was, yeah, that looked like it might be a good compromise for me to go there, so I went there and absolutely hated it, and was there for about a couple of months, I think, and ran away. No, I rang up my Gran and Granddad and went, "Come and get me; I've run away" – I think I managed to run away as far as about five miles away or something. And rang up from a phone box and they came and picked me up. And um, so, and ended up at [the community] because it was like either go back there or go to [the community]."

Lucy – "You went into the community because you kept more autonomy being there than you would at boarding school, even though it was alternative?"

Sue – "Yeah, I think so."

Later, Sue's mother broke up with the boyfriend who had drawn her into the community, but the effort he made to forge and maintain a relationship with Sue has been important to her, and shows a positive and important aspect of relationships in the shifting world of blended family common to these communities – the valuing of individual relationships despite blood ties, and independent of formal family structure:

"[He] has been really... tried to keep it going with us and I really sort of love him for that. But I've definitely got, you know, it's only really in that last couple of years like I've been saying, you know, I've distanced myself more from [my mother] being my mum and [her] as a person. And [he], you know, I talked to him a few years ago: I still had a lot of sort of issues with [him] 'cause of stuff that's happened with him and my mum, you know, so.... But he has really, you know... I really give [him] credit for sort of, really, you know, he's always remembered our birthdays and Christmases, always stayed in contact and, which is, you know... I'm really starting to value that now that he's done it. Not just 'cause we're [my mum's] kids but because he wants to, you know, and he really sort of values that whole, that [community] time and stuff, doesn't he? He's sort of been good like that, and keeping in contact with everybody; I suppose I always looked on [him] a

bit before like he's got an ulterior motive. But that's just because, you know, his relationship with [my mum]... For a long time, it was really messy up 'til, even up 'til two years ago and I got... really did, did get drawn into the middle of that a lot as well, I think, you know, looking at it now actually, unfairly. It was real, you know; a lot of the time [my mum] wasn't talking to [him] and [he] would try and contact her through me and stuff. And like now I'm just like "Fuck off, that's your relationship, it's nothing to do with me." But when you're all emotionally involved in it yourself it's difficult, isn't it? To make that) cut-off, you know?"

Participants describe a culture and context within communities that offered them gains in the area of relationship, but there were also losses in this context, partly because of the alternative nature of the culture of communities creating a sense of separation from parents, friends and relatives outside of that culture or setting. Quite a few participants mentioned ways in which the lifestyle of communities led to strained relationships with parents who were outside the community following a break-up, because of differences in concepts of childhood and different ideas about the welfare of children. Cath's mother (who remained outside her community) was alienated by the culture of her community, as Cath explains:

'My mum has felt like she has been silenced for years, but now we are all out of the community she says things to me like "I used to worry because you would turn up with no buttons, and holes in your trousers, and I used to say I can see a child neglected." And I hadn't really thought about how my mum might feel about that.'

Conclusion

For my participants, despite the communal setting of their childhoods, the relationship(s) of their parents remained powerfully central to their experience of life. The context of communities that were consciously moving away from traditional forms of relationship and family life provided an arena for experimentation. The stories told by participants in this chapter show the interaction between conventional notions of family and relationship and the newly emerging models of more flexible relationship being explored by adults in communes in the 1970s and 80s in Britain. The material of this chapter emerged out of participants' desire to explore and make sense of and swap notes about how they were affected by their families being non-traditional in form, and how this played out in a communal context.

Most of my participants found the breakdown of their parents' relationship painful, and for some the communal context did cushion the blow, but for others the intimacy of their relationship with parents was something that others around them in the community did not really enter into or affect very much. Complications often emerged when there was a difference in ideology between

parents, with one parent being outside the community (and more conventional), and the other inside, so that communal living could add an extra layer of difficulty to a break-up. Participants reported that, in their experience, adult relationships were supposed to be to some extent informal or loose and some participants felt that this meant that adults failed to recognise the impact of relationship breakdown on affected children or even other adults.

Participants, in their adult lives, generally see long-term monogamy as a desirable goal, and it seems important to me that in their own opinion their experience of flux and flexibility in the sexual relationships of their parents has left them wanting some kind of stability, and in many cases believing that other more conventional settings for family life might provide that more than communal settings did. This is in contrast to the possibility that their experience of change and flexibility in relationship might have equipped participants to deal with change and non-attachment, leaving them happy to deal with less consistent, stable models of relationship or even seeing more flexible forms of relationship as preferable ways to conduct sexual partnerships. There is a flavour of romantic yearning in many participants discussion of such issues; a yearning for something that they feel they lacked and would have liked in childhood that they emotionally connect strongly to their communal upbringings and the culture of those spaces. The reporting of experience provides sometimes contradictory reports of participants' impressions and experience of sexual relationship amongst adults in communal settings and how this affected participants' lives, but there was an almost unanimous idealisation of long term monogamous partnership as a preferable and desirable choice for participants in their adult lives and as a setting for raising their own children.

Chapter Five

The self-regulating child – attachment and dependency

'Neither of us knew what the future would bring.
 We only know that now there's some room to talk and sing
 The baby laughs a lot and that's the most important thing...
 'Cause if we keep on growing
 There is no way of knowing
 When we'll meet as two new people we just found
 We just found.'

Joan Baez, Come from the Shadows lyrics

This chapter describes the common impression many participants had that they experienced a level of independence they consider unusual for middle-class children of their era, even in liberal households. Following on from issues raised in chapter five about relationships with parents and carers, I continue to explore my observations from interviews about how participants found attachment and dependency difficult issues as children in communes. The way many participants perceived a lack of clear or consistent structure, guidelines and boundaries for children's lives in communes is explored here, together with further discussion of themes around the conflict between balancing the needs of parents and children following on from themes raised in chapter five. Issues of authority and power, responsibilities and roles in communes, for both adults and children, are brought into greater focus here. Some participants strongly asserted that adult assumptions about what their experience and needs might have been and what mature reflection has shown them, that their needs actually were different, and their comments and reflections about these differences are brought out in this chapter.

The reality of parenting in Intentional Community?

There is no existing research about parenting methods and norms in communes in the UK in this era. Previous research (Abrams & McCulloch 1976; Rigby 1974a), does not investigate children or parenting as a focus, and was therefore short of the scope of my research. As I have not included discussions with parents or adults from Intentional Communities in my research, the 'reality' presented here about those methods, 'norms' and ideologies are entirely from the perspective of the now grown up children. These recollections are from hindsight and memory, and with the bias and focus of the current concerns of participants strongly flavouring how they think about their childhood

environments and experience now. Therefore these reports should be considered subjective and not necessarily as a balanced reportage of how parenting was actually 'done', or thought about by the adult generation in Intentional Community. As participants were keen to point out, there was not necessarily an agreed 'norm' to parenting practices in their communities so finding common themes to generalise becomes a harder task and more difficult to support with much hard evidence.

The observations and reflections of participants represented here might be seen to make up a partial patchwork, which begins to offer a sense of the impression of their childhood environments in communes, especially of commune raised women, who are currently thinking about their childhood experiences in relation to the issues of this chapter. I have attempted to draw out some strongly flavoured common themes from the interview data I collected.

The self-regulating child

"In his communes around the world, sannyasins gathered together to abandon weight, to surrender to levity. Or rather, that's what the adults were hoping for. The children of Bhagwan's communes needed other things. We needed comfort. We needed a place to stash our Lego. We needed our home. Shorter as we were, closer to the earth, we couldn't, or wouldn't, escape gravity. We felt things we weren't supposed to feel. We never seemed to make it off the ground." (Tim Guest, 2004, p. 59)

"...it just seemed like a gang of kids, didn't it basically? That were just left to get on with it..." – Sue

"...they [commune kids] have a lot more responsibility; they are treated more like adults so practically they are given more responsibility, expected to be more helpful, helping cook, looking after siblings, generally helping with everybody." – Bridget

There is commonly a strong and lasting imprint in participants' sense of self and way of inhabiting the world, as well as in their descriptions of their early lives, of a sense of early self-responsibility and independence, which I have begun to identify with the notion of 'the self-regulating child'. This is a term that I have coined to try to put across the essence of this experience. By using this term, I mean both to draw attention to the ways in which children in this context were granted power, choice and responsibility in decision-making (and freedom?) and to point to instances where participants assert markedly heavy responsibility for directing their own lives and caring for themselves and others at very young ages. This sense of self-directedness and self-responsibility forms

the strongest mutual sense of the experience of being a commune-raised child and of adult self-connected by participants to that experience. It was the subject of much discussion. Hence, I have dedicated a chapter to exploring this feeling among participants and tried to find a term to talk about it.

"I didn't really get things from other people... Not really. I remember, umm, I mean, I used to have conversations with people. In the garden with [one woman], but I don't think I took anything from other people which was really radical or really made a difference. I was really a loner in that, and that's why the horse was the big thing, because it was my transport, my friend. I had a lovely..., two lovely dogs too, at different times, but people, no not really, people were really absorbed in their own thing, really there for their own thing." – Jasmine

Jasmine's sense of being very much left to her own devices and rather lonely as far as contact with adults or parents in her childhood was concerned was not uncommon among participants, as Sue and Bridget's comments also convey. One of the things which I remember being talked about in my own community was the sense that adults there had that their children would have the opportunity to have relationships with many people, many adults other than just their blood parents, and that this was a positive opportunity for Commune kids. There was a paradox in what was described by participants around this issue. On the one hand, many participants talked about exactly this notion and how positive it had been for them to be around many people and form relationships with them, how these relationships have remained important to them as adults. On the other hand, many participants talked about a sense of lacking intimacy or contact with their parents in these communal settings and how this was not replaced by their engagement with other adults who were around.

The 'self regulating child' I am trying to describe is not a child without people around or without relationship, but rather a child with a highly individual experience, who takes on a very 'adult' responsibility for themselves at a young age and experiences some sense of being alone or unsupported in that experience. I have not used the term 'adult child' because of its negative connotations, its connection with parenting from adults who are dysfunctional and unable to provide 'proper' care and support for their children. I am trying to describe a situation where children were both liberated from parental authority (to some extent at least) and left relatively unsupervised or without strong guidance from parents and other adults (to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the individual situation), without making a pre-judgment about the correctness of that scenario.

"I remember freedom. Not that I really knew it was at the time because I didn't have anything to compare it to; I didn't hang out with kids from the village, I was kind of fascinated by them and by what they had, their material goods, toys and stuff, but I also knew that they were different and we were different from them and I remember just being able to do, we did so much together, we didn't have to ask any parents – there were never any parents around to ask anyway – and we never, we just got on with stuff, we created games out of nothing. My memories are of going for incredible adventures, bike rides round the lakes and taking a picnic and I am sure that was prompted by adults, but I know that other kids didn't have the chance to experience a lot of that, some stuff really risky, you know, walking across a frozen lake and someone's foot going in and us older kids having to rescue him and get him out and playing on the house when it was half built, being in a gang and having this assault course we had to do, all those kinds of things; the woods at the back of the house which was like this fairyland which we'd... there was a gate out of the back there and we go into fairyland and we used to camp out there and cook our own food and we were only a couple of hundred yards from the house but we were in our own little world and allowed to get on with it." – Charlotte

"I think they kind of made me very very independent. I looked after myself a lot, I was used to doing my own washing, my own ironing, tidying up after myself, keeping things clean and I got a bit tired of living in my dad's space." – Megan

Participants all alluded to some sense of having had (in some cases having had to have) greater self-sufficiency and independence as children than they believed they might have had in conventional family settings, or observed in peers not in communal settings. According to participants, sometimes this was in terms of being encouraged to form and voice opinions and to think for oneself; at others it was in terms of being left alone to cope with life, or being expected to take on traditionally adult roles. Many participants describe being 'unusually adult', 'very mature', opinionated, or having greater knowledge or ability than other children their age from 'conventional' backgrounds.

Megan's comments are typical:

"If I met other adults they would always say, 'Oh you're quite mature' [sounding surprised], because you'd always talk one on one with them, you know, not like a child and an adult. You saw them as an equal, a person to have a conversation with, and you always understood general things that most kids might not have knowledge of and understood more things and stuff, but if you disagreed then you could say so, and you learnt early on how to interact with people older than you as if you were the same."

A strong trend that came out of my discussions with participants was that dependence on adult support, adult guidance of children's lives, and recognition of adult authority or privileging of adult knowledge was seemingly often less than wholeheartedly encouraged in intentional community settings.

This was sometimes simply less feasible, as households and home environments were large and kids needed to learn to negotiate these physical and relational landscapes on their own. According to participants, the political ideals of these communities, which they described as fairly libertarian, placed a high value on individual expression which encouraged kids to refuse or refute adult authority and created a situation in which independence was something to be proud of. From my discussions with participants, dependence needs, on the other hand, seemed sometimes to be difficult to negotiate, find space for or deal with in these settings, and in some extreme cases it was positively disallowed according to some.

The 'natural child' and responsibility

My memory of parenting attitudes in my community was that they were informed by ideas that were libertarian and which assumed both that children were fundamentally good, and that, if provided with freedom and not 'oppressed' or warped by the hierarchical and stifling experiences that were often associated with conventional lifestyles and nuclear-family life by adults in my community, children would blossom as their inner nature dictated – for the good, naturally. Cath's attitude echoes these ideals that I remember:

"I'm a huge optimist. I believe in the goodness of humankind; I think that conditioning makes people afraid, and if you can take away that fear then people will prefer to respect people and be compassionate."

From my memory, the ideal aimed for in my community was to make ties between people relatively light and flexible. For example, marriage was seen by many as too constricting and heavy, whereas partnership without marriage was more flexible, more about 'relationship' and the quality of that, how fulfilling it was, and less oppressive than conventional or legal ties. Sometimes such sensibility was expressed more as a kind of fashion for how it was 'cool' to relate to people and what was 'straight' was deemed less desirable, rather than a stated ideal. I remember some focus being put on not placing demands or expectations on people that might stop them from being able to follow their own desires or fulfil their individual dreams or destinies. That applied between adults and children (to some extent) as well as between adults.

This could be seen as a kind of adult refusal to bear the burden of being responsible, or of 'being the bad guy' - setting boundaries and limits, the responsibility for teaching and socialising children to value themselves and their own needs as no more (or less) important than others'. By some it was seen exactly that way, as bad parenting, as letting kids run wild, as refusing to

be responsible or to instil a proper sense of responsibility in children. I can remember being criticised or disapproved of as a child for being so self-oriented, self directed and unwilling to bow to adult authority or a sense of duty by adults outside of my communal setting. I also remember people (particularly at school) criticising the parenting going on in my community both in terms of the kids not being looked after closely enough and in terms of the kids being tearaways.

I also remember a strong pressure in community life to think communally and to 'pull your weight', so this was not a simple ethos of self-interest by any means. Nonetheless, I remember a kickback by some in my community against cultural norms of 'duty' that could in some instances ideologically support a lack of commitment or willingness to sacrifice one's own desires for the good of the whole or of individual others. Were my childhood critics correct in asserting that I had greater self-absorption, an overblown sense of entitlement and a notion that merit and praise should be granted just for being rather than for any concrete achievement? Did my background fail to teach me that sometimes sacrificing your own desires to selflessly give to other people, despite it being less fun for you, is a good thing? And if so which value set is correct?

Anthony Giddens (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) write about how the decline of conventional marriage is part of a culture wide shift in how relationship is being 'done' in the West. This change is seen by some, as part of a culture-wide slide into narcissism:

'A utopian vision of a world where all others are endlessly loving and intimate and relations are free and constantly re-evaluated according to how satisfying they are for individuals. Where shame and duty do not enter the arena as a force for social control, and there is protection of individual freedom from negative emotional experiences associated with 'doing the right thing' such as boredom, frustration, shame, guilt, sadness, anger... A Garden of Eden where the 'natural child' inside each adult is allowed free rein and values of duty, commitment and obligation do not constrain individual fulfilment of desire.' Giddens (1992, p 32)

Could commune raised children be seen as a living example of that ideal, with little parental intervention, teaching, guidance, protection or moral instruction that might interfere with their self directed individualism? Well, in my experience and that of other participants it was far from that simple. Along with the espousal of 'child-centred' practice and anti-authoritarian ideals, the individual freedoms and encouragement towards being 'self-regulating' and expressing individual desires granted to some commune raised children carried a shadow – far greater responsibility for the self, and towards the wider

community. For some participants the adult pursuit of individual fulfilment and self-expression left them feeling far from liberated, but rather somewhat lonely, unsupported and overburdened with responsibility they weren't ready for.

Hazel – "I didn't really realise how much responsibility and the weight of that until later when I, you know, I went into my own healing process and um, realised quite how much of a weight I had taken."

Lucy – "In what ways do you think you were carrying weight?"

Hazel – "I mean, really by the time I was mid-teens I was more my parents' parent than they were mine and I looked after all my brothers and sisters and, I mean, I think, I remember I think by the time I was twelve, maybe it was 14, um, I would take my whole entire family across London on the tube and buses without my parents and that's baby in arms, you know, toddler, six-year-old, you know, and my mum wouldn't even think about saying anything to me, I was so responsible. You know, but that, if you think about it, was a lot of responsibility. Um, and just looking after the house..."

There was resentment among some about how their parents' (in participants' opinion) lack of willingness to shoulder adult duties and responsibilities left them without direction and sometimes with responsibilities which 'should' have been shouldered by adults rather than children, particularly in caring for themselves and other children whilst adults were otherwise occupied doing their own thing. There were some claims of neglect coming from participants. A scenario arose where the basic needs of some children were not catered to consistently by adults, and participants had to fend for themselves more than they felt was acceptable.

Such parenting ideals could also be seen as a libertarian move away from measuring human beings in terms of their material success or career status, in terms of their achievements, which many in intentional community rejected as ideologies to live by in favour of a kind of universal valuing of people, whatever their achievements (Rigby, 1974a). This was an issue for some participants. As Hazel said to me of her community:

"There wasn't much excellence there. There wasn't much sense of reaching for goals to achieve or of trying to become better at something. Everyone just 'was' in a kind of inertia without attempting to achieve too much. It was all about 'being', rather than 'doing'."

This situation of 'being, rather than doing' left some participants feeling directionless and lost, without a clear sense of how to engage with the wider world as they grew up, and rather as if no one cared about them or what they did (or didn't do). Some, but not all, participants described this openness as

allowing them to follow their own star, their own dreams, once they worked out for themselves what those dreams were.

Care, authority, distance...

In the community I lived in, the children often inhabited a society somewhat apart from 'the adults', with fairly minimal contact with them, usually in the form of 'bumping into' adults around the house or grounds, or at meal times, and we spent most of our time with other kids, often out of sight of adult eyes. The ideal, as I remember it, was that children were to be respected and treated as people, not children, and were expected to be responsible members of the community like adults. In practice I remember there being somewhat more allowance for bad behaviour but also greater accountability – children were a lot more likely to be 'told off' than adults, whatever the ideal. Other participants described similar kinds of scenarios in their communities.

In participants' reporting of the situation, this gap between the worlds of adults and children meant that children took on a lot of responsibility for each other without much adult intervention. In some communities, the successful spreading of parental responsibility meant that other adults would take a parental role as well as kids looking after each other, as Heather describes:

"The children looked after one another, even if you were just a couple of years older, you looked after one another. So, if I came across a baby who was crying, even if I was only five, I'd look after it. We would look after one another a lot, but also other people's parents would look after us. We'd go and stay in one another's units. We used to be told off by each other's parents a lot. They were all reinforcing that the same things were right and wrong, pretty much. So there was shared parenting to an extent, and it was, there were certain parents who you paid attention to more than others. I would always pay attention to [one girl's] parents or [another girl's] parents but not so much to others. Some were more important, some were far more scary."

Here the status of adults in terms of authority is highlighted again, and the hierarchy of power in terms of which adults had the authority to discipline kids is interesting to note. In this case, a level of agreement between adults about what was acceptable and what wasn't provided a cohesive policy for children to get to know and follow.

This was not always the case in every community. Bridget's memories are of a less cohesive, less supervised and more confusing or even dangerous environment. She felt small and alone and somewhat lacking in care or supervision from adults. Bridget found the different directions from different adults frustrating and unfair, but her favourite life lesson from this experience

was accepting difference and diversity. She believes dealing with such different world-views from different adults furnished her with the opportunity to develop an understanding and acceptance of how different people think differently:

"I just remember everyone being really angry [arguing about what was acceptable and what wasn't]. I remember getting physically hurt a lot. There were never any adults around when that happened. They'd always miss the event by... a minute or something, and it was always playing with other kids. I remember me and [another girl] decided it would be a good idea to shave with [an adult's] razor [giggles]. And finding these funny bugs under the front door mat, which bit us. But I just remember it always happened when adults weren't present."

Lucy – "And how did you experience that?"

Bridget – "I think it was quite alarming actually. You'd be in a position where you really didn't know what to do. There didn't ever seem to be adult advice or guidance when you needed it, only when you didn't need it. There'd always be an adult there when you were having a good time... I remember running around a lot – it was huge, the house was huge, I remember it as cavernous. I have always said when people ask me that I think it made me very sociable. I never have been intimidated by people from different backgrounds, or different cultures. It has never been an issue for me to think 'Oh you're different'. I just think "You're another person' and I think that has been the best thing. Accepting differences, which I think is a great thing for kids to learn, really."

In contrast to Bridget's experience, Leah, who was strongly independent and talked a lot about generally finding authority difficult, said, nevertheless, that she did not feel left alone to get on with things, but felt that she was given a lot of extra opportunities and attention that children in conventional situations might not have had:

"I think I was brought up differently, but I don't know if I was treated differently. I think more time and energy was put into me or us, the children, than a lot of children had. We could do anything from help going over schoolwork or making things from wood or teaching us to drive tractors or ... anything, really. I think we had more time and energy put into us than average children do."

From my discussions with commune-raised women, I think it is safe to say that many participants recall a distinction between how they were interacted with at home in their communities and attitudes towards children they encountered in the wider world. Many described what they encountered outside their community environments as at least slightly unpleasant or patronising, and saw it as underestimating their abilities and devaluing what they might have to offer as full people – viewing them as half-people because they did not yet have adult status or knowledge. Participants described a scenario where they were used to carrying responsibility, to having knowledge, to having more equal

status than conventionally raised children, to shaping their own lives (and sometimes dealing with their lives with very little adult guidance or support). I can remember using the term 'adultism' and understanding it as meaning adults discounting, dismissing, patronising or underestimating children, or expecting blind obedient complicity from them. Other participants echoed such notions and how they had been quite militant as commune kids about disliking being treated as less capable or intelligent than adults.

The flip side of this militant demand for not being underestimated that some participants were very keen to convey was concern about children not being protected enough from things that were hard to cope with. There is a residual strong opinion that children need structure and protection, which some communities did not provide effectively. Charlotte describes a distinction between her own community and another one that she used to visit regularly with her parents. This led to her own awareness of feeling similar anxieties to ones that more conventional people expressed to her about the environment of communal life being unsuitably lacking in protection for children:

"There was a real looseness there, and I don't just mean sexually, there was a real lack of control, lack of togetherness and direction at [this other community] that I really couldn't stand, it really frightened me. The filth and level of unkemptness in the kids, these really filthy kids walking around, they didn't have a clue who or where their mum was half the time, and really with some of them they had care from so many adults. I really don't think they knew who their mum was, and their mum might have slept with so many men anyway they didn't know who their dad was, or vice versa. [And] the squalor I really couldn't handle. At [our community] there was a clear distinction between adults and kids: although we were given some adult responsibilities, we were definitely kids, whereas at [this community]... I think they were left to fend for themselves in the wrong kind of way, that's what I felt. They weren't given responsibilities. They were just left to themselves. I might be wrong – I didn't ever live there – but that was my fear – was that life as a kid at [the other community] was really scary because of that, because at [the other community] you were left to your own devices wandering around and you didn't have that support, that if I fall someone will catch me because I am cared for and I am loved."

The relationship 'style' between adults and kids differed in different communities, according to participants. Jody describes the ethos of relationship that was present in her community, an ethos stemming from a desire for a certain kind of environment in which to live and a certain way of connecting with people:

Lucy – "Was being a 'good kid' in the community different from being a good kid in the rest of the world?"

Jody – "Yeah, in terms of relating, yeah."

Lucy – “What was the criterion for relating at home?”

Jody – “It was all about being sensitive to other people and how you relate to them and dealing with, I don’t know, what was really going on with them.”

Jody talked a lot about how she has, through her lifetime, experienced a schism between being ‘real’ about feelings and talking about them (which is how her community and family preferred to relate), how she needed to be in order to fit in with the relating styles and norms of people more shy of acknowledging feelings and more habitually interested in presenting a persona that appears ‘together’ – more self-contained. Her habitual acknowledgement of feelings she sensed going on under the surface could get her into trouble in environments where people felt exposed or challenged by talking through feelings. She learnt to not talk about the reality she experienced of people’s emotional states when she wasn’t in her home environment, but always remained somewhat uncomfortable with adopting this different way of relating.

I remember picking up a sense of ‘conventional’ people being false in their self presentation, or hoodwinked into believing that presenting an empty veneer of success and worldly status was genuinely important in life. This clash of value systems and of relational or self-presentation styles was something many participants alluded to. I remember a lot of interest in home schooling among parents in my community because of not wanting to expose children to the perceived values and styles of relating or being of mainstream schooling. In my community nearly all the children did attend mainstream school, but my memory of it is that we, as children, were somewhat briefed that this might be an environment where the values and ways of being were likely to be dubious. This contributor to *Communes Network* in 1986 (a self published magazine circulated among communes) voices concerns which illustrate some of the negative image which I remember picking up from adults in my community about mainstream school and it’s inherent values, and the notion of the positive ‘natural’ child:

‘Teach the young to be told what to do, or in other words, prepare them for life...
School break – playground – children bursting with energy, anger and frustration, built up during the lesson. Beating each other, tearing the girls’ hair, shouting at each other before going to sleep frightened. Sometimes I stop and look and it makes me so sad. On the other side I’ve seen de-schooled children, running around and laughing and being happy. Being what they are and standing up for themselves; natural and caring, helping and learning if they feel like it or just saying “I’m bored” like everyone else.’

A predominant alternative view (to 'conventional' authoritarian parenting and the values and relational styles of 'the mainstream') that came across again and again in interviews with participants, was that of being self-responsible, and fostering respect by modelling it. This respect is not just towards those in authority (who have more power), but also towards everyone, with equal regard being given to each person's needs and thoughts and each person being granted equal stakes in decision-making (that was the theory, anyway, if not always the reality of how each and every situation ended up being handled). In this way two ideologies about childhood – libertarian and authoritarian, liberal and conservative, alternative and conventional, each believing they had a similar aim (to bring up children to create a better world) but with very different visions and methods – came into conflict over how to achieve that aim, and the mainstream/conventional view had a lot more weight and power in the wider world. Within this potentially polarised clash of ideologies there were real concerns from both sides of the fence about how children fared under each system, with both believing that their own way was 'best for the child'. How real this simple dichotomy was is debatable, but what remains important is the perception, which all participants remembered being exposed to, of a clash or dichotomy existing.

Participants described an awareness of the scrutiny of sometimes suspicious 'conventional' outside eyes, but, as participants described it, they, as children, were often more aware of this conflict than the adults were, as they were more regularly in contact with mainstream people and mainstream judgements about them and their behaviour and well-being. Some participants felt strongly that those judgements did have some merit or validity, that in their communities there was some lack of awareness of children having potentially different or greater needs than adults (in some instances, in some communities), or of children being generally less able than adults to work out what they needed and articulate it clearly. In many participants' communities, the idea was to teach children to learn the skill of identifying and asserting their own needs through experience, with degrees of support that varied from 'they'll learn if we leave them alone – they'll have to' (and little actual help with doing that) to quite a lot of coaxing, coaching and attention.

According to participants, their understanding is that part of the dream of many of their parents in choosing to raise children in community rather than in a smaller group like a nuclear family was to offer them the opportunity to forge

and manage relationships with a wider range of people, to extend a sense of inclusiveness, relationship and community beyond the narrow remit of close family for children and for mothers, who were seen as having traditionally been limited to a narrow domestic sphere (and therefore suffered from feelings of isolation). As adults, commune-raised women whom I have spoken to, seem to concur with this idea in their own thinking and experience, and believe that they did have a chance to develop skills that might not have been on offer to them in another family environment.

Cath describes how she thinks she had chances to develop that she might not have had in a conventional nuclear family:

“I don’t know how people from normal families learn how to relate to people who aren’t family. It’s so claustrophobic [in a nuclear-family set-up], and particularly the way that their parents talk to them all their lives, always telling them what to do – ‘you’re stupid – you’re stupid – you’re stupid, you’re a child – you’re a child – you’re a child,’ all your life. Then ‘OK, you’re 16, now go and be an adult.’”

This subtle play between participants feelings that in their communities they had been respected and allowed opportunities to be ‘adult’, which benefited them enormously, and feeling that they were left to fend for themselves too much, with too little care, guidance or protection, was a major topic of conversation in interview - very much a subject participants wanted to explore. Participants described scenarios where, away from adult eyes, kids within these communities may not have lived up to the ideal of the ‘kind and respectful’ shiny, beautiful people when left to their ‘natural’, ‘essential’ selves. As Cath describes, the culture of ‘the kids’ in her community could be quite rough and tumble, and pecking orders were established on the basis of age, physical strength and daring, and of the status of a particular child’s parent(s), a lot of the time. An ethos of ‘deep democracy’ may have been circulating in many of these communities, but specific skills of relating, in ways that create such a utopian cooperative egalitarian relational style rather than a competitive ‘survival of the fittest’, were not necessarily being either very effectively modelled by adults, or taught to or imposed upon children in some of these communities, according to participants. Participants, like Cath, describe a situation where their understanding was that as much freedom as possible was given to children. Some participants saw this as an adult attempt to avoid squashing, dominating or oppressing them, and some were more of the opinion that this freedom was more the result of adults being more interested in other

adults or themselves than in children, whilst others described a blend of both these notions.

Cath describes a scene that you needed to be tough to survive at home in her community, but feels positive about this:

“I am really glad I was given freedom. I didn’t fare too badly, you know? In the rough moments, when the kids were playing really rough and the same kid would always get picked on or trodden on and there was no adult around, or the wrong one.”

The inference in her statement was that not all the kids fared as well as she did and that freedom had a price in terms of weathering the ‘rough’ moments without adult protection or intervention. Cath explains:

“I remember [one mother] was always quite protective, which meant her kids were always the butt of the joke. That was the power game, ‘Oh look at you – don’t you need protection from your parents?’, whereas for normal kids that would be fine. If someone’s parent came along it would be like just, ‘Oh shit, let’s leg it’, you know? But it wasn’t like that at [the community]. If something happened to her kids, she’d always come running, and have a go at us, and her kids would always get mocked: ‘Oh you need your mummy, you need your daddy. We don’t need our parents to stick up for us’. Some kids were really vulnerable, lots of them had come out of a divorce and couldn’t handle it, or the kids were scared of their parents so they’d get teased. But I was OK. I think the relationship between Dad and [his partner, Cath’s stepmother] was so strong, even before we moved into the community – it was the two of them against the world. They were so passionately radical and political and strong and [she] was quite scary, you know, very emotional, passionate. The nature of their relationship was so indestructible. It was the two of them against the whole world and we knew that they loved each other and adored each other, so we had that, you know. It’s so different if you are a single mother or single father having to deal with everything. When I think of [that mother] I think how difficult it must have been for her, how much she was always struggling, and yet I think that me and my dad and [his partner], we always had each other, and we [Cath and her siblings] didn’t really see them having problems. We never saw them struggle much, they were always solid – and that made us pretty solid too.”

Cath’s father and stepmother were powerful adults in her community, and the trickle-down effect of being their ward is well described by her, as is the difference in status, state of mind and circumstance of different parents, and the difference that this could make to their children in a community environment. The ‘protective’ mother she describes was not only dealing with being a single parent, but also mourning the loss of a child who had died not that long before she entered the community. From my participants’ (the children’s) point of view, as they describe it, the power relations within their communities often seemed far from the utopian ideal aimed at or talked about. This was true

between children and between adults and children as well as between adults and other adults.

A rough and tumble, competitive style of relating was something flagged as present and problematic by some participants. For some, the ethos of caring for adults who were vulnerable and in need of support was also problematic in terms of what they were exposed to in adults they lived with. Some participants had to deal with some quite disturbed people (this was the case in a number of my participants' communities where people were invited to stay on a kind of working retreat – people who needed care and respite). All the participants who had experienced visitors and guests who needed help and care thought it taught them important lessons about people, but also remembered a sense of needing protection or distance from them. Jody describes her memories of some of these scenarios:

“I remember one night – we used to have people like... we had this reincarnation-of-Christ guy there, and witches and stuff – and there was this woman who thought she was a witch, or I thought she was a witch or something, and she was a bit mad, like I think she actually was a bit mad, and one night she just screamed, like howling the whole evening, and that became... I learnt how to adapt to quite extreme situations, like people shouting. I would just go downstairs and say, ‘Mum, she’s screaming her head off and it’s really uncomfortable. Can I be with you, is that alright?’ and she’d say, ‘yeah’ and then the woman would stop screaming and go back to bed. So I learnt to deal with situations like that, which for anyone else would have been... I don’t know, that’s just what life was...”

Charlotte describes her community’s policy of including needy people:

“I don’t know how they got that off the ground but we had quite a lot of people who were mentally ill. People from disturbed backgrounds, as well as people who wanted to opt out of society for a while and who would very much be there to contribute to the making of a community; to do what they could in the garden, the building of the house, and to do what they could for those who couldn’t do all that and to encourage them to do their small chores. Even the most ill or fucked-up person there would have a job to do, even if it was just picking up stuff... I remember this bloke Frank who was huge, really muscley, and we had to pick up and move stones... and he had this little boulder in his hand and it took about half an hour to move, he couldn’t get his head around actually doing anything physically to exert himself, and it was just funny. People would sort of look after each other and make it all happen and there was a massive buzz there in the 1970s; it was quite big then.”

Boundaries and safety

Many participants have strong memories of feeling unsafe, afraid or inhibited in communal environments, of being overpowered by adults or ignored by them, of feeling threatened or unable to assert themselves effectively. The

physical space offered the possibility of freedom away from adult rules, but these large areas were also inhabited. Communal spaces could feel distinctly unsafe to children, either because of the adults (or children) in them or because the right adult was not to be found when help or protection was needed.

Bridget talks about the shock she experienced as a young child as she tried to cope with inhabiting this new space that was organised differently from her nuclear family, which had broken up, and which she had had to leave to come into the community:

“I think the difficult thing when we were there was the instability of not having your own parents close at hand, and that was so unsettling at that young age because you desperately need that at that young age, and we had come out of this secure family home kind of thing.”

Jasmine talks about the joy of freedom and also the difficulty of ‘non-boundaried’ life as a teenage commune child:

“[I remember] elements of it being really magical – remembering [a friend] and I and lots of kids going camping with no adults, and just three or four miles of countryside to roam, and having our freedom. Sort of like Swallows and Amazons, freedom to do our own thing. It was wonderful, the childhood world. When it rubbed up with the adult world it was sometimes more complicated...”

Lucy – “Did you experience the environment as not safe then?”

Jasmine – “Yeah, not because, because of the waifs and strays, maybe, but it was more because of the distractedness of my parents, made it feel unsafe, it was very boundary-less, largely. I could do what I wanted pretty much, but then sometimes when I did they would sort of intercede, but I had no... there was no... I mean I was... Maybe it’s just a normal teenager acting up so you do kind of push them, and you don’t respect, you don’t follow suit, but... I dunno, there was an unsafeness there because of the people who were there and I don’t think Mum and Dad were aware of it... I dunno.”

Many participants talked about issues of safety and the need to protect themselves, or their perception that they lacked protection by adults. It seems that, despite some strong relationships of mutual care, power relations were sometimes worked out between children with little of the hoped-for ‘natural’ sensitivity and quite a lot of dominating, hierarchical behaviour. Jasmine describes a community she spent time in:

“[It was this] gigantic building, really austere and umm... really scary... Not a good place to try to find your way around. I mean I did get used to it and find my way around but you just couldn’t find your way around and plus there was lots of other kids around there so there was a child hierarchy which was quite intimidating. It smelled funny, just everything about it, I didn’t like, I really didn’t like it there. I don’t remember having any good times there. I am sure we must have, but I don’t remember...”

Cath talks about her father (who was present in the community, though her mother wasn't) and his ability to move beyond masculine stereotypes, but also thinks through this notion of protection and representing yourself as a child, and the lack of active drawing in of children in favour of waiting for them to come and be involved of their own volition:

"My dad is a very all-rounded person, very reflective, gentle and soft, and loved kids and stuff, that kind of thing. Although he was very much uninterested, I had a lot of freedom. I didn't really see them [her father and his partner] that much. I was always at another unit, having fun with someone else. My dad didn't really make much effort to draw me in, to some kind of family thing. If I wanted to be there I was there, if I didn't well that was fine by him, so it was very kind of free. I do remember one occasion – there were very few, I certainly didn't do it after this – when I asked for protection – I asked Dad – one occasion, I asked Dad and he said 'sort it out yourself – it's not my problem.' [And] I remember crying my eyes out. It was one of those typical kid things. I had had a fight with one of the kids, and she had hit me and run off and then we had been beating each other up, and chasing each other, and she was chasing me everywhere, and I had been running for like half an hour, and by this point I was just like, 'fuck it, where's my dad? I am going to run to my dad' and I think she had gone off by then and I came to my dad and said (in mocking crying voice) 'she did this...' and he just looked at me and just said, 'Deal with it yourself, don't come running to me with tears in your eyes' and I was so shocked by that, I still remember it. It's one of those vivid memories. I thought 'so this is it, I really am on my own here, totally.' [And] I don't know how old I was – like eight, nine, ten? And I thought, 'OK, if that's the way it's got to be, that's the way it's got to be, what can I do?'"

Charlotte also describes an experience of great self-responsibility:

"I've always thought that was part of me, that I was quite a responsible person, and I think I was – I mean being one of the oldest kids I would probably take more responsibility and stuff, it's really hard to say what's me and what is being given the chance to take responsibility and to make my own choices and decisions from such an early age and make them with other people. I mean it was more than just me. I didn't have siblings I played with because they were all much older than me so it was always other kids at the commune or my niece, who is more like a little sister to me (she's three years younger). Being in that group of children, I mean, we did fight, definitely, we fought and fell out, but we obviously had some sense of responsibility. By some way we had to work together and play together, we accepted that we were together. We never questioned the fact that other kids would come into what was, well, I could have said, 'fuck off, it's my home' you know, so yeah I don't really know but I think on reflection it probably has had quite a lot of influence on me and my character. It'd be interesting to somehow prove that, but I know I can't. It'd be like an experiment, you know? Take me back and put me as a kid in a little nuclear family and see how I turn out then. [And] I think I probably would turn out quite differently. I know in fact, there's a lot of things that I experienced as a kid, because you think about them as an adult and they are there somehow in your subconscious, affecting who you are."

Cath reflects on what she gained from being left to be 'self-regulating' in the context of communal space:

"What you gain is this ability to deal with yourself and stick up for yourself and be self-responsible. Lots of people don't learn how to represent themselves or take responsibility, but it goes against the wider myths of childhood, this idea that children are meant to be left without responsibility and protected. Being in a community, you can't do that, there's too many people. You have to deal with lots of people, a parent couldn't protect you even if they tried."

This notion of how the physical space and social circumstance of living communally made a more self-sufficient attitude more important for children was common among the majority of participants.

Environments for children

Although, according to participants, many of their communities had a distinct sub-culture of 'the kids', some participants, nonetheless, describe spending a lot of time with adults, and adults being very interested in spending time with them. Two of the communities participants lived in were centred on alternative schooling and based the life of the community around the project of educating and caring for children. Jody's community, which was originally founded as a Montessori school, was extremely 'child-centred' as she explains:

"There was a whole area of the kitchen which was child-size and could be used by a child. There was a cooker, a sink, cupboards; all the light switches were at a child's level. It was all geared to a child. It is very much an adult world – children have to grow up in an adults' world. I think they were trying to change that. I don't know if that is giving children equal power, but it is recognising that children are different from adults, and I guess giving them power in that way, altering the house physically and I guess emotionally to suit their needs."

Some participants definitely felt that they had more social contact and adult attention in community than previously. Hazel says:

"I moved there when I was six. My family was one of the families that helped to set it up. My parents had separated when I was two, but they both moved there with their partners, so I had my mum's flat and my dad's flat right next door to each other – with my step dad and step mum there too. [And] all my mother's other children were born at the community. Before we lived at the community we lived in London, and we didn't always live with Dad, so I didn't see so much of him, and we always lived in flats and stuff and so moving to the community was like suddenly having tons of space, countryside; freedom to run around because it was safe; and knowing that it wasn't a short-term thing. I was going to be living with my mum and my dad, so that was really nice. It was very stabilising. It was the first home that I felt we would be in for a long time. Because I didn't go to school, even though other kids did. I still had 17 other kids to play with after school, and that was great. [And] I had a lot more freedom than most kids to just run around, because the adults knew you were on our land and you were safe, so

they didn't worry if you weren't home by dark, or whatever... You know, fag in the hayloft, climbing on the roof, whatever... I remember a lot of meal times, and meetings – the adults often got a bit stressed about meetings, but the kids would just run off and play, [but] I thought it was great and I thought I was very lucky not to have to go to school. I can remember feeling a bit like I was missing out sometimes, but mostly not, because I loved babies, and I loved hanging out with the adults and I would get taught different things by different adults. I felt kind of like I had 30 adults rather than four, which is already pretty good."

There was often a covert assumption to be detected in the attitudes of some participants (which they report picking up from their parents, or assuming because of their parents focus on sharing child care duties) that being a parent is not enjoyable – that children and the care of children is not rewarding but a chore. Many of the participants who had experienced this had very ambivalent feelings about having children themselves, and expressed how much their existence made their parents' lives difficult more strongly than how much their parents and other adults enjoyed having them around and valued their relationship with them. There was a real fear among these women of how miserable having children might be for them, just as it had been, or might have been if they had not been in a communal setting, for their mothers (especially when participants reflect on their own potential role as a parent).

Bridget describes how the lack of distinction between adults and children and the lack of awareness of children's different needs affected her in her community:

"You didn't really understand. I think the boundaries were a bit blurred, and as a child, you didn't really understand your role. It's almost like you didn't really understand what you were entitled to. You had to ask for parenting sometimes. You had to ask for your mum to look after you and not someone else. I remember going to the reunion at [my community], and several of the adults coming up to me and they hadn't seen me since I was what, six? [And] I had this really vivid memory of me as a five-year-old running up and down the halls shouting for my mum and she was nowhere to be found, and it sounds a bit tragic and sad but it was a bit like having two absent parents because not only had we been taken away from our father but we had also lost our mum, because she was so busy going out for her self-expression and her freedom and whatever. [And] you know, I find it hard to blame in that situation. It's not very helpful – doesn't make a difference really. I am sure that that was not her intention in the situation, but I think that was the reality."

Participants often mentioned how their mothers were witnessed as having borne the lion's share of responsibility for their children's well being in their communities. Participants, such as Bridget, showed an awareness of, and compassion for, their mothers' experiences, circumstances and choices, whilst

also attempting to express their current view of the ways in which their situation in intentional community as a child was not geared to meet their needs in some ways. Bridget says:

“With my particular experience it has always been about Mum, – my mum. I think in later years she’s grown a lot mellower and a lot less self-oriented, but I mean everything about going to the commune was about her really, and her finding a place to belong, and finding a group of people with whom she felt she could belong. After being in a marriage that was really unsuccessful, that she felt very unheard in, she wanted to express herself and feel heard and all that kind of thing, and I don’t really think that truly that had a lot to do with her thinking that it would be the best thing for me. [And] I think that’s the case with a lot of parents who took their children to those kinds of environment. There was definitely a preoccupation with the adults. It was self-absorbed. It’s a bad combination really. The adults were very busy – very preoccupied. Their generation was rebelling against what had been before. I think there was too much of a focus on their beliefs politically, morally, etc., and that the whole reason they became a collective was quite self-absorbed really. It was about them fighting for their own beliefs, working out what their own beliefs were, and within that it’s very difficult to be a parent. I guess I see it as quite a self-indulgent exercise. The intention was good, but it was slightly naïve to believe that that was grounds for a happy environment for children or for parenting. They were too busy saving the world. Fighting against the world. They were too busy doing that to realise that they were dealing with a generation of children that they were really confusing – that there was really not enough space for doing both things. It’s difficult because parents are supposed to be quite selfless and when you are trying to fight your corner it is quite a self-centred place to be. I don’t know, it’s not very calm, that kind of environment – that vehemence to fight your moral corner isn’t a very calm place to be, and for children that’s quite a whirlwind to be in. I mean, I think of friends of mine who are parents now and friends of mine’s parents who I would see as successful at parenting are very calm unassuming people that kind of do know their own minds and own beliefs but aren’t overexcited about it and kind of are very loose with the way that they handle their children’s impressionability or vulnerability.”

I have a notion that the adult generation of commune members would, certainly at the time, have argued that saving the world had everything to do with parenting, as it was about trying to create a world worth living in for their children. The fire in the belly of some commune women, who had abandoned traditional models of family or relationship, was arguably also a struggle for liberation with the intention of handing down a legacy of greater choice and possibility for happiness to their daughters. Indeed, to be a mother and not be ‘selfless’ was a major goal of the time for many of the adult women in my community, as I remember it from the discussions of adult women around me in my childhood. My memory is that selflessness was seen as part of the way in

which women are constantly expected to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others as a result of patriarchy.

The struggle against models of relationship based on hierarchy or dominance could have been seen by parents as offering to their own children a sense of democratic relations and creative individualism – an experience of being in a space relatively free of domination and oppression, where children could ‘grow’ freely without being squashed by adults around them. That’s what I remember of my own mother’s ideas about the environment she wanted to provide for me as a child, through living communally. In the process of my parents’ divorce and our moving into the commune, I can remember often hearing the idea that if parents are happy then they are better able to parent well, so in my memory of it, reaching for a more fulfilling life was seen by my parents as having the end goal of providing better parenting for their children, as well as more fulfilment or happiness for themselves.

Judith Wallerstein’s longitudinal study of the impact of divorce on children describes culture-wide assumptions that echo my memory of such ideas being around:

‘In our rush to improve the lives of adults, we assumed that [children’s] lives would improve as well. We made radical changes in the family without realising how it would change the experience of growing up. We embarked on a gigantic social experiment without any idea about how the next generation would be affected. If the truth be told, and if we are able to face it, the history of divorce in our society is replete with unwarranted assumptions that adults have made about children simply because such assumptions are congenial to adult needs and wishes.’ (Wallerstein et al., 2002, p. 2)

In my own attitude and that of other participants this was tricky territory. Most participants basically accepted the idea that parents needed to be happy, and supported their attempts towards fulfilment, but most had questions about whether their needs and their parents’ needs were always in line and whether this was taken into account by their parents. This potentially brings to light an axis of power relationship between adults and children that some participants see as unacknowledged. Some participants were quite resentful, describing scenarios where they believe that adults were quite self-centred and, as children, they were seen as resilient and able to be endlessly flexible and adapt around adult needs. Many participants talked about being told that, as they were young, they’d ‘bounce back’ and cope easily with upheavals and changes to their lives brought about by adult choices. This was seen by some as a way of whitewashing over the ways that children’s needs might sometimes actually be

in conflict with those of adults, and not addressing such conflicts overtly – thus not acknowledging, justifying or maintaining a scenario where adult needs and wishes were privileged on a deep level without question.

Jasmine compares her experience of how she was parented in intentional community with her awareness of her own relationship with her daughter:

“My dad still has that actually to some extent, a kind of... just self-absorption – absorbed in their own problems, absorbed in their own love lives, absorbed in their own jobs. They were... whatever was satisfying them or dissatisfying them would be completely absorbing to them at that time. They weren’t bad people, they were just phenomenally engrossed in themselves, even when they were doing it as a group. Maybe that’s just childhood experience of adults but I really don’t think I am like that with my kids. I am much more open to Martha and what she needs, and I am trying to learn to have more adult restraints for her, so that all that is there for her. There was just this sense of them being on their own mission all the time and I think it was a case of people being needy, emotionally exhausted or just really lost...”

Those participants with children, like Jasmine, all expressed a concern with taking responsibility and ‘being the grown up’ in their parenting role. They talked a lot about having a focus on setting boundaries, protecting their children, providing safe environments and being attentive to their children’s needs in a way which did not vision children as able to set their own boundaries – protect themselves or identify and express their own needs without adult help. These participants connected this concern in their parenting of their own children with their experience of parents and adults in their childhood environments not doing these things for them as much as they feel they needed in hindsight.

Conclusion

Participants described a search for freedom from conformist expectations and prescribed roles that lent many of their communities an atmosphere that was fairly anti-structure. They talked about how, for the children, this was sometimes problematic, involving an intuiting of what the rules of any given situation might be without clear guidance from adults or parents about consistent standards. The stories of participants in this chapter give testament to how a lack of clear boundaries and standards could be confusing, although it also developed a strong ability in many participants to read situations and respond ‘on the hoof’ and strong skills in navigating relational landscapes which were complex and large.

Participants describe a scenario in which reality for them was far more complex than a simple notion of equality, including a sense of the differences between adults and children that undermines attempts to treat children and adults as the same, despite the respect and appreciation they have for the notion of equality between adults and children. There was a clear message that came through about a perceived need to make allowances for these differences, so that it becomes possible to think clearly about what everyone's needs really are and how they might be recognised and considered, or how children's expression or communication of their needs might be encouraged. This was seen by participants as subtle and complex and led to a lot of reflection amongst participants about how power might be negotiated, with less focus being put on individual self-assertion and self-responsibility, and more on sensitivity and consideration of children's needs. This was seen by participants as a necessary development, an add-on to make workable the notion of equality between adults and children in community in order to make allowances for how children are different from adults. This came from their memories of difficulties in identifying their own needs and asserting them in an 'equal playing field' way with adults in communes when they were children.

Chapter Six

The status of children in communes

'I ain't lookin' to compete with you,
 Beat or cheat or mistreat you,
 Simplify you, classify you,
 Deny, defy or crucify you.
 All I really want to do
 Is, baby, be friends with you'
 – Bob Dylan, 'All I Really Want to Do'

In this chapter I consider how the participants see themselves, with respect to power and status within their community. I look at their status as child, in terms of community membership and the power to influence their own life. To this, I also consider the participant's impression of how authority was regarded and exercised in community life generally. I explore the ways in which the rhetoric of equality exists within this community with regard to children, and if community life lives up to such rhetoric. I look at childhood issues of control, of self-directedness and voice and explore the relationship of participation in communal life and responsibilities.

Commune conceptions of children and childhood

From my own experience, and from my participants' feedback, many intentional communities have a basic ideal of some notion of equality and inclusiveness. They reference these ideals as a base model for structuring community life, often posed in opposition to 'normal' 'mainstream' structures of relating such as traditional nuclear family or corporate hierarchical models. Negotiating how this works in practice is a core challenge of living in a community and often remains a goal to be reached for rather than any kind of permanently achieved state of being.

Children occupy a unique position in many of my participant's communities, and also in my own. They were not adults, and were in most cases seen to have a different status, different needs, and different ability. How these differences are dealt with in a framework that also reaches for an egalitarian ideal is particularly tricky ground. None of my participants describe an equal power balance in their communities between adults and children. However, they did often describe a sense of having greater power in their community, than in their

experience of other more 'mainstream' social spaces such as school, or within other people's families.

If you believe it to be desirable, how do you go about attempting to allow kids to have an equal voice in their own lives, when there is such an immediate sense of adult authority and power over children across wider society, especially when adult power over children is often assumed to be the natural order of things? Is it truly desirable to 'allow' children equal say?

I have looked at the actual experience of children raised in a model that attempts to treat children 'equally' to adults. Is it possible to allow for differences between adults and children and still maintain equality? How are these differences recognised? Are these differences real or perceived? These are deep questions, which are not unique to communal life, and challenge many common notions about children

This chapter comes from asking these questions of commune participants. The general questions of the notion of childhood are beyond the scope of this text. I stay within the scope of specific experience of my interviewees and look at particular moment in their lives.

According to my participants and in my own experience, different communities have different levels of expectation of their children being 'little adults'. Also, the amount of allowance to assert views along with everyone else (all the adults) varies. Different levels of responsibility are also expected. Kids tend to exist in a kind of grey area – expected to be actively part of the community and have input and responsibility, but not as much as adults. They are often partly included in decision-making, but in a reduced capacity. Often, the children are seen as just members, but not as much as adults. Kids are nearly always seen as ultimately their parents' responsibility rather than that of the rest of the community. The parents, therefore, generally represent their children, rather than the children voicing their own opinions as individual members. This seems an almost universal situation across all the communities from which I and my participants came.

Parents have differing attitudes about how much parental authority they want to take in terms of choosing for their children, or allowing their children to be more self-directed. Some participants felt that the attempts to empower children to be self directed were as much to do with adult communards not wanting to be in authority or take responsibility as to do with being concerned

for the equality of children. Whether the rhetoric of equality is 'real' when it comes to major life choices or decisions is a moot point among participants.

Bridget describes:

"As a parent, what you take on is the responsibility of having to make choices that affect your children. So, if you give your children the responsibility of making choices for themselves, in a way you are abdicating your own responsibility.

Whether you see that as a freedom for your children or, umm... for yourself..."

Lucy – "Children aren't always capable of making those choices?"

According to Bridget:

"They don't always have the skills, really. It's also sort of an illusion, because the big decisions (I mean we didn't actually have a choice about whether we moved there, we didn't have a choice about moving away again). All those big decisions were made for us and they were very much about meeting Mum's needs. So it's a weird thing because again it's kind of a smoke screen. Yeah, you are under the illusion that those choices aren't made for us, that we are to be consulted and respected, but actually we have to go along with the adults, with our parents, about most stuff that's really important."

The subjective experience of how much your needs and wants win out in a group is obviously very difficult to gauge. Many people habitually feel that they are not allowed or able to assert themselves. This kind of problem forms a strong part of my own memory of conflict in community. Finding solutions with which everyone feels happy is so notoriously difficult! The added issue of the status of children being a grey area in communal life makes 'reality' as usual a slippery fish to catch. This is the kind of impression that Bridget expresses. Her experience is of ideals where children should have equal voice and power, but not a reality of this being honoured when push came to shove. Big decisions being made without the say of the children, is very commonly reported amongst my interviewees.

This grey area of equal but not equal could be slightly confusing ground to tread (for adults as well as children I am sure). Participants reported that they could end up feeling very daunted in holding their own. Developing a presentation of self in order to survive and stand ground and not feel overlooked or overpowered was very tough to do. The 'smoke screen' that Bridget describes causes distrust in adults because of this mismatch between the ideology and actual experience. It seems obvious to me, from my experience, that the experimental nature of many communities, and their inexperience and newness (as they were mostly very young communities in the 1970s and early 1980s), could easily lead to confusing or inconsistent scenarios

for kids to navigate. The adults thrashed out how they wanted things to be run and changed the landscape for kids as they did so.

An 'ever-shifting landscape' in terms of power, rules and responsibilities is something many participants had memories of. Leah describes a very loose and unstructured way of making decisions in her community in general, and the children's part in that process. She experienced this as fairly equal to that of adults in the community:

"I don't remember any formal discussion of decisions, but I think decisions came about through discussion; I mean there wasn't a rule that everybody ate together, but most often we'd all get together in the evenings and eat and I guess decisions were made then... We [the children] had equal voice, equal say, our opinions were listened to; I mean I'm not saying that if we said "We all need a holiday in Honolulu" that that is what would happen, but..."

According to Leah, this loose structure demands a certain kind of persona of kids. It demands a persona that is ready to be proactive and assertive and to bring problems to light. It means children have to be vocal; to speak one's mind, to demand as well as defend themselves. Leah describes the kind of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977) that she developed as a result of her communal living experience, trying to define what marked it out as unusual:

"I'm not entirely culturally middle-class, because there's the liberal side of middle-class supposedly, but there's still that very formal side of social interaction where there are unspoken rules about things that are not to be spoken about, that are simply not said – that very British thing about there's an elephant in the front room but we're not allowed to say so..."

Lucy – "There's a great hairy elephant on the coffee table..."

Leah – "Yeah. I have been brought up to say "Look at that hairy elephant" and [when I'm in the mainstream] I kind of know the rules and know it's not OK to speak about it, but then find myself kind of saying anyway and feeling very uncomfortable in situations where I can't say. I end up feeling uncomfortable with the people and uncomfortable with myself in that situation. That's one of the weird things in relationships now: my upbringing says "If there is a problem then you talk about it", try and resolve it by saying "I am uncomfortable with... unhappy with... what can we do about it?" Partners seem to find that threatening. People seem to find that kind of rude or find it confrontational when it is not intended to be. It's intended to overcome problems, resolve things. I don't know if that response is because of me being a woman and it not being OK for women to speak up, or a sign of my upbringing being very different and me being particularly strident, or an unhappy combination of the two... [laughs]"

Perhaps this sense of stridency, which many people who live in intentional communities as adults will testify to (those precocious obnoxious commune kids, or, even worse, teenagers!) is in part a product of children in community inhabiting that grey area, the margins of the community – when they are

neither full adult members, nor without responsibility, or entirely without voice (if you can assert yourself forcefully enough, that is!). So, commune-raised children are entering a kind of early adolescence, in which they are semi-integrated or initiated into the adult world and not kept in that mythological space of childhood innocence and lack of responsibility. Negotiating that unsure ground is often rather nerve wracking for kids and they have to get confident, or at least enough to talk confidently in an adult way, and develop (some would say precociously) adult awareness and skills, in order to successfully navigate their way.

As Cath testifies:

“There was a lot of analysis, a lot of adult talk, a lot of awareness; I seem to remember even as a child being talked to like an adult, because everyone was so aware, everyone knew about analysis, and therapy; people would respond to behaviour by looking for a reason for it, a compassionate way to interpret what was going on.”

Talking to some of my interviewees, I became aware of a strong undercurrent in what they said about all this. There seemed a strong need to represent themselves – a sort of pride in their abilities and in how young they were when they managed to be very adult, and an irritation and frustration with adults they had encountered as children, who patronised or underestimated them. But I also noted a kind of defensiveness, a sense that participants had to fight their corner in order not to be overwhelmed by all the other adults and kids around. I wondered how much room there was for vulnerability in that kind of environment. According to some participants, in their childhood experience, if they revealed a gap in their armour or argument, others might use it to dismiss them, and if they put their full force into asserting themselves they were likely to be written off as precocious or annoying. A consensus seems to be that if the kids are sidelined all there is left to do is sit on the margins and carp at those in the centre, at the adults who had real power, and annoy them. This could be through breaking the unsaid rules or codes of morality, or making fun of adults, or a host of other resistant behaviour. This seems to go on a fair amount in some communities!

According to my interviewees, kids were often actively encouraged to adopt an identity which is challenging and opinionated, at least in terms of challenging the status quo of the mainstream outside the community, if not also the status quo internally. Adult authority is played down in many of these communities, and the unclear status of children is apparent. The interviewees described

themselves as being both free and unregulated and also rather left out of many of the big decisions about how things were run, decisions that affected their childhood lives.

The lifestyles of children in communes are markedly different to those of adults in many cases. Often children went out of the community to school and this set up a strange 'other life' for children, in which they were often much more closely involved with the conventional mainstream world than the adult commune members. Adult communards were free (to some extent at least) to choose their contact with 'outside' to be in more sympathetic spheres than state schools. This, arguably, set up demands more on kids' sense of identity than many adults in community were coping with. It also means that many kids weren't expected or able to share in as much of the work of the community as many adults did in the community. This is largely because they had to spend their days at school and with homework. In some communities, where adult outside work was required to be kept part time in order for members to be available for work inside the community, this time constraint could be seen as significant. An enduring notion of childhood, which crossed from 'outside' to 'inside' communities, was the idea that children need to play, learn and do children's things rather than work, or being always involved with the adults' world. So, children could be seen as unable to have the same roles as adults in communes either by circumstance or because of how their needs and capabilities were seen to be different.

All this mitigated against children being seen as fully part of, or being fully consulted on the core running of the community, without significant adjustment towards their differences. It may well be true that adults did not entirely have the will to involve children so centrally either. Perhaps this is because the adults didn't see them as full members, or had little interest in them, or because they thought it wrong to expect children to be so adult. The differences of children and their lives made it difficult to include them in the usual processes that were set up for adults. Participants remember debates amongst adults about what should be expected, allowed, what was good for children or not. Almost always, the debate would end asking, 'What are children?' as well as asking, 'How do we incorporate, and deal with them?' These tricky questions remained unanswered in most cases, with a lack of consensus that entails vagueness about communities' positions on children. Are

they full members? How much should they be involved in work? How much should they be consulted?

Heather explains her community's decision-making processes, and how the children were partially included in it, partly from their own choice:

"I guess, on a basic level, everyone was considered equal in terms of responsibility and decision-making power. I don't know how other communities work but the decision-making process was based on veto; any individual had the right to veto any decision. I don't know if children had the right or not. Decisions got made at the Friday meeting, and if you were at the Friday meeting then you got a vote. I think there was an agenda drawn up and if you cared about an issue you would go. You didn't have to go. I think kids could go, but I didn't go. I think maybe you had to be a certain age to go, certainly if you went you had to behave and be quiet. There was that basic feeling... Everyone had to do their share, and you had to share the responsibility as well as the rights, and I don't know that much about it, what I know I have learnt since almost, my mum told me."

Rules, power and authority

It is difficult to be libertarian and allow children such freedom, to adopt a model of equality as an ideal, and still pull rank on commune-raised children so as to be able to impose rules. I did hear some stories of extremely rebellious behaviour from participants, particularly as they became teens – most of which they asked me not to repeat in my writing. Many (but not all) of my participants described being difficult or 'a nightmare' for adults in the community to deal with because of being so forthright and refusing to bow to adult authority, any authority.

Leah describes this as a lasting legacy for her in adult life as well as when she was a child:

"There's also that people not brought up to stand up for themselves obviously have a real fear of it [commune-raised people's assertiveness or confidence in questioning authority], or of crossing any sort of authority [themselves] whether that's their parents or teachers or the state, doctors, whoever, and I think that being brought up to question things and to stand up for things you know that you can actually say that you disagree and you won't necessarily kind of be instantly thrown out of college or whatever for not doing what you should."

Heather describes being a young child running wild at a community as an anarchic experience, and her experience is echoed by many of my participants when speaking of pre-adolescent times in community:

"I suppose my overriding thing that I identify with [my community] is being in a big group of children and playing loads and loads of games together; we just used to play games all the time, and being naughty and going places we shouldn't and doing things we shouldn't and really being a kid. Because I was quite young when I left I see it as a very free place, just doing exactly what I wanted."

Cath describes to me how, once her gang of kids reached adolescence and began taking interest in the opposite sex, the adults insisted on curfews for bedtime to avoid kids staying in each other's rooms late at night. She said:

"We just couldn't believe it, I mean we were just like – Are you serious? Now, now you're deciding to come all heavy?"

The children's incredulity at having limits and boundaries placed on their behaviour, after having been left so much to their own devices, paints a comic picture, but also speaks to the distance between adults and children and the separate worlds they inhabited. The children were left undisturbed until sexuality brought anxious adults into their childish kingdom. As I shall discuss later, this could be seen as a particularly difficult issue because of very confused messages and practices in communities to do with sex and the appropriateness of exposure to adult sexuality for commune-raised kids.

In many of the communities I researched, ideologically adult authority was often rejected, as part of a whole approach to life that valued self-directed action over anything demanded by duty or 'the rules', and in which positive actions were supposed to come from genuine internal urges towards generosity and cooperation and negative feelings were not to be suppressed (as this was seen as unhealthy and false). Children could choose to respond to adults with this ethos by echoing their unwillingness to do things they didn't 'feel like' with an equal unwillingness to do what they were told unless they 'felt like it.'

Participants could, thus, sometimes respond to adult demands with an irritating parroting of adults' own ideas, turned and thrown back at them.

Sue describes:

"I think, yeah, it was a combination of [what my mum is like anyway, and her] going through the whole hippy stuff and not, you know, being very parental. That whole ethos of not telling kids what to do and letting them make their own decisions and stuff, which was that real whole '60s mentality, wasn't it? And you know, educating at home and stuff, she was already sort of into that. But I think it was a combination of that and actually she was absolutely on me, over me. I mean I remember being sort of ten and doing absolutely nothing she said, telling her to fuck off actually and going to do exactly what I wanted to. Which was OK in [the really rural place where we lived], and it was really lucky, I mean looking back on it I think "Oh my God, can you imagine if we'd lived in somewhere like London? You know, in the East End, and I was behaving like that at that age? God knows what might have happened to me." So you know it was so lucky I could go off all day and just do what I wanted to do. So it was fine, I think it was literally she, you know, she had no authority over me whatsoever and I just did do completely what I wanted..."

Lucy – “Did she want authority over you? Or was that part of the whole kind of...?”

Sue – “Thing is, she did try to discipline me to an extent but it was... she did to an extent... it must have made life really difficult having a kid who wouldn’t do what they were told, ever! But I think, yeah, partly as well (mother) was just off doing her own thing...”

This navigation of personal freedom and living in community or with others sometimes drew some uneasy resolutions. Sue also describes her situation as a teenager in community (she lived apart from her mother, but in the community, from when she was 13).

Lucy – “You didn’t live in a unit with your mum, did you? [Sue shakes her head]. That’s quite a unique experience to have as a teenager, to actually be able to have some distance from your parent...”

Sue – “Yeah, I mean I suppose it’s good in some ways; I’m sure for, like, you know, a teenager who didn’t have so much sort of emotional stuff going on as me. It’s probably quite like a really good compromise actually, isn’t it, to have your own separate unit but within, you know, with your family there as well? But I do remember feeling a bit like I just got the crap rooms because... I had that horrible room downstairs that was really dark and then that tiny little one at the top. So it was almost like it emphasised my sort of being out on a limb really and not really fitting in with adults or children ‘cause I was like you know a teenager? I definitely remember feeling like, you know, it was a “them and us” thing [adults and children]. When I was about 16 [another teenage friend of Sue’s] moved down, and we were given the flat; then it sort of, it got better then, ‘cause we had our sort of, you know, we had our sort of nice flat, you know. I sort of felt a lot more grown up then, but I think by that stage I’d completely started doing my own thing, hadn’t I? I wasn’t around I didn’t get involved in [community] stuff, I was completely doing my own thing, and I ignored the community really; I didn’t feel part of it.”

The basic question of membership seems here to rise again, did Sue ‘choose’ to be part of the community? She was taken there out of her mother’s desire to live there, against her own wishes at the time, and her status as a ‘member’ was really as a dependent of her mother, rather than as a freely choosing individual, who had chosen such a lifestyle and, therefore, agreed to abide by it’s demands. How aligned participants felt with their communities, how much they wanted to be there, seems to have had a huge influence on how they experienced their inclusion and their treatment in the community, unsurprisingly. This situation is particularly acute because of the relatively insular nature of these rural communities, and the difficulties for some participants of establishing relationships and a life outside their community. Arguably, this makes a move into such a community a very radical one to be made for you by your parents’ choice.

Power and Plasticine

Sue spoke eloquently about her mother's expectation that, as she was a child, she would 'adapt' more easily to any new situations she was put into, and echoed a common belief which I have called the idea of the 'plasticine' child, the small person who, because of their youth, can accept and deal with change without being overly disturbed by it. This was a common idea, and not only in the alternative circles of communes. The 1970s, for all their upsurge in notions of 'child-centredness', also spawned ways of viewing children's response and reaction to upheavals in the form of the family^{xx}, which may have been produced with stronger reference to adult needs, desires and perspectives than children's.

'Two faulty beliefs provide the foundation for our current attitudes toward divorce. The first holds that if the parents are happier the children will be happier, too... 'Children are not considered separately from their parents; their needs and even their thoughts are subsumed under the adult agenda.' (Wallerstein et al, 2002, p. 2-3).

For me, embedded in such ideas of children adapting more easily than adults, or being happy if their parents are happy, is the idea of a child made of plasticine, able to be reshaped and remodelled to suit adult life choices without the resistance adults have to change. Such ideas turn a blind eye to the fundamental position of powerlessness which children often occupy in controlling their own lives in comparison to adults. Sue's feelings about her mother's parenting style echoed Wallerstein's findings about the actual experience of children of divorce being that they did not adapt effortlessly, that they were not made of plasticine but of less easily malleable stuff, probably the same stuff as adults.

For Sue the issue was not just one of divorce but also of her mother's pursuit of self-expression and fulfilment and, within that, her desire to live in intentional community, to the detriment (in Sue's opinion) of her considering how this impacted on her children's needs as well as, or separately from, her own:

"[Child-centred or libertarian childrearing ideas] it just seemed to be a convenient thing to latch on to, that actually what [my mother] was doing was, you know, had a basis behind it, you know, about not disciplining us and not having boundaries and stuff. So, she was totally going through an adolescence 'cause she'd had this structured upbringing and then meeting my dad and getting married so young. I mean, if you look at photographs of my mum then she was just a completely, you know, normal housewife. She used to wear miniskirts and had a beehive, and you know, she was like really straight. So she just completely, you know, flipped out when she got out of that conventional marriage. She had us really young so it was

kind of understandable; she was going through her 20s when she was in her 30s basically, and doing her own thing and getting into partying and stuff and you know... And she got into umm... Sannyasin, the orange, Sannyasins group. So actually I remember I was really angry but that was because I was scared, you know, behind anger is usually fear –and I remember when she was doing all that Sannyasin stuff being absolutely terrified, you know, she used to do this dancing, howling to the moon sort of ritual thing and I remember us as kids going like “Oh my God, you know, what’re they doing?”. So, yeah, I mean totally I think she was going through a really selfish stage and I didn’t have any respect; I didn’t know what she was doing, and she wasn’t so interested in me really, either.”

This type of feeling was not uncommon among my interviewees, although some had a notably different kind of experience from the one Sue describes, in which they felt that their parent(s) had genuinely considered their needs and feelings and been very strong, very adult figures who had provided a firm sense of containment and safety for their kids. Sue’s anger, fear and pain pay witness to a problem with some of the libertarian or egalitarian ideals that many of my participant’s communities seemingly espoused, namely that in order for them to be genuinely ‘equal’, kids’ needs have to be equally represented and given equal weight in decision-making, and kids know the difference between lip service being paid to theories of equality and adulthood and genuine consideration, in which their feelings matter as much as adults’ feelings do. Added to this was the problem that some participants identified around being given the attention and guidance they might need (being less experienced than adults in identifying and communicating what they need) to discover and assert what their needs actually are. Most participants wanted to be ‘equal’ as children and be listened to, have a say, but many also felt rather overwhelmed with being left to make their own choices, or left to assert themselves in a larger community. So the participants reflect two perhaps oppositional desires from their childhoods – the desire for genuine ‘voice’ in their lives and communities, and the desire for guidance, boundaries, help, support, reassurance and back up in making and asserting their choices. Thus, the status of children is placed in an ambiguous position, in which their differences – their lack of power, self-knowledge or communication skills – might seriously limit the equality they actually end up with, unless adults were prepared to cater to helping them define their needs and wants and assert them. This is, of course, also true of adults with regard to lacking self-knowledge or communication skills, but kids have this extra problem to deal with: less real power, way more radical dependence. Having the motivation of others around them to genuinely assist them in achieving equality, independence and ‘voice’

might be questionable as it could involve those others around giving up their own privileges first. It is hard to see your own power when you are sitting comfortably in it, much easier to be aware of power when you have less of it than others around you.

As Wallerstein goes on to say:

‘If the truth be told, and if we are able to face it, the history of divorce in our society is replete with unwarranted assumptions that adults have made about children simply because such assumptions are congenial to adult needs and wishes (Wallerstein et al, 2002, p. 2)’.

This can be true of the circumstances of divorce, and of intentional community living. What marks intentional community out as having a special version of this unacknowledged assumption is that in many of these households there is a real difference between what is said (as in talk of child-centredness, libertarian parenting, equality, adultism, etc.), and what is done in practice (as in children’s real needs and feelings having less importance and status than adults’). Some of my participants are quite cynical about the gap between ideology and reality in their communities.

Power could operate in subtle ways, with this potential double bind in evidence. Leah explains ‘the rules’ at dinnertime:

“We used to eat what everyone else was having but there was no “You have to eat it.” It was like “If you don’t like it, don’t have it.” There were no allowances though; if you didn’t like it you didn’t have to have it, but you weren’t made something special, even if it was boiled unflavoured seaweed they were all eating!”

This brings to mind a scene from the film about communal life called *Together*, by director Lukas Moodysson. In this film, the children use the protest tactics of their parents to demand meat for supper. There is a vast difference between choosing to eat boiled seaweed as part of your strongly held beliefs in environmentalism or vegetarianism, or even from a belief in your community, and having such things chosen for you without having the economic power to go and get other food if you want to. In this instance, we see children being treated equally, the same as everyone else, but somehow it does not feel very libertarian, but rather, somewhat oppressive and without reference to children’s wishes and needs as potentially different, because of their very different position in the community.

Dealing with change

Going into and coming out of community could be very confusing for my interviewees, because the rules, as well as the ethos or belief system, could

change quite a lot. Having learnt how to navigate one group/family environment successfully and be a 'good kid' there, the exact same persona could suddenly be problematic in new circumstances. Many participants became acutely aware of issues of power in these moments when the regime changed. When attitudes to 'power over' children and adult authority shifted in their environment, participants were not necessarily willing or able to shift and mould themselves quickly and easily to follow suit, and the ensuing conflicts brought power relations in the family, or community, into stark relief in participants' experience.

Heather talks about her experience of going from a community into a nuclear set-up with her mother's new partner:

"[It was hard] having this addition to the family, which was my step dad, because my mum had never allowed any of her other friends or male friends to have any authority over us; they weren't allowed to tell us off or to make any laws for us, but when she married [a new partner] and he was on the scene he was allowed to kind of impose rules on us, and that was a shock, this bloke coming round telling us what to do, and I was really kind of [makes roaring noise] indignant about that. [This was true for my siblings] particularly with my brother, particularly my oldest brother who was quite a difficult child and needed telling quite a lot, I remember being quite scared and going "God, this [guy] is a really scary bloke", but I think that was because he was given permission to be authoritative with us, so then when we moved [abroad and away from the community] and it was just my mum, her new husband, me and [my younger brother], it was quite a shock that he wanted to do things a certain way. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing between my mum and [her bloke] that she didn't want us to be told to do things a certain way; I think that was quite hard. Because at [the community] everyone was in a position to tell off everyone, we did regularly get told off by people who weren't our parents and that was cool, basically if you got told off you respected it and you did what you were told, because all of the adults were in a position to enforce basic rules, about property or whatever, they used to tell us off and we'd be suitably chastised and do as we were told. If we were doing things we genuinely shouldn't be doing then that was fine. Anyone could tell us off and we'd respect it, but then when [Mum's new partner] came along and we were in a nuclear-family situation, then he wanted to make rules about how we kind of behaved other than when we were doing things wrong. He wanted to say we should eat all our food for example, and my mum said "I don't want them to eat all their food; if they can't eat all their food I'm not going to make them" and that was quite interesting – at [our community] there was always an issue, there was a rule you should never take more food than you need; it was seen as irresponsible, you should never do it, because what about everyone else who wants some? So it was quite interesting seeing the same issues dealt with in a smaller environment, really. So with meals at [our community] and not taking more than you need and [Mum's new partner] when we [went abroad] saying "You will sit there until you eat that" and my mum saying "No she doesn't have to" – so the change was quite interesting."

Heather's mother is here attempting to uphold her children's more adult status and to maintain an attitude of child-centredness against the wishes of her new partner. The kids were caught in the power struggle between the adults. It is possible, when there's a pot of food for 30 people, to take a little to eat, and then get more later if you're still hungry; if there's some left then it can always be eaten by others or recycled into another meal, and food nearly always needs to be kept warm as people drift in slowly or queue up and don't want it to be cold by the time they get some. On a smaller scale, in a nuclear home, food is less easily made on a 'help yourself in small portions' affair. The focus also shifts from not overeating (in order to leave plenty for everyone else, and out of respect for the starving millions...) to showing proper 'manners' and eating what you have been given as a sign of gratitude to whoever is feeding you. In a large community, the cooks (and there would normally be more than one, and everyone would be likely to take a turn, not just one designated household 'cook' i.e. Mum or Dad) would be pushed to notice if individuals didn't like the food.

So, the different context and ethos of communal living from conventional households can be seen to give rise to very different dynamics, and a different set of expectations of behaviour and a very different power dynamic therefore. Although Heather's difficulty with accepting her stepfather's authority could suggest a lack of experience of adult authority, she remembers her community being quite firmly run by adults.

She describes it thus:

"I don't remember any negotiation going on [between adults and kids]. I know that we were encouraged to be inquisitive and have an opinion and best of all somehow it was reinforced to me that I was alright how I was, that if something wasn't right for me I should speak up and say so, and that was fine. In fact it was good to stick up for myself, look after myself, question things that were wrong, an open-mindedness and level of honesty, a certain level of being true to yourself, making sure that you were alright, so if something was going on that I didn't like I could say, "That's not OK. I don't like that" – whatever - but I don't remember kind of formal negotiation or consultation between the adults and the children as such. The kids weren't exactly asked their opinion. That's why it was such a shock with my step-dad. At [our community] there were people with very different opinions. People like [my friend's] dad thought that you shouldn't take more food than you need and stuff, but even though there were many different opinions there, I only lived by what my mum told me was right and wrong. Partly because she was a single mum. She was the main person in my life. What she said went. I listened to her, so as far as I was concerned, no matter what he told me I knew it was alright to eat as much as I wanted and if I had taken too much by accident

then that was alright. I didn't have to eat any more than what I needed. [And] to come out of that into a nuclear family where [my mother's new partner] had been brought up with, I suppose, manners, then he wanted me to eat everything I had got. My mum objected because she said that I should have that power. She accepted my judgement, whereas he came from a household where it was very much "Do as you're told while you're living in my house". I remember so clearly him saying "While you're under my roof, you'll do it my way" and I remember thinking "What? What do you mean, surely I do it my way whatever?" [And] it was quite a shock to learn that I wasn't just able to do what I fancied whenever I fancied."

Lucy – "So what happened: did you get used to it?"

Heather – "Yeah, I think what happened was he and my mum fell out over it and my mum won, ummm... because I think it's also very difficult being a step-parent. There's always this thing: they're not my kids, I can't make rules for them. It's definitely something they had to negotiate in their relationship and I do remember many nights where we had to sit there until we'd eaten our food [my brother] and I, and I think in the end my mum was like 'I'm not having it', I don't remember it going on forever."

This shift from communal living to conventional (if blended) nuclear family set up is a great illustration of how the basic situation of living with many people changes the power dynamic. When adults are having to negotiate with other adults about how things are done it is harder for individuals to impose the way it should be on others and this extends to children in that space. There is, in some ways, a self evident democracy of kinds created by such a living arrangement, by that structure of living, which may not be easily replicated in smaller family groups where it is much easier for individuals to impose their way of doing things on others without opposition. This could, perhaps, be particularly true of people used to being dominant in smaller family groups suddenly having to interact with other men or women empowered enough as individuals (as Heather's mother turned out to be) to refuse to accept their authority to lay down how things should be submissively. In such a situation, it is arguably true that children might gain a sense of empowerment through communal living, that being one of a larger collective, rather than one of 'our' children lent them a perspective and a context where they could challenge adult notions of how things should be done more easily than in smaller family groups.

Responsibility and participation

The issues of power, adult authority, and children's status, and how much real power children have to decide what happens to them, or their environment, is often described by participants as slightly confusing or difficult. However,

being given responsibilities was usually seen positively. The sharing of domestic work was regarded as problematic by only one of my participants, and that was to do with her being left with too much responsibility for younger siblings rather than being expected to help out with domestic or community chores. Most participants engaged happily with a role in the community that involved some element of work, and felt positively included in these moments, respected and treated as competent and adult. Indeed, this was strongly cited by many participants as one of the experiences of communal life that they thought was useful and would like to pass on to their children.

Charlotte gives her opinion thus:

"I was on the rota from the age of eight or nine to cook lunch and it must have been for about 30 people. I would do it with another kid maybe and I think we might have had an adult popping in to see how we were doing, but I really did cook a vat of soup and I knew how to do it – start with the onions, fry 'em up, get all the leftovers, chuck 'em in... I knew how to cook the soup, lay the table and cook for 20 or 30 people at the age of eight or nine. I can't tell you exactly but it had to be before ten because that was when I [moved away]. So, yeah, wash up, dry up, I was rota'd from a very early age and kind of accepted it, kind of liked it if it was lunch. I was on for doing that, it was my responsibility, and I didn't really moan or complain because I saw it as what was required and part of living there. No particular one responsibility stands out, but you know, that's huge, I don't ask that of my children now (Charlotte has two children. One is 9 years old and the other 5, both girls) I am starting to think I ought to now, particularly with [the nine-year-old]. [...] it's not about [being in a commune] it's about the attitude and it's about it coming naturally, wanting to share, with whoever you're with; for us, we've chosen to live as a [conventional nuclear] family and I get irritated, and I've talked to [my husband] about it... I feel it is not working as a family if we do too much separately and we lose consideration for each other, so it wouldn't make any difference, to [share household chores] in our family is just as relevant as to do it in a communal group, and it's very much about this give and take, and this respect for each other and actually it makes you feel really good; that's what I am trying to explain to [my daughter], and I've seen it, and she's agreed with me; you partake in this, it's almost like a ritual, like I see meals as being very ritualised, and I put a lot of energy and effort into meals when friends come round, and meals happen quite organically in my home and I think that definitely comes from my upbringing. But you feel great afterwards, even if you do the preparation, you cook, you sit down and eat and you wash up together. By the time you've gone through that whole thing, you feel very different than if you had been all sitting in your own rooms doing different things and then come together. It's a real bonding thing, a different vibe. It's really nourishing for the individuals in that group."

Other participants echoed this positive enjoyment in being involved in group work as children in their communities, whether it was outdoor work on the farmland that most of these communities had, or cooking for everyone, or even

maintenance and cleaning. It is interesting that while talking to Charlotte, as well as other participants who had their own children, I gathered that it was seen by them to be much more difficult to instil this sense of willing participation inside a nuclear-family home. Perhaps this is because the meal is smaller and is a less social type of event with less people. Is it exciting to cook for 30 people but less so for a small family, perhaps? Or, fun to interact with a variety of people each time you work in a community rather than with the same few in a smaller family group? This is interesting, particularly in the light of feminist concerns to undermine gender roles and stereotypes by living communally – which would seem from the feedback I experienced to be effective. They clearly did not see the women of their communities as being there to serve their needs as children, but had adopted an attitude of domestic work being naturally shared amongst everyone, regardless of age or gender. Participants who were excluded from the work of the community and from its decision-making processes could end up feeling really sidelined and disenfranchised. They could also, as Natalie explains, end up in a limbo space of neither adult nor child, fitting into neither, without company of their own age and trying very hard to keep up with the grown-ups in order to hold their own in adult company.

Natalie describes times when she was still pre-adolescent:

“I think I related to the adult world rather than the child world, the child world of my siblings... um, but I wouldn't say that I was allied to them because, uh, they were as inaccessible in a way as my siblings' play was, so um... it was slightly easier to be around the adult world. I would hang out in the kitchen or um, occasionally be present in a meeting and it was a comfortable place to be and I would choose that... but it wasn't like it was an open, or child-friendly adult world.”

Natalie was one of the participants who suffered from being rather isolated in her commune, without peers her own age to run with. She felt somewhat excluded from joining in with the community. Her experience illustrates well the particular problems faced by children caught between the worlds belonging fully to neither. This could mean kids got caught between the rules or demands of school and home, or one home and another (and be disapproved of by all sides for being 'awkward'). Natalie's community ran a school, but one in which she and her siblings were not included, because it was for children who needed special attention – a fact that Natalie found confusing.

Lucy – “Did you have to take part in all those things like preparing dinner and cleaning and those sorts of things?”

Natalie – “That sort of fluctuated in a typical, you know, in a typical mum, dad and [community] style. It was completely unpredictable... um, I do remember, I actually remember doing house chores. On the whole, I remember my mum argued that we shouldn’t and mustn’t be included in household chores, because we were going to school and it was enough of a job to get three kids off site down a three-mile lane to school all the time. Especially as, I mean this is classic: Monday mornings the milkman would never arrive at [the community] until quite late, possibly not until 9 o’clock in the morning. No one was supposed to have breakfast until the milk arrived because there wasn’t enough milk for everybody and that wasn’t fair, and that meant us. So, every Monday morning we’d be late for school because of this bloody milkman and the rule. The shit we got at school for that. It was just not the best way to start the day, Monday, or the week. My mum thought that it was more important that we had the best chance every morning to satisfy another set of rules and values which were really not, um, not like the community’s. The school system was not supported by home; it was supported in a tokenistic way. It was supported because my mum knew how much shit we got but not because she actually believed in it. So, no we weren’t expected to do chores, but I do remember that on a Saturday I would do the mopping. I would put myself down on the rota, and adults would ask “Do you want to do it?” and I would. I would join in because I wanted to be part of the community. I so wanted to part of it. I actually wanted to never ever have to go to school. I wanted to go to school there [at the community], you know. I was running away from home at six because I didn’t want to get in the car and go to school. I did not know why I had to leave one school to go to another one where nothing made sense. I mean yes, it was chaotic at home, but it wasn’t as alien in a way. One year we were invited to come and spend Xmas with my dad at [the community] after my mum had left and taken us with her. We served the entire school their Xmas dinner. And I don’t actually remember being given a choice in it. It was talked up as a fun thing: “Wouldn’t it be a fun thing to do?” But I think there were hidden agendas there. Because I, you know, I felt quite resentful doing it. You know, why, why when I’m not really part of this place and it doesn’t really cater to me, why am I putting on this act? I felt what was really offered was scraps, you know, it wasn’t genuine. There were occasions when it was genuine, meaningful attention and love from students and adults but it was so infrequent. In fact, the person who was really interested, the person who went out of their way to make meaningful... a meaningful relationship with me was [the guy] who subsequently became my step-dad. One morning I woke up on my birthday, on my tenth birthday, and there was a little package on the doorstep and inside there was a brooch, a parrot brooch, and um something else, maybe a badge and it was from him. [And] you know possibly he was the only person in the community who went out of their way to mark it with a present... Seen and not heard, more adult than child, that’s what I felt like I had to be. The main focus of the community was totally nothing to do with me.”

This sense of having less status and receiving less focus and attention from adults than did other adults or community projects, such as farms or schools, was also a fairly common experience among my participants. It is interesting, when thinking about the status of children in communities, to notice how, in

my conversations with them, participants noted again and again the distinction between what was said and what was done in terms of actual practice, how they were actually treated by adults, and how discrepancies between talk and action were tied up with their sense of their own importance, status or power positioning in their communities. Participants were therefore carrying both strong resonant memories of how things were actually done, the reality of power relationships in communities they lived in. At the same time they were carrying the ideal and the idea of equality as a current influence in their lives and thinking. Despite the ideology not being lived up to in practice, they still upheld the ideals of that ideology.

Control and privacy

In recollecting part of the ethos of my community in the 1970s, there was a real attempt to distance from 'bourgeois' middle-class culture. The 'repressed', 'grey', 'dutiful', 'unquestioning' culture of mainstream life. Some of this quest was about openness and a sense of making the private public, of living life out in the open, and celebrating human life. In some communities this manifested itself as a disdain for notions of 'the private' and a pressure away from secrecy and towards visibility. This sense of exposure formed a strong part of many participants' experience, to varying degrees. Along with this there was a feeling of exposure and a sense of being invaded or overpowered, that adult expression is something that is hard to say 'no' to or get away from.

From some conversations, I gained a strong impression of there not being much space for kids emotionally, even though there was a lot of physical space. This is because adult agendas of self-expression and the 'goodness' or 'rightness' or 'naturalness' of openness and visibility left little space for kids if they wanted privacy for themselves or distance from adults' intimate lives. For some participants, this could also result in a sense of not being protected from things that were frightening or uncomfortable for children.

This sense of openness and exposure was also sometimes part and parcel of being treated equally or 'like an adult'.

Leah explains:

"If there was a discussion on whatever, there weren't taboo subjects not to be spoken about around children, and I think that's quite different from what happens in normal houses, or it was back then."

For some participants, like Leah, this practice of not 'protecting' children places children in high regard. It does not patronise them or treat them as less than

adults. Other participants felt that such practices make great demands on their ability to make sense of the adult world and feel safe when exposed to the full reality of adult experiences and practices.

Charlotte contrasts her own community, in which she felt there was more privacy and protection for kids, with another community she used to spend a lot of time at as a child:

“At [our community] I felt protected because people did recognise that I was a child and there was a limit to what I could be given; what I could see, what I could hold in my head; what I could take responsibility for, and I find it quite amazing actually. That I did have that feeling, that sense of comfort, and protection, because it was a bit random. The parenting, a bit sporadic, and I know I did receive parental care from more than my own parents, other adults, but only from adults that I felt able to take it from, comfortable with, so yeah, I think that is what was lacking at [this other community]; [the children there] were witness to too much, when they were too small. They were too young to see this stuff... I think that the reason I felt comfortable at [my community] was because people recognised that I am that old, or not that old...

Lucy – “As you are speaking I am thinking, remembering that feeling of being physically small and relatively weak and powerless and not having enough knowledge to be independent, that feeling that you sometimes have as a child, of being out of your depth.”

“It’s that feeling of, it was almost a visceral reaction, being at [this other community]. My guts would tense up, and I would feel... I have said fear too much, it wasn’t fear – well it was fear, of the unknown really, there was nothing concrete and it was out of control... It’s frightening to me, that lack of boundaries, lack of guidelines, and I suppose because it was such a big organisation there were a lot of strangers. It must be partly because I had witnessed things I knew I shouldn’t have seen, which did frighten me, if you’re in an environment where it feels unruly... I suppose that my fear was that I was going to witness more of that kind of thing because no one’s around to stop it, and everyone’s very free and it could come out from anywhere, any person can do what they want and I could be here while that happens or I could be the victim or whatever. Umm, I remember at [our community] this guy, I don’t know what has happened to him now, but he was very disturbed, and I must have been about 14 or 15, but he came into my room when I was in bed at night and he sat on my bed and he was getting closer and closer to me, and he was just talking at the start but I couldn’t get him out, and I ended up having to raise my voice quite loud. He wasn’t going, and eventually my brother heard and came in and got him out, and you know, I was lucky, and I think I just relied on the fact that someone was going to hear me and get him out, but that... I dunno what it is, the fact that that was my home and yet this lunatic, gentle most of the time but he was on drugs and if his drugs had done something weird, medical drugs, you know, but he could have been violent or tried to molest me and I was vulnerable to that, and I felt even though it happened at [our community], that it was less likely that things like that would happen there than at

[the other community] where there just wasn't that structure and things like that could happen to you and no one might notice or come to help..."

This sense of not having control over the environment was something nearly all my participants talked about. Some felt that even private space like a bedroom was not safe from invasion, or that they were exposed to a motley crew of whom some might be strangers, and some of whom children might not feel comfortable with. When I asked them if they might consider living communally again, or if they thought they might like to bring up their children that way, the most common negative response from participants was about 'not having enough control' over their environment and not being able to make sure that their children's environment would be 'really safe.' This might not be so surprising a concern in the risk-conscious times we live in, but for some commune-raised participants there was a real sense of having lived with feeling fearful sometimes, as children dealing with adults who seemed strange and unpredictable.

Exposure and sexuality

Issues to do with sex and sexuality and adult sexual behaviour and relationships were a frequent topic of discussion with my interviewees. They have also, in my experience, been part of the most usual stereotype people have about communes, i.e. that they were full of strange orgies and partner swapping. In fact, in my experience, intentional communities in the UK were, and are, mostly far closer to the kind of earnest, slightly dowdy, middle-class sensibilities of 'The Good Life' than to some kind of hedonistic Californian sex romp. However, the impact of the sexual liberation movement combined with notions of the 'naturalness' of open sexuality and the anti-duty, anti-privacy ethics to produce some insistently 'open' or 'free' relationships, or attitudes towards sex.

Charlotte speaks of her experience of unconventional attitudes towards sexuality:

"There was that whole side, which I think is part of what scared my mum off in the end, and it was a very strong sort of hippy movement – the sexual freedom side of things – and even when I witnessed (she sighs) there's quite a few things which I witnessed which I didn't really like, and I thought they were morally wrong.; There was one thing I knew was morally wrong, one hundred per cent, but I was only, I couldn't have been more than six so I had that very strong sense of morality at that age."

(Charlotte is referring to a previous discussion we had off tape, about instances of adult sexuality that she witnessed. She did not wish to include these details in my work.)

“But I wasn’t really aware that what was happening there was in a way a clash with, it was clashing with what they [Charlotte’s parents] had tried to start the community with. They had tried to start it with caring about people. I don’t think my mum ever really entertained that they could have this massive influx of hippies who all wanted to walk around naked and shag each other, you know... It didn’t go that far at [our community]. It did at [another community], and we did see stuff [there] that scared the hell out of me, whereas kids [who lived in this other community], it went right over their heads. They were used to witnessing it. I wasn’t used to that and it really freaked me out. So yeah, caring about people’s feelings was very much a part of the core of the community at the start, but I think it was kind of led by my mum and dad and other core members who were fairly few in number, but it did manage to sustain that feeling of, umm, it was a less selfish attitude than the one that prevailed [among others in the community]. It felt quite selfish that whole, the sexual side of it, because I saw a lot of people [adults] getting hurt, and that was wrong. If you’re gonna do this then do it in a way which isn’t going to hurt people, and it wasn’t so much the sex part of it – I didn’t give a shit if women were walking around topless, I was used to that – but yeah, it was the hurting, if you’re gonna hurt people that’s wrong.”

I wonder a little, after having interviewed and talked with people, whether the kids at the other community would say that what they witnessed did ‘go right over their heads’, as Charlotte suggests here. I suspect that, although they might have got used to not reacting to seeing adult displays of sexuality, it might still have felt uncomfortable to them.

The ‘partner-swapping’ or sexual liberation ideas present as part of the fight against repression and hang-ups in some communities posed several difficulties for children of those communities. The search for a way to experience being female and female sexuality, or rebellion against notions inherited by both men and women of sexuality and the body as shameful and sinful, or a fight against conditioning to be ashamed of the body, pleasure and sexuality (which was seen as a negative element of Western culture), led to some people and some communities experimenting with relationship, sex, nudity, pleasure and the body in what was thought about and presented as a less negative and guilt/shame-shrouded way. Whether this ideal was reached is a big question, and one that I cannot hope to investigate fully here, but my memory, and the memory of other participants, was of a less than utopian reality, in which floating ideas like this sometimes produced some pressure to appear relaxed about sex and relationships even if it wasn’t true for you.

Participants talked about finding it hard to express, or have acknowledged, attitudes and feelings which did not fit into being relaxed and a kind of ‘easy come, easy go’ approach to sex and relationships. Participants talked about

adult expectations of them as children being able to adapt easily to changes in relationship, so that changes in adult or parental partnerships, a parent's non-monogamous sexual encounters (with people other than a regular partner or co-parent), were not recognised as affecting children particularly. They also felt there was an expectation from adults in communes that children would have an easiness and acceptance around open sexuality and a lack of inhibition about the body or nudity. In their reportage there was little space for hurt feelings or feelings of resentment about the upheaval that changes in the constellations of relationship brought into the lives of adults and children in communities.

Children, witnessing changes in adult relationship allegiances and the pain and suffering that went with many of these shifts, could become quite distressed about why people were insisting on hurting other people like this, and for some participants, like Charlotte, this distress and sense of adults not acting with enough care or respect for each other left deep impressions.

I can remember being around some adults who thought that children were being 'done a favour' by adults who were free and easy about the body, sex and ties and bonds of a sexual nature, because they thought that the children, as a generation, would be freer and less inhibited about sex and sexual relationships by not 'being conditioned' to believe that traditional monogamous marriage (the 'dead' relationship) was the only right way to live. But it was far more complex than that for many children, who did not have the power to resist the changes to their own lives that adults' choices inevitably involved, and who did not have the authority or confidence or, perhaps, the self-knowledge to identify ways in which they were uncomfortable with being privy to adult sexuality, and to express such concerns.

Sex and sexuality could be quite frightening for children in communes, if my participants' stories are anything to go by. One participant described with horror her witnessing of a women's workshop when she was a small child, in which women were naked and smeared with menstrual blood as a celebration of womanhood. She experienced this as deeply frightening and disturbing, rather than as an affirmation of women's power, or if this affirmation was present in this encounter for this little girl, it was a power she did not share in but was disturbed by from a position of felt powerlessness. This example sounds extreme and was not entirely usual, but shades of this experience of shock were reported by other participants in witnessing adult sexuality; male sexual presence as well as female was experienced by some participants as

threatening or shocking, and being near open displays of sexual behaviour was not remembered by participants as being received with innocent acceptance and uninhibited curiosity (although curiosity was sometimes part of the gamut of responses).

A sense of having witnessed too much sexual activity and unclear boundaries between adult sexuality and children's pre-sexual inner worlds was described in various ways by many respondents, and was linked by them to the adults' engagement with the sexual liberation movement in some communities, although examples were generally of isolated incidents rather than all-day, every-day orgiastic scenes such as are stereotypical of images of 'hippy communes'. These loose or flexible models of relating to each other and (for some participants) the ever-shifting configurations of relationship could be hard work for kids, as well as adults. Conventional boundaries in terms of personal space and privacy were also loosened up in some families, in some communities, and became potentially problematic, as Hazel goes on to explain:

Lucy – "You all slept in one bed together, all sleeping together, adults and kids?"

Hazel – "Yeah, I mean my family went a bit over the top actually, um, and er the area they went over the top in I think was that there was sexual abuse from the standpoint of witnessing your parents have sex. And I think that was really unhealthy, um, because especially as you're an older child, when you hear someone having sex it makes you feel something in your body and so you switch your body off because that's disgusting. Because how can you feel something sexual about your parents, you know, it's like you know you feel really disgusted. And I think um that a lot of, you know, I shut down a lot of my sexuality because of that, um, and just thought that it was something bad to feel. And it's not like it happened very many times but I remember it happening enough times that, that I, you know, put some mental blocks in place."

Bridget commented on a sense of having an agenda imposed which championed flexibility but wasn't as loose or responsive to people's actual feelings or needs, in her experience, as it might appear.

Bridget – "A lot of people [adults] were rebelling against their parents' ideals or ideas. I know Mum's upbringing was very religious, very strict, very sexist, so she had a massive need and wish to rebel against that, but then the moral values of the commune became very rigid actually, in that sense."

Lucy – "In what sense?"

Bridget – "In that the reverse of their ideas was intolerable to them; it didn't allow for a choice between the two extremes of the very conventional and this extreme reaction against it, when it was supposed to be free..."

This sense of pressure to feel a certain way, to be emotionally comfortable with the practices of communal life, and the pressure to conform to a way of looking

at the world in line with adult communards was a common experience among participants. In terms of power this raises some interesting questions: how communes dealt with difference, the different ways that children might experience things, or their unwillingness to think in the same way as adults exposes a lot about the true status of children in communes being a tenuous mix. Where conformity could be seen as necessary to achieving status, a situation where 'you can express yourself as long as it's in line with all of us' could be seen operating, on some levels. On the other hand, on other levels participants have stressed their experience of being 'allowed' to assert themselves, their wants and needs, even encouraged to do so. So no one clear picture emerges.

Conclusion

A broad spectrum of experience was related by participants in respect to the way in which they felt they were consulted, considered or had power to control what they encountered in their home communities. Some of them felt quite safe and thought they had a fair amount of power and influence in the household – far more than friends in conventional settings might have had. Others felt quite radically unprotected and unsafe. In the main, participants described a mixture of being given more power and responsibility than they thought they might have had in a conventional setting, but also being exposed to far more.

The status of children in communities remains unclear from these interviews. I believe that this is because it was unclear in many communities, and not given the attention it deserves as an issue perhaps. Not many of my participants' communities addressed this issue consciously, which to a certain extent illustrates how children were not considered full members of communes, but rather were subsumed into their parents' membership. There were concerns for participants about the strong moral and political views that abounded in many of their communities, in connection with being expected to hold similar views and values to adults in their environment. The ways in which this inhibited their self-expression and choices, as well as their contact with more conventional people and social spaces was of concern to some participants. This is in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of freedom and self-expression that was also common in communes at this time.

Issues around privacy and private space were a common concern for participants and in this power position as less powerful than adults, this can be seen to operate on a level below structure and rules and in the arena of personal

power. Whether adults would be so free to invade other adults' boundaries as they were with children remains a moot point, but participants felt more vulnerable to invasion of their personal space or disregard of their feelings about what was going on before them than adults in their community, as a general rule. None of the participants' communities had rules specific to how children should be treated as far as I could work out, and in this absorbing of children under adult agendas, the key differences between adults and children and their personal power may not have been acknowledged terribly well.

xx Arguably these changes followed hot on the heels of the change in divorce laws, making it possible to have a 'no fault' divorce and, therefore, making divorce easier, as well as an emerging culture of individualism. (See Muncie et al, 1997, p. 20/21). Yet others argue the form of families has always been adaptable and subject to change throughout history, never truly achieving the stable 'nuclear' model which is popularly mythologised as 'normal', yet acknowledge a rapid shift in how acceptable deviating from this mythological 'normalcy' has become over recent decades. (See Beck-Gernsheim: 2002, p. 16-30)

Chapter Seven

Crossing into and out of commune spaces

'Let me tell you about heartache and the loss of God

Wandering, wandering in hopeless night

Out here in the perimeter there are no stars

Out here we are stoned immaculate.'

The Doors, Stoned Immaculate, lyrics

In this chapter I explore participants' experience of 'crossing over' between 'alternative' (commune) and 'mainstream' spaces^{xxi}, and think through how participants managed their identities in order to cope and flourish both at home and in the world outside their communities, including other parental homes and mainstream schools in particular. Different identities and ways of being which participants needed to adopt in order to fit into these different atmospheres and cultures are described and discussed, and issues and feelings around managing this positioning.

Participants' images of mainstream people and places are explored as a way of tapping into attitudes to more conventional people and lifestyles, which participants absorbed from the ideological climate of their communal childhoods.^{xxii} Transitions into and out of communal living are also explored. How participants felt about themselves and their environments and relationships at these key moments of transition is explored as a way to better understand just what commune child identities consisted of.

Exploring the feeling of being marginal or an outsider was one of the key personal questions that led my own interest in this research. I wanted to explore how much my own sense of not quite fitting into either mainstream or alternative spaces was echoed by the experience of others with similar backgrounds. I had a sense of being from another culture, and of being unable to return to it – because that culture was so time specific and the time had passed. I had conversations with people who had immigrated from other countries and identified with their sense of carrying their original culture with them, whilst attempting to navigate the new culture they'd arrived in, and their surprise when they attempted to return 'home' and found their original country and culture was no longer recognisable as the one they grew up in. Did other commune-raised people carry this sense of being different, of having a different 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977)? How could I think about that experience when I and

other participants had also grown up within 'mainstream' culture, not truly separate from it?

I was very influenced by Morwenna Griffiths (1995) work about identity in thinking through the issues in this chapter and would draw the reader's attention back to the literature review and my musings upon Griffiths influence on my work therein. The notion of identity, as formulated in relationship, in personal relationships and in power relationships, resonated strongly with my experience. Thinking through this model, I also wondered about the way in which commune kids' identities straddled 'inside' and 'outside' spaces, not only with moves into and out of community, but whilst 'in', through relationships with other family members, friends, schooling etc and how my own recollected sense of straddling recognisably different cultures inside and outside commune life might be echoed or negated by participants. These were questions I proposed to participants, and this chapter includes excerpts from some of our ensuing discussions.

A key issue to note at the start of this chapter is the process of time situated remembering that participants and I have been involved in. The participants in this project span a range of age groups, so that some remember a childhood of the 1970s, with its very different flavour from those whose key memories are from the '80s, when the social and political climate in Britain changed markedly.

Middle class outsiders?

'As children of the counterculture, we faced constant negotiation between home life and outside influences. We learned to live between two worlds: the one our parents created and the straight one that surrounded us. Our parents couldn't shield us from mainstream culture – though many of them tried. They could simply do their best to pass on their values and beliefs about a difficult, corrupt world.' Cain (1999, p.24)

'It is their present and past positions in the social structure that biological individuals carry with them, at all times and in all places, in the form of dispositions which are so many marks of social position and hence of the social distance between objective positions, that is, between social persons conjuncturally brought together (in physical space, which is not the same thing as social space) and correlatively, so many reminders of this distance and of the conduct required in order to 'keep one's distance' or to manipulate it strategically, whether symbolically or actually, to reduce it (easier for the dominant than for the dominated), increase it, or simply maintain it (by not 'letting oneself go', not 'becoming familiar', in short 'standing on ones dignity,' or on the other hand

refusing to 'take liberties' and 'put oneself forward', in short knowing one's place, and staying there.) Bourdieu (1977, p. 82)

My experience of living a recognisably 'alternative' lifestyle in the 1970s in Britain, was that many ideas that are now comparatively mainstream (for example health or organic food which is now on sale in supermarkets, but then was unusual and specialist) were strong markers of difference. This was particularly true in the conservative rural settings, the communities in which the participants in this study and myself were situated. It was my experience that the ideas and politics, which many adult communards were trying to live by, could be experienced as deeply strange and threatening by more conventional people whom I came into contact with, or at the very least often ran counter to 'common sense' or dominant ideology or hegemony, and were seen as weird or laughable.

This experience seems to have been common to my participants too, as examples in this chapter will show. In conversation, it became apparent that all my participants were aware of being at risk of condemnation from 'conventional' people as children, because of their unusual living arrangements and the identities and practices of their parents. Some were more worried by this than others. Bridget found it quite uncomfortable:

"I mean attitudes have changed now but then it was a bit close to being hippy – sixties, slight kind of chaos and people were wary; parents were wary, they didn't quite know what mum's values were and the word commune, that was a bit scary..."^{xxiii}

Echoing Bridget's sense of the negative stereotypes that Communards encountered, Charlotte expressed a common sentiment among participants when she said:

"We never called it a commune, we always called it a community, and my parents and others were really adamant about that, and I became really adamant about that."

It has been my experience that this situation has become slightly less marked as I have grown older, that alternative ideas and lifestyles of my childhood have gradually been drawn into the mainstream, better understood and normalised (at least in their de-politicised or commercially useful form). I wonder if this impression could also be because I don't actually live in an intentional community any more, and therefore can choose to be undeclared in that previous experience or identity. Certainly, I saw first hand as a teenager how much prejudice and intolerance was directed towards those who chose the lifestyle that came to be labelled 'New Age Traveller' in the late '80s and early

'90s in the UK, so perhaps it is I who have changed circumstances as much as general attitudes towards alternative lifestyle choices having shifted?

I am aware of my increased power – being more able to choose my company and move away from those who might be judgemental or hostile far more effectively than when I was a child and was simply faced with dealing with what was presented to me. I muse about my increased ability to know how to handle being around more 'conventional' people, without getting their backs up quite so much, - more than I managed in my childish innocence (or confidence?). My ability has increased to hide those aspects of my self or formulate and present a more acceptable or adapted self with greater skill. Possibly, I am simply more 'conventional' now than I was when I was younger, and so gain the benefits of that easier fit with 'mainstream' ideologies and ways of life.

Context, age, stage and timeframe counted for a lot in participants' experience of marginalisation as Sue's example illustrates:

"I went to [the local F.E.] college straight from school when I was 16. [This would have been in the late '70s]. [And] then I remember just getting into like punk and I was still 16, so then I was up completely off then so it was great having a flat, 'cause I could bring people back and it was like, my own place. [And] then it was weird it sort of changed, 'cause it was actually, from when I was at school it was really uncool to be in a commune, and I remember like just being completely mortified by it. [But] then going to college, it was turned around it was actually quite cool, 'cause the group of people I got in with there really sort of thought 'Hmm, you know this girl lives in a really cool place' and all sort of wanted to be my friend 'cause of it. So it sort of flipped over, and then it was quite good."

'The point we seek to make here is that 'outsider' status must not be equated with disadvantage. If anything, social movements attract the more articulate in society.'
Byrne (1997, p. 19)

There is something about people with access to privilege choosing to live alternative lifestyles which is particularly galling to some, a form of condemnation reserved for those who could live 'normal' lives quite 'comfortably' but choose something else, choose a kind of life which refuses (at least for some time) some of the privileges available to that person. Why, my schoolteachers asked, why would a nice middle class woman like my mother choose to reject materialism and marriage when she could have a nice house, nice life, and choose instead to dress her kids in jumble sale clothes and live in that huge messy house with all those others?

My mother has described to me, as we have discussed this research project, that she came to community partly out of what she saw as necessity. She saw her other option, as a newly single parent, might have been taking a council flat with less space and facility than the Commune and still having little money or resources. For her, the choice to join the community was not just ideological but also practical, gaining a better environment for herself, my sister and I. My experience tells me that it is also true that there was ideology as well as practicality in play. In my memory of my community, there was, by many, a refusal of materialism and a valuing of other things in life: time, relationship, the community itself – which meant that earning hard cash was valued but so was working in the community, or being a useful person around the place in many other ways than inputting money.

In my memory of my community, kids were seen as being offered the entire community to entertain them, and the whole countryside to play in. Buying consumer items for them was seen as less important than offering them those forms of enrichment, and for adults the social ‘usefulness’ of work was often prioritised well above its remuneration. This is my (child’s eye and now recollected) impression of what was going on in my own community, but is borne out by the impressions of social researchers who went and studied other Communes in the 1970s. (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Rigby, 1974a, 1974b)

This marked commune kids out from many children ‘outside’, who lived more ‘conventional’ lives, where money and luxury goods were strong markers of success and respectability. Perhaps the middle class origins of many members of intentional community also increased hostility towards them, because this (perceived or real) background of privilege fed into a kind of imagery of decadent, lazy, hedonist people. The valuing of relationship and time to engage in projects towards self-fulfilment and exploration could also add to this imagery, in stark contrast to the underlying Protestant work ethic of many sectors of working and middle class society. Most of my participants stressed how hard the physical work of rural community is, and I read this (drawing on my own experience) as partly a defence against mainstream assumptions that communal life was decadent in some way that they had encountered throughout their lives.

A particular situation is produced by stepping outside of mainstream lifestyles; a positioning where people are both privileged – with access to the social and cultural capital, as well as the literal material privilege of the middle classes,

and also marginalised because of their life choices. The children of people who attempted to step 'outside' conventional lifestyles and belief systems, the experience of being 'outside' or being treated as outsiders, was common, I discovered. There is a resonance with my own experience of feeling that way.

For example, Sue says:

"I can think of things that I did get which is, you know... I'm sure have sort of helped shape me in what I'm doing now, but I mean yeah, but from living not only in [my community], but in my whole upbringing [before and after living in intentional community] of knowing what it's like to be discriminated against and being, you know, the outsider. So, I can empathise with people in that position definitely."

My participants experienced disapproval of their parents' lifestyle choices. They experienced hostility towards the radical ideas that they learned, as commune children, from their parents. This added complications to being approved of in communal and mainstream spaces, which could require quite different identities and practices. Life has, arguably, become somewhat easier for commune-raised people as they have gained adult power positions (and possibly as society has caught up with their parents' then radical ideas). Bridget describes her experience of being in community in the 1970s:

"... that actually still makes me die with laughter, that after all these years when we got dragged to health food shops to eat muesli bars and weren't allowed chocolate and now it's in Sainsbury's and everyone is talking about eating organic, you know? Whereas when other kids [not from 'alternative' backgrounds] used to come and stay they were always gutted about the food, and now everyone eats muesli – thinks women should be equal and loads of people don't live with both parents or have 'normal' family lives."

Awareness of being brought up with parents and carers who were 'different' often dawned on participants as children when they wandered outside of their 'parent' culture into more conventional settings. Leah describes:

"I remember being quite fascinated by going to 'normal' people's houses. This one girl in particular, who I was at school with, her dad owned a garage and her mum was a housewife who wore pink and had blow dried hair and pearly pink lipstick. [And] I remember going to her house and finding it absolutely fascinating and really alien. Having fish and chips or fish fingers and baked beans for dinner, which I thought was amazing - and being allowed crisps. Just kind of being really fascinated by what I guess for most of the rest of the population was pretty much 'the norm', but for me was really alien. Her mum had these awful pink frilly negligees, that was the most fascinating thing."

This sense of wondering estrangement that Leah exhibits about conventional femininity, conventional food, and conventional nuclear family life formed a strong element of my own experience too. Commune raised people could be

seen to have acted as kind of native anthropologists in some ways, visiting mainstream ways of life, customs and rituals, without taking for granted that they make sense or that they are the right way to do things – always with one foot in another kind of ideology, culture and way of life, albeit one that was not totally discrete from the ‘mainstream’. Leah’s experience places ‘the outside’ in the ‘weird and unusual’ category in her mind, but the different ways of living and being which commune raised children carried with them into mainstream situations could also be a source of shame or fear for them, with mainstream perceptions of ‘deviance’ lurking.

Sue describes her experience of this lurking sense of what she was experiencing being ‘wrong’ in some way from her experiences of the 1970s:

“I was a kid, you don’t know why you’re scared do you? But I do, I mean, god yeah, just of everything, you know? Being in, in such a different, you know? Family structure to everyone else, you know, being at school and being absolutely terrified of being at school and just wanting to be, you know – normal. I just wanted to have white bread sandwiches in my lunch box instead of bloody lentils and, you know, brown bread that you couldn’t even cut with a saw. [And] you know that whole thing; kids just want to fit in don’t they? Just being absolutely terrified that, you know, I was so different in every way.”

‘Child centred’ environments and inimical spaces

‘Like any minority group, their view of life is questioned by the majority, and with time the members of the minority will begin to doubt the validity of their particular ideas in the face of criticism, ridicule, incredulity and the questioning of representatives of what can be termed the cognitive majority, unless they can in some way insulate themselves, to an extent, from such pressures to change their ways of thinking. One strategy involves the creation of communes within which radicals or cognitive deviants may maintain the plausibility of their knowledge.’

Byrne (1997, p. 6–7)

The model of ‘free’ and democratic relating and self-regulation for children arguably did not always prepare participants well for interacting with the different codes of the ‘outside world’ and its attitudes towards children. The communities that did promote the ideal of deep democracy and child centred childrearing^{xxiv} seem, from my research, to have produced a particular mind-set and expectation amongst its young, my participants, - children who, more than most, had been affirmed in their right to speak their minds, direct their own lives, ask questions, be opinionated at home and in the wider world (which often meant challenging status quo ideas in line with the opinions they would have been exposed to at home) and approach adults with some expectation of equality with them.

Those children, of necessity or choice, would inevitably cross over into mainstream spaces, where they would, sometimes, be faced with very different ways of relating and structuring social life, often more based on values steeped in overt hierarchy, which they were likely to encounter as a rude shock sometimes. As Sue says:

“I think you could go too far the other way couldn't you... have it too child centred, do you know what I mean? End up, really, with kids with a warped sense of who they are, you know? They could go out into the real world and just absolutely have a real shock to the system, that actually the world isn't centred towards you, you know?”

This pervasive sense of the 'real' world or the 'mainstream' world echoes through my interviews with participants and illustrates the boundary which, real or imagined, formed such a strong part of the experience of these commune raised people in their childhoods, and remains in their structure of thinking to this day. There was an eternal disappointment with how their commune created identities did not receive good reception in the 'outside' world, and sometimes a sense of anger, either towards 'the mainstream' or towards their parents or parent culture for in some way not preparing them adequately for the 'real' world.

Some participants felt this more keenly than others, but it was a common theme that surfaced in all of my interviews to one extent or another. Some did not feel resentful, but did acknowledge there was a tricky negotiation that took place. For example, Cath felt that she was able to cope with making the journey into more mainstream environments [in her 1970s and early 80s childhood], but also that there wasn't much guidance or recognition of her having to deal with very different environments at school or away from home:

“I had a best friend, her dad was very right wing and argumentative, a pilot in the air force, and I was like red rag to a bull to him. It was hard. Me and my friend, we used to have political arguments on the phone at ten or eleven years old, via our dads. I would say, 'but my dad says,' and she would tell her dad and he'd tell her what to say back, and it'd go on like that... Her Dad was really pro-nuclear, he took us to see the film 'Who dares wins,' it was eighteen certificate. It was really anti-CND and all about how nuclear weapons are necessary. My Dad didn't like that much... [And] they took me on a beat, you know – hunting, my dad went mad, but [my Dad's partner] said 'let her go and see what she thinks of it', and I hated it, so that was that. There were some of my friends because their parents were really Barbour-wearing hunting country types, I wouldn't bring them home – but my parents weren't anti-them they just thought they didn't know any better, you know? [And] walking into [the local village] was always a bit of a trauma. It was like, 'oh it's the [commune] kids.' No one really taught us how to deal with the mainstream. We were all left to deal with it as we saw fit. I never said anything

about it like, 'Oh I can't bear it at school' or anything, so maybe I didn't ask for help. I am not criticising, but I wasn't given advice. I think that is a good thing in a way though, I don't think I would have wanted advice. How could they possibly know how I should behave when I actually end up having to live it. We were always told anyway, to respect others; understand where people were coming from and not to judge people or criticise them as individuals, so I tried not to judge those people who were different from me and hoped they would be nice to me."

Adults in my community, it seemed to me, did not necessarily have much awareness of what their kids were dealing with in these crossings over into mainstream life, and if they did they often saw it as a good thing that the status quo was being questioned by their children's ways of being – and as evidence of the basic corruption and wrongness of the mainstream. The question of what it was like for the child to be the person who brought the status quo into question was not an awareness I remember in my experience of adult communards.

I can remember feeling that I was a peg that stuck up above the others at school, that needed hammering down to the same level, as far as some teachers were concerned. I looked the teacher too directly in the eye, had too many opinions, something indefinable, which was not about being badly behaved, as I was rarely non-compliant or disruptive and did well in my studies. I wonder if this has a relevance to what Sue says about some Communes being 'too child centred.' In my remembering, my community did not particularly prioritise the needs of children self-consciously, but they did encourage kids to speak up. Often kids had to shout quite loudly to have their needs heard by other kids or adults, and there were a lot of adult role-models around who were outspoken and critical of many aspects of 'normal life', so my, perhaps, fundamentally critical or judgemental attitudes may well have jarred with people (who I saw as 'mainstream' or 'conventional') who did not wish to be challenged or judged – or judged me right back!

Kids who are used to being responsible for themselves and making their own decisions can be seen as resisting being disempowered by adults, who do not understand how 'adult' their understanding is in some ways, or how much they are having to deal with in their everyday lives. For commune raised kids, it could well be true that in encounters with teachers or 'outside' adults that the 'child' could potentially be dealing with far more complex things in their lives than the 'adult' in the scenario. Certainly, I had an attitude of thinking I knew more about the world than many 'conventional' adults I came into contact with as a child and young person.

From the evidence of my interviews, not many communes were so democratic as to formally include children in decision-making processes. Indeed, none of my participants remember being included regularly as full members in community decision making as children. Sue says of the community she lived in:

“... kids weren’t part of the meetings, not at all. I remember going to a couple, when there was something directly relevant to me, but it wasn’t... the kids weren’t included in decision making, no ... Strange ‘cause there was a lot of that ideology bantered about the place – about alternative education and stuff, child centred stuff, but I don’t know it really happened in reality.”

Sue talked about feeling that her needs were not often understood or being ‘looked out for’ by adults in the community, and described her struggles to get what she needed. As she remembers it, she was often unclear herself at the time [as a child or young adult] what she needed and why, and an added complication was that when she did get clear on what she wanted she had to negotiate some things, not with one or two parents but with 30 adults, some of whom were not necessarily sympathetic to her or bonded with her.

In a particular example, Sue’s attempts to straddle the worlds she inhabited, inside and outside the community, brought her into conflict with some of the adults in the community over her horse, when she wanted to go drag hunting (fox hunting with a false trail instead of a real kill). The situation blew up into real conflict with Sue at the middle of it. Sue describes the situation:

“I was 15 you know, 14–15 yeah, I mean out of a whole community of supposedly open minded liberal people they were absolutely, really tough on me... Looking back now, I think some of the adults were more sympathetic weren’t they? Like [one couple] and people were, and sort of saw me as a person whereas I felt like a lot of the adults didn’t. They just saw it as what I was doing, as ideological – not about my needs or growth. Not the little girl who was inside really and what a tough time I was having. But so, I mean it partly was to piss people off or rebel but it was partly ‘cause I made two friends at school who were completely from you know, typical nuclear family in [the local village] who were in the pony club, and I just really wanted to fit in ‘cause that was the world I was in at school and they went hunting. [And] they were in the pony club and I just wanted to do what they were doing. So it you know, there was two sides to it, totally. To tell you the truth, I don’t totally re... I just remember it being, ‘cause I was just so... I kept myself so distant, as much as possible. Distanced myself from the adults at [the community], so I don’t... didn’t get into the nitty-gritty politics of it all. I just remember there being a huge furore about it and at a couple of meetings I must have gone to, sort of vaguely remember that [three or four adults] were just totally anti me having a horse after that. But I had to fit, I mean I had, think there was some of that before that anyway wasn’t there? About a horse didn’t really fit in with the principles and the values of the commune – and it was too bourgeois. [And] it was you know, a

middle class activity and a horse didn't actually contribute anything to the commune and so there was all that going, and so it actually gave something really solid to get hold of didn't it? The fact that I was going hunting, um... and yeah, all it served to do was completely alienate me even more didn't it? 'Cause I had to keep my horse over the other side of the road... I wasn't allowed to keep it at [the community] for a while, was I? So yeah, I mean that's just totally served, as you know, even more ammunition for me hating all the adults there, didn't it?"

Is this a basic struggle between ideologies – between an emotional awareness of a child's needs and an intellectual or political discourse about the morality of fox hunting, or horse-ownership? Is this a power imbalance arising between the needs and desires of adults and that of children in this scenario? It seems so, and also a stark illustration of the pull between two cultures – two worlds, where Sue as a child is attempting to create her own opportunities for exploration, learning, friendship and growth outside of the confines of communal dogma and community, and is being pulled in two directions at once: by her loyalty and need to please or fit in with the adults in her home culture at the community, and by her desire or need to fit in with her peers outside the community. Her situation was particularly acute, as was the case with other participants who described similar quandaries, because she did not have many peers her own age within the community. She was reliant on finding company outside in order to develop any kind of social life independent of her 'parent culture' within the community. Is this a lack of awareness of a tricky dance, or a dogmatic insistence on a moral, political or ethical code, despite any awareness of such dilemmas? A key theme that came out of my interviews with many of my participants was a tendency, within some of their communities, to place political or ethical concerns, an assertion of 'there is a right and wrong way', above and beyond sensitivity to individual emotional needs, creating a kind of code of conduct quite tight, rigid and at odds with the purported liberalism and freedom espoused by many involved in communes. This double standard, 'be free', as well as, 'our way is the only right way', created some serious conflict for some participants and some resentment or accusations of hypocrisy.

Going to school, crossing the boundary

For those participants whose home life was influenced by the ideas of the alternative educationalists and the notions of democratic relationship which many communities aspired towards (if not always achieved), the most regular 'crossing over' which they had to do as children was in attending mainstream school. Some of my participants were home educated or went to alternative

schools, but many experienced this boundary between their alternative home-lives and more conventional mainstream lifestyles and beliefs daily, as they went to mainstream school. Different participants dealt with these shifts or transitions with greater or lesser ease.

Leah says of her memory of mainstream school:

“Oh god it was horrible, it was just like, in the middle of the ‘80s – all about bigger better cars and yuppies and all of that - and I was the only one, well no I wasn’t the only one, my first boyfriend - y’know, kiddie boyfriend, we held hands and stuff - was sort of from some old hippy family, but other than that... I pretty much got on with most people but I got teased an awful lot for eating brown bread – not only brown bread, but homemade brown bread and wearing home made versions of the school uniform... [giggles] thanks Mum... and that sort of thing, so I suppose I didn’t make friends that well in school, more sort of outside school...”

Jody remembers that both her home environment and more mainstream people and places had things to offer her, and that, although there was adaptation and learning involved, it was not a totally negative experience, but, in fact, offered her some valuable life skills. She describes her transition from attending school at home in the community to going to a mainstream local school (in the 1980s):

“It was in a small village in west Wales. [And] you know, quite a conservative little village, and you know, ‘weird things’ were happening up at the castle [her community], you know. [And] to begin with I was seen as a bit different and I really wanted to fit in, you know, from the outset. I was a bit strange and was seen as different, came from this weird place. I used to be called ‘hippy’ all the time, and people used to make fun of me all the time, and that used to upset me. I think I quickly learnt that I had to fit in and not be different from everyone else, and I learnt to adapt, to fit in with everyone else; be normal. [But] then I’d come home and deal with all this totally weird stuff that was happening at home. I learnt to deal with that, to shift from one place to another really well, and interestingly enough all my friends at school, particularly secondary school, they all came from like normal backgrounds, you know, nuclear families and parents that had stuck together and I think I kind of attracted people who were kind of ‘so called normal.’ I don’t know why that was, perhaps a need to learn to fit in with the normal world outside the community. Kind of like, I learnt from how they did things, how they functioned. I never really had anything to rebel against [at home], in the way that normal, or well, normal other teenagers, do... Like they go off and they smoke and they drink, and everybody has to rebel against their parents in some way. In retrospect, I don’t think I had much to rebel against. My parents were doing it all for me. Me rebelling in a sense was being really normal, being quite straight. So maybe that is why I didn’t form groups of friends outside the community who were alternative, I didn’t need to, I had that already at home. I was always really a ‘good kid’ in that way of fitting in and accepting how it was in different places. I think I learnt quite quickly that at home I could be open and question and do things that I couldn’t do when I was at school. I think I learnt that quite quickly, maybe that was quite nice to be able to be part of both, like the mainstream world

and at home, but that's in retrospect. I think at the time it wasn't easy, I can remember saying that all I wanted was a normal home, with me and mum and dad, but I wouldn't think that now. I think that all the people I met and those experiences have to help me in how I relate to people now. They taught me useful things about life and people. Like, having to live with people, just like a stranger. You don't know them, and having to make them part of the family. Getting close to people and then they leave. That was constantly happening, there were all different kinds of people and you just have to relate to them. I think as a kid you just do – you are more open. You don't have all those inhibitions. Just having that amount of people coming through the house, and having to learn to trust people, and let it be my home, but let it be their home too. I think it was easier because I was young and open and that's all I knew. I think if I hadn't grown up with that and then tried to do that as an adult I'd find it quite hard. [But] I think as a kid I was made to feel quite special. I don't know if all kids in other communities were, but I have a feeling we were made to feel special in a different kind of way; that we were different in a good way. I guess that's a good thing, but now as an adult I am not sure. There's a kind of arrogance about that, I have this different experience... I am slightly wary of that, as kids we were given so much space and independence... I guess that from four years old I was surrounded by all these adult people and spent just as much time with them as my parents, and I guess, does that make you more socially aware? I don't know. I think I formed more relationships, close relationships with other adults than you would in a nuclear family situation. I mean how many adults do you relate to like that in a normal family? Where they take on that responsibility, almost parental responsibility, like that parental responsibility was shared, I mean obviously people were ultimately responsible for their own kids, but it was shared, and that made me relate to adults in a different way even if they were strangers."

Some participants, like Jody, have the same basic experience described here, of adapting to inside and outside spaces. Their perspective is not one of trauma or resentment, but of being offered special opportunities to explore human relationships and different ways of life. Her positive sentiments about being offered the opportunity to experience relationships with other adults apart from her parents were echoed by virtually all my participants, even the ones who also found the flux and flow and constant adaptation more traumatic in their current reflection.

Still, a pervasive distrust or sense of emotional pain surrounds most participants' memories of 'mainstream prejudice' against those from communal backgrounds, so that the 'mainstream' capacity for disapproving of those from less 'conventional' lifestyles remains a sharp pain for some. Charlotte describes her feelings about the local village school she attended and her 'outsider' status there:

"...at school we were definitely branded, although I don't think we were actually called names, but the first teacher, in fact I think she was the only teacher, she was

why we were taken out of school in the end... she definitely hated us [children from the community]. I am sure it happened to other kids not from communes but I felt really picked on, I felt really picked on because I came from the hippy commune down the road, but I was quite bright at school so I did actually do really well."

The interaction with the local community around communes was often most marked for participants in their school experiences. I heard many stories of the shock of that formal, hierarchical environment, where teachers and other adults were given authority over children, and children in school are suddenly in close proximity with people (both adult and child) who may not have been very nice to them, and sometimes these people were ones who had considerable power over them.

Megan describes this shock factor when visiting 'conventional' family homes of friends:

"I couldn't be in their houses for more than five minutes, I was acutely aware that it didn't feel right, you couldn't walk out of the front door without a parent going 'where are you going?' And having parents overlook you all the time, that was very strange, it felt alien, it felt very constrained. There didn't seem much room for expression, or for freedom of choice, you were fed when you were told to eat, went to bed when you were told to, we'll have a snack now, a sleep now, go in the garden now... We had so much freedom at home."

Even outside of school such experiences of prejudice from or towards the local 'outside' community were often recalled. Charlotte goes on:

"I know I stood out as being different, and I was picked on by these very conservative women who ran the school and did the catering. Certain experiences in the village shocked me. It was always in the village. On the one hand if they actually got to know us it was always really nice, but there were really only two or three families who made that effort – kind of stepped over their prejudice to find out if we were alright people or alright kids, but on the whole they didn't like us and it did stand out. [But] on the whole it didn't bother us because we were a group of kids. [And] we all hung out and if we were in the village, we were there to buy our sweets and then bugger off, you know? I didn't try to take part in the village life, didn't need to..."

This is a key point I think. Those participants who had a large group of children their own age to be friends with inside their communities tended to feel this inside/outside tension less keenly because they didn't have to look outside of home for company and social life with peers. It was much harder for those who were 'stranded' with only much older or much younger people around, who were compelled to attempt to gain acceptance from external local communities in order to find company.

Even those, who in retrospect feel that they rode these transitions quite well in the end, were keen to highlight the differences they experienced in how they were expected to 'be' in inside and outside spaces – even if they didn't experience extremes of prejudice or rejection. Jody describes her transition from 'inside' to 'outside' as initially traumatic, whilst she learnt the new rules of this new (mainstream) space:

"At eight years old I had to go to a normal school and so did quite a lot of the other kids who had been at my school. I think for the first week, I came back and I cried every night. I was so freaked out by the fact that I couldn't ask questions. I wasn't given time and space to work out what my opinion was. I had been given that before – questions were encouraged and I wasn't rushed to do anything. Montessori [which was the basis of the school which had been run at Jody's community previously but had to close down, so compelling her attendance at mainstream school] means you go at the child's pace and you do what the child wants a lot of the time. I was given independence. I was allowed to question and ask. The child makes choices all the time, so obviously it was a shock to be told what to do all the time, to be given limits and restraints, boundaries, that I had never really been given before. After the initial freak out, I think I settled in quite well and I remember my mum saying that the head teacher said that all the kids who had come from [my community] were really committed and had a real love of learning. He was just surprised by how different they were from all the other kids in the school. They were all doing really well. I think that was really reassuring for my mum to hear that."

Of course, not all 'outsiders' were so prejudiced. Some people outside these communities were open to the way of relating which commune raised people often had, or could be charmed to it, or were simply prepared to work with and accept it. Hazel, who was home educated until she was thirteen, found that by the time she did go to school she was able to deal with relating to teachers there, and that there were enough people who had similar values to her among the school-children, as well as other kids from her community in the school to hang out with:

"I think it was really quite interesting, especially at [my secondary school] 'cause what happened was because I had no sense of adults having authority over me. I just befriended all my teachers and I got away with a lot of stuff that nobody else could have got away with because I treated my teachers as human. [And] when it came to homework, not being handed in or anything like that I was literally the only one person that could get away with it because I would just tell them. You know like 'Sorry whatever, my dad took me to whatever for the week and I didn't do it'. You know, 'cause my life was pretty unusual still, and they would always be alright with it 'cause I always treated them with respect. I didn't lie to them or, you know, be irresponsible or whatever. [And] so it was an interesting way of getting away with something 'cause it was very sort of genuine and I think probably more than anyone in my classes I was friends with my teachers."

Lucy: – “So were there any points of conflict – did all, were there any of the teachers that found your way of being difficult to deal with?”

Hazel – “Not that I can remember.”

Lucy – “They were all charmed?”

Hazel – “Yeah I got on with all of them, I mean there probably was a couple of teachers that I didn’t like but I didn’t have a really big problem with them.”

This charm didn’t work for everyone. There were many more stories from participants about unwittingly going into more conventional situations and behaving ‘normally’, as they would do at home, and being harshly judged and disciplined or misunderstood, or simply receiving slightly bemused responses. Some other participants found that the mature approach they had learnt at home towards interactions with adults served them well. Interestingly, this was sometimes described from the perspective of being willing to be disciplined by many adults, rather than being unused to being disciplined by any adults.

Megan describes her experience:

“I think it [living in the community] prepared us, or prepared me, for, certainly for school. It wasn’t unusual for someone outside the family to tell me off [in the community]. I didn’t have a problem with that and I was aware that other kids [from conventional backgrounds] did, you know, they were like ‘who is this person to be telling me off?’ about the teachers and stuff... I think in general the community and relationships with the adults there certainly prepared you better for the adult world, and interacting with other adults. If I met other adults they would always say ‘oh, you’re quite mature’ [sounding surprised], because you’d always talk one on one with them you know, not like a child and an adult. You saw them as an equal, a person to have a conversation with. [And] you always understood general things that most kids didn’t have knowledge about and understood more things and stuff, but if you disagreed then you could say so, and you learnt early on how to interact. I know that I did challenge teachers quite a lot, not necessarily high school but when I got to sixth form and I was getting a bit more confident in myself and who I was, I would challenge their conventional stances and coming from a relatively socialist and feminist background. I had all these opinions and I was going to give them whether they like them or not. Luckily I was encouraged, the teachers didn’t say ‘don’t talk to me like that’ or ‘what would you know?’ I think the teachers were relatively liberal there. Since then, in a work environment I have definitely had to be more careful. I have had to go ‘right, this is nothing to do with me, I am not involved in the ethics of it, that’s their business’ because if I was to really give my opinion, for example at the place I am working now, I’d be fired straight away [giggles] just because my opinion of what they are doing is quite strong and political.”

So an intricate pattern emerges from the interviews, which shows a variety of ways of viewing this theme of the negotiation of inside/outside social spaces, and a variety of experiences too. What each participant chose to share, and what and how they remembered, was very dependent on their current

perspective, of course. This chapter, however, is attempting to present common themes that came up repeatedly across all or most of the interviews. School was a hot topic! The other area that presented some emotionally charged memories for participants in the area of inside/outside transitions, was family...

Family and friends outside the community

It was my experience that a family, or part of a former family, moving into intentional community could be a strange loss for family who were 'outside' the community. Family members inside an intentional community could be very focused on other members and life within the community, in the same way that those in conventional nuclear family set-ups might focus attention and energy on extended family networks. A rich ground for misunderstanding was provided when the value system of commune members (and their children) came into contact with the value system of more conventional family members, whose *modus operandi* was perceived to be more in line with traditional notions of relations between men and women, adults and children, family and non-family (blood relations being privileged over other forms of association). Hazel describes her situation as a happy one, particularly as she did not have to deal with any tension between inside/outside ways of being as for much of her childhood she was 'home schooled.' But still this tension did arise for her. She also vividly remembers her grandmother's horror about some aspects of Hazel's life as she witnessed it:

"I guess the thing that I really loved is, 'cause I didn't go to school, before going to [live in the community] and I didn't go to school after, um even though the other kids did, I still had 17 other kids to play with after school and um, so that was just brilliant – having like, your friends living with you, and having, I think, probably a hell of a lot more freedom than most kids have. Because you're in a safe house and you've got, you know, your own land all around you and you can run off and be outside playing 'til dark and no one's too worried, you know. So those I think, as a child my main memories –especially the summer, those long summer days with making camps and playing rounders and, you know, playing in the hayloft and climbing on the roof and what have you. [And] I remember things about like meal times and, you know, all the meetings. [And] I can remember the like, the adults getting a bit stressed about the meetings and kind of the kids just running off and playing, um... But I thought it was great and I thought I was very lucky not to go to school. I mean I can remember kind of feeling, sometimes I felt kind of like I was missing out, but most of the time I was really happy, 'cause I loved babies and I liked hanging out with the adults and I would get taught different things by different adults, I felt like I kind of had 30 parents instead of 4 which was already pretty good."

Lucy – "So what happened about education, were there particular adults that took responsibility for sort of teaching you lessons."

Hazel – “No it was pretty random. Um... my mum did teach me some lessons and, but, she had so little education herself that the way she educated me was pretty weird, like it was basically what she wanted to learn. So she would teach me, like, O’ level maths, when I didn’t know how to multiply yet, and you know, I could do it. I can’t really remember it now but I do remember that I was able to do it, but was a little bit backwards you know. And um... I like, I couldn’t even read a book until I was, like 9. [And] then the reason I could was ‘cause my grandmother was so disgusted with my mum that she was like, you know this girl has got to read, so she taught me and she was definitely pretty slapdash about, and wasn’t very organised. [And] um, I was supposed to have lessons every day but I wasn’t that into them and so I would always get away with not doing them and so I would go and hang out with some adults. So what I learned was a lot more about life and common sense and you know the garden and babies. [And] I learnt all kinds of things that, you know, most people don’t know, but I definitely missed out on some of the basics. So then, so sort of as I got older, like after I learned to read and everything and my mum started and you know she had another kid that was now three and whatever, um, she started to take it all a bit more seriously, ‘cause with me, I think it was a bit like ‘Oh lets not send her to school, ‘cause school’s terrible’. Um... and so we started going to more education conferences and, you know, learning about home-schooling and stuff, and from all of those conferences which were brilliant, I mean really inspiring ‘cause you’d meet lots of other home-schooled kids and find out what was being taught and learned. So I got quite involved in you know, in education, and took much more of an active role than your average kid would.”

Hazel’s description also shows evidence of her awareness of the difference between her life and that of the majority of her peers and the tension between her own need to explore ‘outside’ spaces and experiences through her parents ideology and beliefs about ‘mainstream life’ and education. This clash of beliefs was another very common theme in all my interviews, and the sense of the ‘outside’ or ‘mainstream’ or ‘conventional’ world as potentially damaging, dangerous, or wrong. Some felt quite daunted in approaching ‘outside’ and yet others simply did not experience this level of suspicion or judgment about ‘outside’ in their communities and didn’t take it too seriously.

The consumerism of ‘mainstream’ life (or the anti-consumerism of many communal cultures) could create a culture clash that maintained a distance between those in intentional community and family or friends in the mainstream. Material markers were also a strong issue for my participants in childhood, as, in some cases, an anti materialist ideology combined with just plain levels of relative poverty to produce a lifestyle which was not materially abundant (in relative western middle class terms). The clothes and toys and luxury goods of contemporaries were sometimes a source of envy for participants, and their lack sometimes a source of their being ridiculed, or seen

as dirty and shabby – being stigmatised by other children in much the same way as children from poverty stricken backgrounds might be. Authority figures raised similar suspicions about how they (and myself) were being raised and had a tendency to suspect delinquency of some kind. At my school, it was us and the gypsies who ‘had fleas.’

Megan describes the tension between mainstream materialism and her background, and between the contexts she was used to being in, and those of her more conventional peers:

“My main feeling as a child, seeing conventional life - we were in a very conventional village - my gut feeling was to want what they had, the material things.”

Many participants described a longing for material and cultural markers from the mainstream in order to ‘keep up’ with the culture at school. Many times, it seems, these longings were dismissed, even judged as materialistic or sometimes downright wrong. The exclusion which some participants felt from being able to share toys, or talk about TV programmes other kids were into, has nothing to do with material greed really, it is to do with belonging or being marked out as different.

My father and stepmother were concerned about the result of such convention-breaking ideologies and contexts. They were vocal about their worry of such things as permissive parenting, which they worried might end up bordering on neglect, and which did not teach young people to accept authority. In their eyes this was a worry because of the potential handicap commune kids might have when dealing with the mainstream world which operates largely through systems of hierarchy, with children often being judged as ‘bad’ if they do not learn to accept adult authority gracefully. Certainly, there were issues and problems for my sister and me blending with the parenting practices they used with their children (our new half brother and sister). Their new family was run along much more conventional lines of adult authority and from a more conventional world-view. From my interviews, I have learned that they were not the only ‘outside’ family members to be concerned that the culture inside intentional communities might not teach kids to deal with ‘the real world’ – the world as it is, out there in the mainstream, beyond the utopian arena of community life – but rather demanding acceptance of the child or person ‘as they are’ instead.

It's interesting to note that there was rarely real freedom for children to be exactly 'as they are' inside communal spaces, but rather an expectation of an adoption of a different kind of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977) and ideology. This was not free from restrictions about what was approved of or supported and what was not, and in some cases was quite censorious in some areas where 'outside' influences were being resisted against coming in and affecting the kids. A kind of power struggle develops about which identity the child should inhabit, that arguably is a clash between adult ideologies as much as about children's 'essential', or self-created sense of self and their true wants and needs. That said, many participants experienced their communities as spaces of freedom in comparison to 'outside' spaces. This was a definite weighting in the view of nearly all my interviews on this issue.

I can remember this culture clash between the two households of my mother and father being difficult for me to negotiate. The same behaviour would be received very differently in different households, and conflict and mutual hostility between the adults involved meant any agreement about consistency was not reached. Getting a hold of the different expectations and rules, the different versions of what constituted a 'good' child or behaviour that was appropriate or approved of, was complex and hard and rather nerve wracking. In the post-separation period of anger and recrimination there was a widespread atmosphere of judgement and disapproval between the two households. My sister and I were at the centre of this situation, and totally caught up in it.

This was a common memory for me passing over into mainstream spaces as a child. The most striking memories I have of this clash between my parent culture at home and the mainstream were regularly expressed judgements from 'outside' about the physical state of us children's appearance or the physical upkeep of the communal house, which was seen as shabby and dirty – as were the children – by people outside our community locally, as well as in my father's household and community (another conservative rural village). I can remember being visited by social workers, who had the same concerns about neglect, although they were satisfied enough that this was not the case when they visited to take no action.

More conventional people often had concerns about how children would 'run riot' without proper discipline, and didn't appreciate children who didn't 'know their place', thinking that it is important to learn to 'do as you're told' to

create people who will be cooperative and responsible. In the alternative view held by many in intentional community, this was often theorised as merely prioritising the needs of adults and giving them sanction to dominate children and insist on obedience in ways which were damaging for a child to experience. Some feminist mothers in intentional community, concerned to liberate themselves from oppressive structures and practices, wanted (in some cases) to also allow their children 'freedom' from adult 'domination'. Other political ideologies, such as Marxist, Socialist or Anarchistic ideals, also held equality as strong values that could be extended to children as well as adults.

My participants seem to mostly see themselves as having been created as exceptionally, if anything, over-responsible children. At the same time, the children are acknowledged as being responded to (in 'outside', and sometimes 'inside' spaces!) as cheeky, insolent, or phobic of authority. The consensus opinion amongst participants is that they experienced a lack of respect from 'outside' adults in comparison to 'inside' ones and that, along with this greater respect, came greater responsibility than they witnessed their peers 'outside' having to carry, as mentioned in previous chapters.

The judgment cut both ways. Some participants felt sense, of the 'outside' world being deeply wrong in various ways, sometimes rubbed off on how an 'outside' or more mainstream parent felt coming in, or even led to them in reality being excluded, judged or ridiculed. Bridget had a sense of unease about how her father, who remained outside the community, was viewed and received within it:

"I always remember when Dad came to visit, it being really apparent that he was an outsider and that he was – um, that he must have different beliefs - and I think he struggled with that. There was this whole environment, which was like this whole sect or something, and it's incredibly powerful. This collective of people who all think pretty much the same thing – that can be incredibly intimidating to other people. I think that was enforced in a way, it's very tricky to describe isn't it? The idea that something is supposed to be... I keep thinking of religious cults or something, it's a bit like propaganda – where everything on the inside is projected or perceived to be harmonious or free, but the reality is that if you have another idea then you can sod off... I don't think other people's ideas were necessarily seen as evil exactly, just that it was... I think it was ridiculed, it was taken the piss out of, or felt sorry for. I don't think it was sinister. It was more bloody-minded. They were quite self-righteous about what they believed. They got politically quite uptight about stuff. [But] I think that that was also the era, the time [the community] was started [in the 1970s], politics was incredibly different to how it is now, and it seemed there was a lot more to kick against back then that needed to change."

Images and imaginings of mainstream people and places

There was ripe ground for participants as children, or young adults (and perhaps still!) either unwittingly, or fully consciously and rebelliously, presenting a challenging persona to 'conventional' people. Those in 'mainstream' life, attitudes, conventions or institutions were often seen as far from positive in intentional communities. This comment from a commune parent in Communes Network illustrates:

'Can we, especially in communes where we've got the responsibilities, face ourselves and say we are doing the best for our children sending them into the system at such age and seeing them being formed and trained to become wimpy cashier, bank manager, solicitor and so on. Shaving their legs at twelve or becoming the real cool guy, man? This society, which has developed in such a nasty way, needs to train children to become part of it. It needs to bribe them with computer games, telly, video, cars, central heating - hey I can't stop - fashion, discos, Dallas, Dynasty, alcohol... Especially in the cities where the lead in the exhaust fumes drives little children mad. Things which once were nice to have, have become needs, addicting people in order to carry on. People can't face themselves - alienation - mistrust - what the fuck is going on? But back to school, what does it teach? How many raindrops fell in Brazil in 1964, Languages (they can learn them five times faster being in the country), that Washington never told a lie...How to be silent, how the teacher is always right even is s/he isn't, how to be better than the rest, how to wake up in the morning remembering the fear of a dream, how to fear. (Communes Network, 1986, Summer)

As can be seen here, judgment and condemnation was not one-way traffic. These judgemental and disapproving attitudes towards mainstream ideology and values (and sometimes towards people who lived mainstream lifestyles) could be difficult for kids who had to have close contact and relationships with those who were more conventional, particularly when it was one of your parents, especially one who didn't live inside the community or share it's ideology, as was the case with Cath's mother:

Lucy - "What do you think your parents thought was wrong with mainstream life?"

Cath - "Everything; that it was all about image, money, showing you had money, it was all fake. All about one-up-man-ship, not very real. Men, were sexist. That there were, kind of, people who were ignorant and victims of the mainstream media. That was difficult - of course my mum lived in mainstream life, and I judged my mum a lot based on that, because she'd chosen not to be with us, but secondly because everything my mum seemed to be about was what we were told was wrong."

Scenes of conflict with local people, who were either fiercely judgemental of a community and it's inhabitants, or whom the community were judgemental or hostile towards, were described by a number of participants (note: participants

describing these incidents made great pains to make the distinction between being hostile towards people's attitudes or lifestyle rather than towards individuals as people). Leah recalls an incident as an illustration of the clash of values between her community and the local rural community they were surrounded by:

"There was a shop, organic fruit and veg; local produce. We bought some stuff there that we didn't grow ourselves. I can remember going into this place with my mum, and they had a sign saying: We don't stock any South African produce – so a shop with moral values. I went in there with my Mum when I was about ten, and this very well spoken woman came in and said 'Oh I am so glad you don't stock South African products, you don't know what black person might have touched it...' [giggles]. I can't remember exactly what my mum said, this is just a guess, but I reckon she told the woman what a bigoted, colonialist, blood-of-our-ancestors, etcetera, etcetera she was, in no uncertain terms... [Leah's mother is Israeli]."

This kind of incident now provides an inspiration and a model for Leah (in her own estimation and self-identity) to 'not take any crap' as a woman or an Israeli, a modelling of strength, or refusal to be meek, mild, subjugated, subdued. However, Leah also described such incidents as moments of shame and confusion at the time. She felt a strong sense of being different and outside mainstream life as she became identified with her parents' lifestyle and politics (as well as her own and her mother's ethnicity), both by other people and inside herself. There was no 'passing' or hiding. This confrontational attitude, where oppressive sentiments were to be challenged, left commune raised children prone to behaving in ways that they could be quite severely punished, or ostracised for. Most participants see this firmly as a problem with the mainstream and not their parent culture, but some raised questions about being radicalised so young, and therefore exposed to a lot of hostility that they might have ducked if they had been prepared to be silent.

As well as overtly political issues, such as the racism that Leah and her mother encountered, participants reported conventional life as being often described rather negatively by those who had chosen a different way to live and had chosen intentional community. Adults, and participants themselves as children, sometimes experienced this negatively. Cath expands on the sense she developed of nuclear family life being insular and exclusive in stark contrast to her own experience of being raised in an intentional community:

"That's the legacy of living at a place like the one I was brought up in. It's seeing the one dimensional-ness of people when you come into the mainstream. You have a sense of inclusiveness rather than what other people have – this sense of exclusiveness, of sticking together by keeping other people out. They are not

looking to bring people in, get close and learn. They are looking to keep others out. Where I grew up, it was like, hey, here's a new person to bring in, include, learn from, change – as in show them there's another way to live..."

A mixed reporting then, of a sense of insularity and judgement of 'outside' and a sense of inclusiveness and 'live and let live' inside has emerged from the research. A range of different responses, from a relaxed ease with moving through different social spaces all the way along the spectrum to real fear of surviving 'out there'.

Natalie described a sense of fear about conventional scenarios, and a self-deprecating attitude about a kind of 'arrogance' that could develop inside communities:

"I'm not... I'm not equipped... I'm not equipped for the outside world, or I can be, but for short intense periods of time which are completely unsustainable. And... and require me to be somebody who I really am not. It's just a persona and it's not a persona I like enough to kind of agree to carry on doing... This also kind of harks a little bit back to an earlier thing we were talking about, about the history of this sort of alternative movement and, and what have we learnt from it, what kind of attitude... It's a kind of tone that we grew up with and the tone was arrogant, the tone was superior, that sort of not being understood was seen by others as being incredibly arrogant and incredibly superior that we, that I think other people thought that we really did believe that we were better than others, that we were somehow special. [And] I do remember being kind of knocked for 'you think you're so special' and even now people say it, with a completely different quality because of our different culture but it still actually hits quite a nerve and its said, and its mostly said with love but it hits a nerve because that's what we were taunted with 'you think you're so special'. [And] actually, its like, um... well, I was told I was special. I don't feel special, because no one actually bloody treats me like I'm special, but somehow you think that 'I'm treated special and that I deserve to be knocked down a peg or two at every opportunity'. So yeah, its like just, all get off my back, because it's not what it looks like at all. [And] I know I clung to those values at school because I believed in them. I remember being a kid and being very clear about that. But possibly that's an illusion that all kids have about one thing or another, that it's their choice but it's not. It's completely dictated and completely socialised because home is so powerful and, like, I remember doing a survey, 'what did you have for breakfast?' Everyone – cornflakes, Shreddies, Sugar Puffs, na, na, na... Somebody said Alpen and I said Muesli and the teacher says 'Muesli's the same as Alpen, it doesn't count, well we'll put it under Alpen', and I say 'Actually its not, its very different'. [And] you know, 'you always want to be so different: you think you're such an individual' that was another one. You know the rest of us, the stuff that makes up the rest of our lives, these ordinary children is not good enough for you, you've got to always go one better. [And] its like, 'well you asked me what I had for breakfast and I didn't have f*cking Alpen [laughs].

At home in the community, no doubt, muesli was seen as very different from Alpen for it's healthier qualities: no added sugar or milk powder – organic...

These markers of difference got some strange responses, so that sometimes commune children would be marked out and have prejudice against them without they, themselves, taking up any particular stance or arrogance, as Bridget describes:

“Other parents were wary because their kids would come home going ‘Bridget’s mum does this, or lets her do that’, and they’d go – ‘loony hippy, letting her kids run riot’. Which just wasn’t the case really...”

This dance of living in both mainstream and alternative worlds could be confusing, knowing how to fit in and what qualities to manifest, what to keep as part of your integrity, and what to change in order to manage to survive and thrive, as Natalie describes:

“Who are you rejecting? [And then] who rejects you, or can you lead a double life and can you do it successfully? ‘Cause I certainly lived in two different places, two kind of very different sets of, in fact I had three, ‘cause I had my dad’s, my mum’s and school’s. [And] they were all... it was a triangle if anything, yeah. I was denied access to the thing that consumed my parents’ time and life. ‘Shielded’ from the work of the community. These students that came to be helped, because they were ‘bad’ or ‘troubled’, because that was the kind of thing my dad said about them. It did come across in that way – not terribly understanding or well explained. We just knew we weren’t supposed to really be around them because it was kind of dangerous. I’ve been given another view recently, which has been very helpful in negotiating your way through that border. The threshold where one culture rubs against the other and all the friction that comes off it. [And] in a way, its sort of been suggested that the answer to me being able to enter the world – because I haven’t wanted to enter it – meant drawing on those qualities and values that were seen as bad and negative, like competitiveness or not caring for somebody, or just going all and out for yourself. [And] the view that’s been given to me, I kind of see it as a bit of a map really, to map the boundary line of what I can cope with, what my... where my limits rest and if I can have a sense of that then I can sort of know how much is realistic; how much is sustainable.”

Even in their adult life, there is awareness for participants about crossing into unfamiliar territory where things are done differently from their own backgrounds, as Jody explains:

“My partner’s family, they are still together, it’s very nuclear. They don’t have that many friends, it’s all family. [And like] the way they are with each other is different; the way they communicate. I mean, my family will sit around the dinner table and have like really deep conversations about us, about them, how they’re feeling, and the world. [And] I’ve never had to worry about how I am, what I say, whether I swear, there’s no inhibitions with who I am in relation to them. [And] I have to change that with other people. I am very conscious of how I am, what I say, how I say it, if it’s said in the right way. I find that very stifling. I am not saying, I mean even with my family there’s still the shit, politics and tensions and whatever, but at least it’s out on the table. It’s the kind of openness I miss when I’m with other people’s families.”

Leaving the community

Leaving communities is the final, biggest boundary crossing according to my participants, and one of the hardest transitions to navigate. Having learnt the rules of a culture so comparatively self-contained and self-referential, one that is so different from 'outside' arrangements, it is an entire community to inhabit rather than a smaller 'family' space. It was reported, by most, as very disorientating trying to find a sense of belonging in more mainstream spaces upon leaving intentional community, either as a child or a young adult. This was, it seems, particularly true for people who left as younger children. Once adolescence was reached, the transition was often eased by a desire on participant's parts to explore their independence and life 'outside', whereas for younger children it was more of a shock to the system. I left just pre-adolescence and found it fairly difficult to adjust at that stage, but other participants, who were younger, found it much harder by all accounts. Having said that, for some, if they were really young, they simply left behind the culture of their community and adopted an identity which was much more recognisably 'mainstream' and had less sense of not fitting in with mainstream life.

Bridget described a sense of displacement about crossing out of a communal life when her family left for good:

"It is very, very hard to feel like you belong anywhere when you've been in a commune and then you come out. I mean, I guess for people who stay till they're older as well [Bridget left when she was still a small child], because it's a bizarre set up. [And] there's nothing like it to hang around outside of that particular community. I certainly spent a lot of years feeling very confused about not having a continuous place where I felt that I belong, it's made me feel like a loner."

Working with participants looking back over their lives, it became clear that this transition out of communal life was a central issue for every one of them now as an adult, particularly at the stage of life that my participants are at, being in their twenties and early thirties (mostly). The questions of their childhoods remain issues in adulthood: How do I fit into conventional life? Where do I go to revisit my parent culture? Are there spaces where I fit in? As mentioned, these issues are often exacerbated by the high turnover of commune membership, so that 'home', in terms of the original commune was often no longer the same place, with the same people in it, if it still existed at all. There is a sense in which hearing the experience of participants puts me in mind of some of the experience of immigrants, who make visits back to their home

culture only to realise that it is no longer the place they remember so fondly. It has moved on, but they have not moved on with it, as they've been away. Home does not exist any more, except in memory or imagination. Perhaps, again, this does not, in fact, mark out my participants from other people who also experience a sense of being unable to return to the culture of their childhoods, as the world moves on apace. I suspect that there are particular issues for my participants and I, however, because of our marginal childhoods.

Conclusion

Many of my participants experienced a sense of fragmentation in their identity, through having to adopt very different sets of codes of behaviour inside and outside their communities. They 'acted' like different people according to the environment. This does not mark them out radically from many other people who were not raised in communal environments, particularly women (Griffiths, 1995).

Having to fit around social roles and conventions, stereotypes and hierarchies is a common human experience. I am unsure if I can claim a stronger experience of this for commune raised women than other women, but I know from my research that issues of belonging, inclusion, exclusion, power, integrity and compromise were hot topics for my participants, as well as for me.

Many talked about this learned adaptability as a positive quality to have as an adult, but also spoke of how managing these different identities and codes of conduct was a difficult thing to handle as a child. Growing up in this context remains a difficult area, an issue the participants had a great deal of self-awareness around. As children of communes, my participants also pretty much inevitably had to make transitions out of communal life into more mainstream lifestyles in order to leave home, even if they had not previously been moved out by parents. The ways of being they grew up with, and the ways they differed from more hegemonic ideas and roles, were inevitably going to produce some sense of marginality. This remained as part of their self-identity as they grew to adulthood, stretched their wings and launched into the wider world.

Endnotes to Chapter Seven

^{xxi} It has been a struggle for me to let go of my attachment to the notion of 'mainstream' and in some places I admit I have probably lacked full self-awareness of my own prejudice in this regard, despite my efforts to guard against simplistic assertions or readings of ideas like normal/conventional/mainstream/status-quo/straight. These words were shorthand in my childhood for ideas about 'the system' and ways of life

which weren't attempting to break the mould of 'the system' as communes were seen to be. I gained a child's impression of 'the system' as something that existed out there in the outside world, without necessarily having the more sophisticated understandings adults around me had of exactly what they meant by these shorthand terms. For example, I knew that my father, who didn't live in the commune, was called 'straight' and that this meant he was less enlightened in some way, and there remains a lingering sense of moral or ethical judgement in me around this, perhaps imaginary, division between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' ideologies and lifestyles. Another issue around this, perhaps imaginary, divide is that many people who were not raised in communal settings experienced very similar ideologies and lifestyles, so that it is clear that 'alternative' is in no way limited to 'communal'. The boundary between these other expressions of 'alternative' ideas and lifestyles and communal ones has been nigh on impossible to pin down in this work. I have ended up having to simply accept a vague notion of communal living as a particularly strong expression of ideas and ideals that were expressed in many liberal middle class households of a similar era. There is, perhaps, a difference in terms of space, that the space of communes was more 'set apart' from mainstream life than other households more integrated with mainstream culture could achieve, and this, perhaps, gives the experience of living 'alternative' ideologies as a lifestyle particular strength for those children with experience of communal living. It seems to me, from my experience, that sociology itself as well as counter cultural politics has become more sophisticated over the last thirty years in it's understanding of the potential mythology of ideas like 'the mainstream' or 'the system', or any clear or real division between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' than it, perhaps, was in the 1960s and 70s. I have not researched the development of such notions with enough depth, however, to back up my personal observations with evidence outside of experience, this being one of many avenues of exploration that the thesis raised, that I chose not to pursue. I would direct the reader to literatures about New Social Movements, for example Byrne (1997), for some discussion of these issues and to the Rigby (1974a, 1974b) texts for examples of this thinking amongst adult communards.

^{xxii} Noticeably, this chapter provides many examples of other participants' holding similar notions to me around previously mentioned divisions between 'alternative' and 'mainstream', which suggests to me that such notions were common in commune spaces and were commonly picked up and absorbed by children in these spaces. Whether they have validity as a way to think through these ideas sociologically or not, these dualities form a recognisable structure of thinking for commune raised people.

^{xxiii} This is one of the reasons why some communities refused the label of 'Commune' and, instead, preferred 'Intentional Community' – but as I have talked to people about this research and about my history I have found that if I say 'Hippie Commune' everyone knows what I mean, whereas if I say 'Intentional Community' the light of realisation only dawns when I say 'You know, Hippie Commune, type of thing.'

^{xxiv} Child centred child rearing and education practices came largely from the work of John Dewey (1998) and his student Carl Rogers (1969) who developed 'client centred' psychotherapy techniques. The main thrust of this ideology is to listen to what children themselves would like, trusting them to be able to both know and assert their needs and what is for their own good, rather than imposing adult authority and ideas of what is in children's best interests. It stands up for the perspective of the child and attempts to liberate children from external authority.

Conclusion – A life more ordinary...?

'Come baby, find me, come baby, remind me of where I once begun.
Come baby, show me, show me you know me, tell me you're the one.
I could be learning, you could be yearning to see behind closed doors.
But I will always be emotionally yours.'

Bob Dylan, Emotionally Yours lyrics

"[I have this friend now] she has this New Age Hippy thing going on. [And] wanting this alternative lifestyle and as soon as she goes into that I just think 'Er, yuk!' ... It's like when you've lived it it's not massively romantic, not really, because it's real, and they're kind of coming from a very romantic slightly, umm... un-thought out. It always seems really soppy, really whimsical, not very... grown up. It's kind of like believing in horoscopes, they're alright for fun, but you don't want to build your life around it. But then I think 'oh that's just you being brainwashed by another bunch of ideas', like I understand how the stock market relates to pensions, so does that make me more of an adult than believing that if you bury yourself alive and wake up the next morning in a shamanic ritual you are in fact reborn..." – Jasmine

Utopian Dreams and Realities

The dreams of the communes movement of the 1970s, as described by Rigby (1974a, 1974b) and Abrams & McCulloch (1976), are both carried by its children and undermined by their experience of communal life. Participants clearly show that they are still very much their parents' children in their values, their ways of being in the world - in relationships and community in particular. They are all sympathetic to 'outsiders' – the marginalised and discriminated against, and have a strong awareness of prejudice, inequality and the potential for changing social conditions for the better. They all have a strong sense of potential and possibility in their lives, of 'thinking outside the box' and being open to new ways of doing things, new alternatives, creative and unorthodox solutions to life's conundrums.

Participants were nearly all extremely sensitive to others' feelings. They were intuitive, imaginative, creative, emotionally intelligent people. They valued relationships and people highly and were highly skilled at communication and inter-personal contact. Participants talked often about a sense of service to others being a key moral value that they learnt through their experiences. They tended to be very conscious of being inclusive and non-judgemental (although this sometimes broke down when they were either being cynical about 'straight' society or being cynically humorous about 'hippies').

Very far from emerging as self-serving narcissists (of the myth about hippie children running wild and becoming selfish and unconcerned with others), many of my participants emerged as a group enormously interested in being useful and in 'mucking in' with others cooperatively. Many came across and described themselves as self-responsible, earnest, self disciplined and mature, with a real dedication to personal integrity, being 'grown up' and to shouldering responsibility. They saw this quality of being 'grown up' as partly produced as a response to witnessing the 'self-indulgent' behaviours that emerged sometimes in community living; as part of their response to having had to be very 'self-regulating' as children, and being both encouraged to be responsible members of their communities in terms of pulling their weight, and ending up being responsible for navigating relationships and negotiating with many adults. They also often made reference to the necessity of looking out for and looking after other kids in their community as part of what they felt formed this quality in themselves.

Participants were very aware of, and knowledgeable about, power relationships and of group dynamics. All still held an ideal of community that was recognisably 'utopian' in flavour. Their attitude was not one of having given up the dream of community or collectivity, but of having a desire to ground that dream in hard lived experience of 'reality', based on the emotional 'realities' of human attachment, dependency, vulnerability and power relationship. They all believed that the world could be improved, and most expressed opinions that improving relationships between people and creative problem solving were extremely important factors in how this might be achieved.

Participants had some reservations about their parents' ways of being and thinking in terms of the perceived 'romanticism' of those counter cultural notions of spontaneity, freedom, self-expression and the possibility of breaking free of 'conditioning,' mainstream roles and norms very effectively. From the experience they had of being (dependent?) children in environments that were anti-structure, to the extent that personal connection, contact and relationship – the emotional 'sea' of communal life – became the ever shifting basis of people's lives, they both developed an appreciation of organic and self aware engagement with human relationship, and a concern to reinstate boundary, structure, clear agreements and stable social scenarios. This, along with adequate protection and attention, was a particular concern of those

participants who had children about what they wanted to provide for their children that they felt they lacked in their childhoods.

Many, if not all, participants had some confusion about who they were as individuals in relation to mainstream life; a sense of being different or 'outside'. Some remained unsure as to how to navigate 'mainstream' life, and felt they were ill equipped to deal with it. Few had a strong desire to live communally again, although some did talk about a nostalgic longing for communal life. None had actually lived communally as adults but some were recognisably still involved with 'counter culture'. Some participants were distinctly determined to be successful in terms of money, career and status. There was a common sense of having lived without the luxuries of consumer culture compared to other children. Some participants still embraced an anti-materialist basis for life. Some had a fierce desire for gaining 'the good things' of life they felt they lacked as children.

The inherent competitiveness and individualism of post-modern neo-liberal life was difficult for many commune raised people, and proved one of the main points of ambivalence. The desire to be able to 'fit in' and do well in the mainstream was present in some participants, but there was also a sense of unease and dissatisfaction with how that meant they had to change their performative identity, or be out of line with their core values in order to blend or do well. Many had found beautifully creative ways of living that allowed them to express their values and skills in their work, homes and communities. Many were involved in creative industries, arts and not-for-profit organisations, that echoed their values, creativity and humanist concerns. For nearly all, there remained a sense of being somewhat 'alien' to the mainstream, and there was a strong sense that a cohesive 'mainstream', or normal life exists, which they are somehow not fully from, or of. Natalie shares a common feeling among participants when she talks about a difficulty in experiencing herself as an individual, separate from the needs of those around her, or the group's needs:

"I think I have an ambivalence about [being brought up in a commune] and that is reflected in the way I've yo-yoed between mainstream and alternative lifestyles. I'm not happy in either. I'm not comfortable in either. I can't fully embrace either. In fact, whilst I feel more confident that I know I'm not mainstream however much I long to be. Because there is a part of me that just longs to be fucking ordinary, I'm left with the option of go with what I know is good, good for the whole, good for the collective, but actually kind of isn't actually for me – unless it's a particularly well organised, well grounded and well bounded situation. I haven't got an

awful lot of confidence of being able to look after myself in a... in those group experiences, you know – I disappear. I somehow become the group and nothing else at the same time and you know, that's just not ok. It's just not ok and so it's made me pretty under-confident about how to handle, manage me. [And] how am I going to respond to that, where I am not disappearing for the good of the group. [But] at the same time there, very much there, it's a very, very odd place to be." – Natalie

Individual goals were mostly less important to participants than 'experiencing life' and relationship with others, and often also expressing themselves creatively. A sense of finding life (sometimes nerve wrackingly, but excitingly) free, open and full of possibility was common, as was some type of search for structure, security and consistent relationship. In work or occupation, nearly all had a sense of 'can do' in terms of being able to achieve careers or work they wanted and a desire to either help others or be creative in that work. But working out what to do was problematic for many too. Leah illustrates a common reflection among participants when she says:

"I have been brought up to believe that I could do anything, within reason, in terms of career but also in terms of life choices, I was brought up to think that all was open depending on what I want to do and what I apply myself to, which is a really good thing, it's just a problem if you don't really know what you want to be doing [giggles] then you're a bit stuck..."

The most common place where participants were looking for security and structure was in sexual relationship and (for those who have children) current family life. There was a very common scepticism about 'open' and 'free' relationship (mainly to do with the 'selfishness' involved and the refusal to recognise how attempts to be non-possessive 'hurt people', and this hurting of people was clearly judged as wrong by participants. In their world view it implies a lack of care for others, a prioritising of your own pleasures and whims ahead of your social responsibility, (as far as participants were concerned) and a common complaint about the instability of their parent(s) relationships, of not having had stable consistent adults in their lives to develop long term relationships and depend upon as children.

Often, participants talked about feeling they were 'left to bring themselves up' or to be brought up or bring up other kids, and their longing for greater intimacy with their parents, a desire for greater support and direction. Those who did have strong relationships with parents and felt held and protected by them adequately had a much better time of communal life than those who felt abandoned or that their parent(s) had abdicated responsibility for their well being, or for guiding them or teaching them. Some were quite resentful of their

parent(s) lack of enthusiasm about being a parent, or of what they saw as their parent(s)' selfishness in putting their own needs ahead of their children's.

But nearly all participants also showed great sympathy and understanding for the counter cultural agendas of their parent(s) and other adult communards, and for the struggle they had in trying to create something new and different in communal life. Most participants strongly defended and valued having been brought up to be questioning of authority and were suspicious of unequal relationships of power in 'conventional' nuclear family relationships and in the workplace or wider world. Many also found the strong ideological agendas of their communities 'a bit dogmatic' and, as children, found that the world-view they copied from their parents sometimes created trouble for them if expressed to people who did not share it. There was a feeling that they innocently opened their mouths to speak 'truths' that they heard at home with no idea that it would 'get people's backs up' outside the community.

All participants felt their lives had been enriched by their access to many people, and their relationships with both adults and children outside their immediate family. All loved the space and freedom of their childhoods. The physical environments and unsupervised play were mostly seen as bonuses by participants, although many also reported many moments of danger for themselves and other children left unsupervised. Nearly all loved being 'close to nature' in their childhoods, farming and gardening, looking after animals in their community and having land on which they were free to roam. All talked about being involved with the work of the community – cooking, cleaning, gardening, farming and other tasks, as being positive experiences for them, mainly because of being included in the group, but also in terms of the experience of working with others and learning self responsibility as well as practical skills.

Many found the exposure to some adults in their community, or visitors to it, whom they didn't feel safe with, frightening at times. Some felt seriously lacking in adult protection from exposure to adults who were bullying, negative, abusive, sexually frighteningly open, mentally unwell, inebriated, emotionally out of control or just simply hard to deal with or stand up to. Although nearly all participants also talked about having gained an ability to deal with and get on with diverse people, and not being prejudiced against 'difference' that they valued in themselves and felt helped them to be good people and to get on well in the wider world. They commonly felt that they

gained an ability to speak up for themselves and hold their own from this experience of having to deal directly with unrelated adults in their communities.

One strong aspect that came out of the research was about pair bonding and family. Attempting to both engage in community life and maintain a strong couple or family bonds was notoriously difficult, and most participants stated flatly that they would fight hard to protect the insular bonding of 'the family' against external demands in their own lives as adults. The communal openness to relationship with many people involved an assumption (even a demand) that individuals are able to cope without 'screening off' within a relationship or family group from wider social pressures and relationships. According to participants, this was not always true of adults in their communities who became 'stretched' and didn't have enough energy for the constant engagement in intimacy with so many people. They also observed that cliques and hierarchies of power among adults often meant that there was not an equality of mutual connection between all, and that those couples who did 'stick' together and 'screen off' often ended up with much more power and influence than single adults or less bonded couples. This was problematic for kids whose parent(s) were not in good power positions in the community, as the parent's status directly affected the children's.

Openness to relationship with everyone proved an even more challenging idea or task for many participants who were, through their positioning as children, necessarily in a position of 'dependence'. They felt out of control and positively 'oppressed' when expected to 'adapt' to having many caregivers rather than a limited number, without having choice about who they wanted to be close to. Very common for my participants was a sense of not getting enough time and attention from parents and being forced to be independent or accept help from adults they were less passionately attached to, when they really wanted the intimacy of contact with their 'real' parents.

Participants reported that it was common in their communal environments for there to be attempts to avoid the 'smothering' of children, for adults to avoid authoritarian or possessive ways of relating to children. This was reported as being seen by adults involved as giving kids the freedom to 'develop' on their own. But contrarily many participants felt that adults failed to recognise that children need stable dependable relations and may not be able to cope with too wide an array of relationships and still feel safe or genuinely comfortable.

Participants talked about how children do not genuinely have equality in the power stakes or the same learned abilities to handle relationships and social interactions, as adults might have in the same situation, and how they do not feel this was always recognised or taken account of in their communities. Many talked about how they felt they had to grow up very early in order to cope with making their own decisions, so that choice became a burden as well as a boon. That fostered self-responsibility and maturity was nearly always also seen as a positive thing, but a weight of aloneness, of lacking help, was often part of that experience for participants.

Participants confirm that, in their experience, there was, for them, a 'special' bond with parents (as opposed to other 'caregivers' when they were in evidence), which many felt may not have been fully acknowledged, catered to, allowed, accepted or encouraged in order to make the project of community work in line with adult expectations and desires, rather than to fit around children's needs. This 'fixation' with 'actual' parents may have been labelled unhealthy or unhelpful by communards, but that is experienced by participants as a form of authoritarianism, an imposing of adult power over children, which ignored and denied the child what they feel or want – not a very 'democratic' kind of exercise in power relations in actual fact. Participants were keen to express their memories of times when the emotional realities going on beneath rigid attempts to be 'ideologically correct' were not recognised. They described their experience that people were getting 'hurt' emotionally but that reality was over-ridden by dogmatic intellectual idealism. Participants all found this schism between ideology and emotional reality very uncomfortable when they witnessed or experienced it.

Participants illustrated an ambiguity about notions of children and childrearing in their communal environments, where children were supposed to be 'free and equal', but actually weren't in their experience. Their opinion was that their actual experience, as children, did not always line up with adult assumptions or expectations. Their comments draw attention to an ambiguity about children in their communities' 'child-centred' ideology, where children are indeterminate in terms of how much responsibility they should have, how much power they should be given, how much they can handle, and which also points to a certain hypocrisy in terms of what is said about equality and anti-hierarchical or authoritarian practices and what the actual power dynamics between adults and children were like. Their opinions and experience seems to confirm Abrams

& McCulloch's (1976) sense of children's 'secondariness' in communes and that they did not have the status of 'full membership', as that research implied. However they certainly found strategies to deal with that and often described themselves, as children, as 'obnoxious' and 'opinionated', willing to assert themselves with adults in their communities and outside. The stories of participants fluctuate in terms of their own sense of power and agency, but rarely did participants remember themselves as powerless children. They often talked about being unusually willing to talk to adults as equals and how, outside their communities, this was seen as precocious and disrespectful to adults. This implies that inside their communities such behaviour was allowed or even condoned or supported. In participants' telling, commune kids found ways to get what they wanted or let their presence be known, in no uncertain terms a lot of the time. Beneath this assertive exterior, however, many participants talked about dependency needs they felt were not met for them as children. Some of their hostility to adults (taking the piss out of them, for example) was described by participants as being linked to feeling that they had to 'shout to be heard' – that they had to be tough. Participants as children often experienced vulnerability as problematic.

As adults, participants show a jadedness about the inescapability of mainstream life, and whilst maintaining an interest in being creative about how to live and survive, and a commitment to an ethos of individual fulfilment and creative individuality, they also have a deep knowledge of the work of community, the sacrifice of living with others – a sense of communalism, which is definitely and distinctly in conflict with individualist ideals. Despite the difficulties that were experienced by participants being brought up in the way they were, nearly all had many positive things to say about their experiences. Most valued their childhoods, despite the critiques they had of what happened in their childhoods.

Heather sums up a common sentiment amongst those interested in living communally again:

"I was having this discussion with [a friend] last night, about wanting for my children everything that I had and I actually can't think of a more idyllic childhood. [And] even [my community] as it is now isn't as it was, bringing children up there now would be not a patch on what it was like for us. There isn't a sense of community between the generations like there was. The children there don't have a sense of belonging in a group of children like we did, and it's difficult because we talk about it a lot among ourselves. Whether we are going to set up another community; whether we would want to go back to [my community]."

[And] I think everyone agrees that no one wants to go back to [my community], and yet we want for our kids what we were given because we all got from it such strength and such good things."

End-thoughts...

There is a feeling hanging over this work for me, one of slight disillusionment. To be raised with such powerful messages about what is wrong with the mainstream world and the enthusiasm of a generation (my parent's generation, that is) to find new ways to live, then end up facing how difficult the accomplishment of world changing actually is, how the ideals of community and individual fulfilment come into conflict, feels slightly sad. The romanticism of the ideals I was raised with still seems to me to be a dream worth holding, and, as a child, I saw evidence of how it can be different, positively, as well as what goes wrong with trying to do it differently. The world around myself and my participants can leave me feeling positively old fashioned in my ways of being, because our peers do not seem to have had anything like the experience of community that participants and I have lived. They do not miss what they have not experienced. Participants and myself do. All of us expressed nostalgia for both the dream and the reality of communal life, but none of us have attempted to be proactive enough to create new communities to live in as adults. Participants nearly all said it was 'too much hard work' living in community, that it is easier to create a 'community of friendship' that you can close the door on when you want to.

I came to the project with some fundamental questions, about myself and my place in the world – a sense of floating slightly, neither at home in mainstream life, nor in alternative culture (which I know well the pitfalls of - the marginality – from experience). It has been emotional, as I have attempted to unpick my early life through thinking about participants' experience. This has been a journey that has often left me feeling unsure if there was anything of interest to others not involved in communes or the counter culture in what I was writing about. The experience was so intensely personal. Applying an academic rigour to unpicking ones' childhood is not for the faint-hearted.

My hope is that the stories of my participants will to some extent retrieve and record a moment of social history which will not come again in the same way. I also hope that the work might be useful to anyone looking to enter into an alternative lifestyle with children in tow, or interact with children who are involved in one. Across the board the 'family' is now changing, and some of the feedback in this work may be useful to those engaged in new family forms. In

the process of my research, I swapped notes with another academic who was writing about the experience of women trying to raise children on New Age Traveller sites in the 1980's, 90's and '00's. Although there were many differences, there were many similarities between that group of children's experience and that of my participants, so a familiar counter cultural experience remains, one that children are being born and raised in.

Steering the work towards childhood and the experience of children complicated the issue in as much as my participants' adult memories of childhood were partial and it might have been interesting, had there been time, to talk to their parents and adults they lived with in community as well. In fact, I might possibly go for the bold option of focusing on one community and interviewing a larger number of people from that community if I began again. This would give a smaller picture, but perhaps a more elaborated one. I left out boys and men from my picture too, and there is some interesting research there for someone else to do – to explore the experience of boys and the models of masculinity in communes of this era.

I hope that I managed to explore and convey the ways in which my participants' experience differed from their parents' assumptions, but also from mainstream stereotypes, and to give them a chance to have their say about what their memory of the reality of communal life was like.

I think that participants' life choices as adults speak loudly about their 'take' on their upbringing. Mostly they are attempting to live relatively conventional lives and reaching for structure and conventional forms of success to some extent. But they do have a wealth of experience of being part of a group, of relating inter-generationally with non-parents, and of living with many children who are not kin, of creating community. They are all productive and responsible. Many say they feel they have had to be adult from a very early age, and it shows. They all have a strong morality and political awareness, and they all believe, still, despite some sense of disillusionment about where the strong culture they remember from their childhoods disappeared to, in the possibility of being inclusive, of being fulfilled as an individual, of living creatively.

In answer to Abrams & McCulloch's (1976) question about whether children of communes would find them 'really great places to be a child', I would say the answer is 'yes' and 'no'. Like any childhood, there were boons and benefits from this experience as well as hurts and harms. I think that Abrams & McCulloch's assertion that these childhoods were neither better nor worse than average dual

earner nuclear family life is true, but these childhoods were most certainly different from that experience and developed different skills and priorities. If the way people turn out is the measure of a childhood, then communes did a great job. All my participants were productive, responsible, socially concerned, self aware, intelligent and loving people with a very strong sense of care for others, and a very highly developed ability to be co-operative and useful to others. Communes created a generation of people noticeably more moral and less narcissistic than the descriptions of competitive individualism included in this study (Beck, 2001), more concerned with caring for others and maintaining both family and community through the valuing and practice of relationship. With deep thanks to all my participants, to the community where I lived as a child and all the adults and children there, and to my parents and their entire generation whose striving for a better way has developed our sense of possibility.

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Appendix One

1. 'If few if any British communes have evolved a structure which frees the adult woman from her normal state of secondariness, giving her socially sanctioned resources to use as a member of the commune in asserting her equality with men, what can we expect in the case of children?' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 146)
2. '...it was the possibility of freeing the child from the hazards of personality absorption rooted in the conventional domestic love nexus that was most emphasised when the question of children in communes was discussed: "Children can relate to more people, reducing the hideous friction of the nuclear family prison"; "Excessive dependence on the mother and with it the liability of fixation is diminished in a commune"; "The effect of any one adult and therefore the damage any one adult can do a child is much less"; "In a commune kids benefit from all the vibes of all the other people; they are likely to be more open-minded than if brought up in a bi-parental system"; "Children can relate to several different adults on a deep level, but with less smothering emotional involvement." (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 147)
3. 'Commune parents did not exert any intellectual control over their children. The mind was not an organ to be developed, it was an organ to be bypassed. Communes were completely anti-intellectual places, not only because the people did not read many books, but also because children were not logically trained. The younger children at The Ranch were never told the reason for anything. They were expected to learn discipline merely as a reaction to feeling – the mother gets mad so the kid knows he has done something wrong. Nobody relied on logic as the outside, objective proof of why things should be a certain way. It was enough that a grownup was mad – the child was kicked out of the kitchen or the house; or, at the Farm, sent away from the 'energy center.' As the parent did not use a logical arsenal against a child, the child did not develop logical defences in retaliation.' (Rothchild & Berns Wolf, 1976, p. 199)
4. 'Children found it more difficult to hide behind parents, or to be easily bailed out by them. Parents were not a point of reliance on that level – Andy Peyote never knew whether or not he would be allowed to stay in his father's dome. If Andy was an asshole, somebody else at The Resort could have told him to leave for a few days.' (Rothchild & Berns Wolf, 1976, p. 201)
5. 'The rural parents were not preoccupied with their children, with their health, their intelligence, their morality, in that familiar intense way [like in mainstream families].' (1976, p. 200). Kids had to learn to be self-regulating and self sufficient very early in communes, 'It was like that in most communes; from an early age kids learned that they had to get themselves out of trouble.' (Rothchild & Berns Wolf, 1976, p. 201)
6. 'The most important thing to commune parents is that their children be straight. Being straight has to do with relating to other people in a simple and direct way. All the children did that.' (Rothchild & Berns Wolf, 1976, p.194)
7. "Anti-family' movements such as the communes developed which made a deliberate attempt to counter what were seen as some of the damaging effects of families. These included questioning the sexual role of family life and monogamy, the 'selfish' preoccupation of families with maintaining the self-interests of their members at the expense of others, the assumed naturalness of the transfer of wealth through inheritance, and the inferior positions of children and women in families. Advocates of communes argued that many of the ills of society, such as exploitation and materialism, were fermented and perpetuated by nuclear family structures.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 149)

8. 'Cooper presents the family as legitimating the perpetration of four evasions of autonomy: 1) the manufacturing of self-other dependencies – the 'family' to fill out the incompleteness of the individual, permitting the latter to live stiltedly through others rather than self-sufficiently 2) the locking of the individual into the specified roles required by 'the family' as an alternative to 'laying down the conditions for the free assumption of identity' 3) teaching the child to accept the social order as naturally given at the expense of it's own integrity; and 4) specifically, equipping both mother and child with a 'need for love' which is then used not as the basis for a growth of spontaneity and tenderness but to justify repression, violence and guilt.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 123)
9. 'What is presented [by communards] is the way in which the hopes of love are turned into the debts of love; motherliness generating childishness; romance generating stale and ritual togetherness; spontaneity generating compulsion.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 123)
10. 'We suggest that communes may be thought of, first and foremost, as attempts to institutionalise friendship on the basis of place-making. And that insofar as that is what they are doing they will face certain major problems – of hedonism, utilitarianism, inequality, self-consciousness, and reification.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 31)
11. 'We have emphasised three general themes: That communes may be understood as attempts to institutionalise friendship on the basis of place-making; that at an immediate, observational level the decisive feature of the structure of communes consists of a combination of a core and a fringe; and that at a rather deeper level an important reality of communes is their effort to be both ideologically withdrawn from and structurally open to the outside world.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 49)
12. 'What tends to happen is that as a result of the refusal to contemplate the problem of power structurally, the principles that determine the distribution of power in the larger society insidiously make themselves felt within the commune too.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 46)
13. 'Thus, capitalism is not seen as a complex, historically produced system of social relations and constraints but as a way of life, something that happens because people are selfish or short sighted enough to want it to happen; if they could be persuaded to want something different they could have something different.' (Abrams & McCulloch: 1976, p. 45)
14. 'If the change is to be put into a few words it can be described as a general relaxation of standards, a greater permissiveness, a raising of the demands a man may make on life and a lowering of the demands life can make on him.' What has happened in the last twenty years is that the pace of this change has increased. This has been especially true in the last decade. We can see changes occurring at many levels in society that reflects the erosion of traditional values and the growth of a hedonistic and anti-ascetic philosophy. This change has been greatest among young people...' (Davies, 1975, p. 1)
15. '... unlike their parents, who are also avid for the plenty and leisure of the consumer society, the young have not had to sell themselves for their comforts or to accept them on a part-time basis. Economic security is something they can take for granted – and on it they build a new, uncompromised personality, flawed perhaps by irresponsible ease, but also touched with some outspoken spirit.' (Roszak, 1969, p. 31)
16. 'We grasp the underlying unity of the counter cultural variety, then, if we see beat-hip bohemianism as an effort to work out the personality structure and total life style that follow from New Left social criticism... They seek to invent a cultural base for New Left politics, to discover new types of community, new family patterns, new sexual mores, new kinds of livelihood, new aesthetic forms, new personal identities on the far side of power politics, the bourgeois home, and the consumer society.' (Roszak, 1969, p. 66)

17. '[There was an] attempt to recast the very frame work of social life' was at the core of the Communes Movement. 'Communitarians are 'doers,' sober activists on behalf of their way of life. While their radical predecessors may have spent their energies in social analysis and communication, editing and distributing underground newspapers, today's social reformers never write or talk about reform. In building their small societies, establishing land trust and cooperatives they are attempting to provide living models to the broader society. They are saying, "We have something that works!" (Bouvard, 1975, p. 6)
18. 'The position of many young people then is that they are at a real loss as to what they should seek to become. They can perceive no attractive adult role models for them within the social structure. As a result certain of them are attempting to "find themselves" and create a richer, more rewarding alternative style of life to themselves within the confines of a commune, concentrating on what one commune member has described as "a lifestyle in which work for money is irrelevant and undesired work is minimised, thus permitting concentration on the objectives of developing every individual to his maximum capacity"' (Rigby, 1974a, p. 11-12)
19. 'It is interesting to look at the changes that have taken place in the United States, a society that is in many ways similar to our own yet with some very different cultural traditions. In the last ten to twenty years America has similarly shifted in a permissive direction but the change has been more thorough, more drastic and more divisive than in England. Moralism, not causalism, still prevails as the predominant mode of argument in America and their society can almost be seen as two hostile camps; those committed, on moralist grounds, to permissiveness, (who are chiefly young and either very rich or very poor) and those committed, on even more moralist grounds, to stamping it out.' (Davies, 1975, p. 8)
20. 'this movement lacks any well-defined objectives and goals other than a shared concern on the part of its participants to transform their own lives and that of straight society, to create an alternative social order characterised by values counter to those that appear to dominate our present existence. To the value of competitive individualism they counterpoise the values of co-operation and brotherhood between people; against the value of conformity and routine they seek to establish that of creative individuality; to the belief in man's sovereign right to exploit nature for his own short-term instrumental purposes they seek to present the image of "mother earth" in whose family man is only one of the many life forms that she sustains and whom we must respect and love if life is to persist. They seek to subvert the sacred respect and obeisance paid to "experts" by proclaiming the right of each individual to have a voice in the control of his own environment and living space. They seek to replace parliamentary democracy by new forms of decision-making involving the devolution of power, and to replace the capitalist system of production for profit, sustained by artificially stimulated demands, by a system of production for use in order to meet genuine needs – the list could go on.' (Rigby, 1974a, p. 1-2)
21. '... communes can provide one answer to such life problems of modern existence as the isolation and loneliness of nuclear family life, the meaninglessness of the rat-race, the futility of consumerism, the boredom of nine-to-five work and so on' (Rigby, 1974a, p. 148)

22. As David Graeber (2002) said in a *New Left Review* article, while describing intellectual responses to current radical action and movements, 'as an anthropologist and active participant – particularly in the more radical, direct-action end of the movement – I may be able to clear up some common points of misunderstanding; but the news may not be gratefully received. Much of the hesitation, I suspect, lies in the reluctance of those who have long fancied themselves radicals of some sort to come to terms with the fact that they are really liberals: interested in expanding individual freedoms and pursuing social justice, but not in ways that would seriously challenge the existence of reigning institutions like capital or state.' (Graeber, 2002)
23. 'We must not forget that many, if not most, of this post-war generation of young people carried on their lives in ways not dissimilar to those of their parents; they had more in the way of material possessions, but they continued to live in conventional marital relationships, to pursue careers in the established professions and occupations and be content to express any political feelings through the "normal" channels of mainstream parliamentary parties. A significant minority did not, however; their reaction to greater affluence and relative economic security was not to embrace it with a mixture of enthusiasm and relief, but rather to question it. They were no longer prepared to show deference to established political leaders and institutions, but wanted a more active say in how their world was run. They developed a preoccupation with what has become known as 'lifestyle'; that is, they saw economic growth as involving at least as many problems as it did benefits, posing a threat to individual autonomy and opportunity for self-expression.' (Byrne, 1997, p. 30–31)
24. 'Jaffe and Kanter (1976) have argued that communal living places special strains on married couples. Our data suggest there is an interactive effect. The initial period of communal living, in particular, seems to jeopardise the marriages of new members. For many individuals, however, communal living was appealing because of marital relationships already in transition – see Ferrar (1977).' (Aidala, 1989, p. 316)
25. 'Whereas the individual is "over-determined" in the primary public institutions and expected to play narrowly defined functionary roles, he is left to fend for himself in his private life. The decline of traditional communities, the high social and geographical mobility demanded of members of modern industrial society, the nature of the large modern, anonymous urban and suburban communities – all these developments have meant that the individual in modern society can find it almost impossible to establish that network of intimate social relationships that are necessary if one is to gain reaffirmation through social interaction of one's sense of one's own inner worth as a human being.' (Rigby, 1974a, p. 10)
26. 'Neo-liberal economics rests upon an image of the autarkic human self. It assumes that individuals alone can master the whole of their lives, that they derive and renew their capacity for action from within themselves. Talk of the 'self-entrepreneur' makes this clear. Yet this ideology blatantly conflicts with everyday experience in (and sociological studies of) the worlds of work, family and local community, which show that the individual is not a monad but is self-insufficient and increasingly tied to others, including at the level of world wide networks and institutions. The ideological notion of the self-sufficient individual ultimately implies the disappearance of any sense of mutual obligation – which is why neo-liberalism inevitably threatens the welfare state. A sociological understanding of Individualisierung is thus intimately bound up with the question of how individuals can demystify this false image of autarky. It is not freedom of choice, but insight into the fundamental incompleteness of the self, which is at the core of individual and political freedom in the second modernity.' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, preface, xxi)

27. 'Some of those drawn to a communal lifestyle are seekers who have not found what they need and want in more traditional family forms. Seeking quality intimate relationships with more than one other adult could possibly deepen one's understanding of life and therefore, bring more meaning to one's life. The communal environment can enhance one's journey to find meaning...' (Smith, 1999, p. 16)
28. 'Giving certain conditions, the pure relationship can provide a facilitating social environment for the reflexive project of self. Boundaries, personal space and the rest, as the therapeutic manuals say, are needed for individuals to flourish in a relationship rather than slide into co-dependence. Yet it is plain that there are also large areas of possible tension and conflict here. The shared history that a relationship develops can serve to screen off troubles in the outside world; one or both individuals may become dependent, not so much upon the other, but upon the relationship and its routines in a fixated way, as a means of insulating themselves from a full engagement with other social tasks or obligation. Achieving a balance between autonomy and dependence is problematic.' (Giddens, 1992, p.139–140)
29. 'Everything we read in the literature about changing attitudes towards children suggested that there is a filter down effect. Views that are held by the middle classes in one generation are highly likely to be adopted by less privileged sections of society in the next... Child bearing and child rearing have indeed become highly problematic. Activities that were once taken more or less for granted (even if beset by ill health and premature death) are now arousing profound doubts and uncertainties. They have become highly contentious. There is of course, one straightforward reason for this new state of affairs. Modern methods of birth control have created the possibility for all children to be chosen. Children are in theory, even if not always in practice, optional: every child can now be a wanted child. But what exactly is a wanted child? How does one balance such a want for a child against the pull of career and good times?' (Taylor, 2003, p. 10–11)
30. 'Regardless of their broader social political, or religious goals, almost all communal groups considered changes in traditional patterns of marriage and parenting desirable or necessary. What distinguished attitudes of commune members toward the family was the ambivalence and uncertainty about conventional choices rather than expressions of outright rejection.' (Aidala, 1989, p. 317)
31. 'In the nineteenth century, as industrialisation gained ground it helped to form the nuclear family, which in its turn is currently losing its traditional shape. Work outside and inside the home is organised on contradictory lines (see Rerrich, 1988) Market forces apply outside, while at home unpaid work is taken for granted. Relationships involve contracts between the partners, whereas family and marriage imply communal interests. Individual competitiveness and mobility, encouraged by the job market, run up against opposite expectations at home where one is expected to sacrifice one's own interests for others and invest in the collective project called family. So two epochs organised on opposite lines and value systems – modernity and counter-modernity, market efficiency and family support – are welded together, complementing, conditioning and contradicting each other... In principle one's fate is decided in the cradle even in industrial society, lifelong housework or making a living by fitting in with the labour market.' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 26)
32. 'The overtaxed individual 'seeks, finds and produces countless authorities intervening in social and psychic life, which, as his professional representatives, relieve him of the question "Who am I and what do I want?" and thus reduce his fear of freedom.' This creates the market for the answer factories, the psycho-boom, the advice literature – that mixture of the esoteric cult, the primal scream, mysticism, yoga and Freud which is supposed to drown out the tyranny of possibilities but in fact reinforces it with its changing fashions.' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 7)

33. Pierre Bourdieu illustrates how such visionary projects are perhaps harder to find in current times: 'We see there a typical example of the effect of shared belief which removes from discussion ideas which are perfectly worth discussing. One would need to analyse the work of the 'new intellectuals', which has created a climate favourable to the withdrawal of the state and, more broadly, to submission to the values of the economy. I'm thinking of what has been called the 'return of individualism', a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy which tends to destroy the philosophical foundations of the welfare state and in particular the notion of collective responsibility (towards industrial accidents, sickness or poverty) which has been a fundamental achievement of social (and sociological) thought. The return to the individual is also what makes it possible to 'blame the victim', who is entirely responsible for his or her own misfortune, and to preach the gospel of self-help, all of this being justified by the endlessly repeated need to reduce costs for companies.' (Bourdieu, 1998, 6–7)
34. As Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim say of current times: 'We live in an age in which the social order of the national state, class, ethnicity and the traditional family is in decline. The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding shaping human being who aspires to be the author or his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time. It is the fundamental cause behind changes in the family and global gender revolution in relation to work and politics. Any attempt to create a new sense of social cohesion has to start from the recognition that individualism, diversity and scepticism are written into Western culture.' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 22)
35. 'People who dream of community in the hope of finding a long-term security which they miss so painfully in their daily pursuits, and of liberating themselves from the irksome burden of ever new and always risky choices, will be sorely disappointed. Peace of mind, if they find it, will prove to be of the 'until further notice' kind. Rather than an island of 'natural understanding', a 'warm circle' where they can lay down their arms and stop fighting, the really existing community will feel like a besieged fortress being continuously bombarded by (often invisible) enemies outside while time and again being torn apart by discord within; ramparts and turrets will be the places where the seekers of communal warmth, homeliness and tranquillity will have to spend most of their time.' (Bauman, 2001, p. 14)
36. 'Explicitly sociology has a poor reputation in communes. Implicitly communes ask to be seen as an attempt to make nonsense of many of the ways in which sociology conventionally treats the social. They are experiments in social solidarity based upon hypotheses which are, from at least some sociological points of view, incredible. They assert the possibility of relationships between the self and the social which the normal terms of thought of sociology make it difficult for us even to think about. Not only do they refuse to be defined in terms of any of the familiar classifications of sociology but they pronounce those classifications useless artefacts of a self-estranged world – positive obstacles to understanding the human qualities of the social.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 7)
37. 'It can be said that modernity, which dawned with the subject's claim to self-empowerment, is redeeming its promise. As modernity gains ground, God, nature and the social system are being progressively replaced, in greater and lesser steps, by the individual, confused, astray, helpless and at a loss. With the abolition of the old co-ordinates a question arises that has been decried and acclaimed, derided, pronounced sacred, guilty and dead: the question of the individual.' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 8)

38. 'Many people join communes to find or realise their selves. People are embarking on such ventures all the time, of course. What is peculiar to the people who turn to communes for that end is that they have at once rejected socially given recipes for self-construction and understood that selves are socially constructed. They turn to social relations at the same time that they turn away from society. Although we found a great deal of criticism of self-centred-ness in communes... we found hardly anyone who subscribed to the naïve religion that sees self-realisation as a matter of 'doing your own thing'. Rather, there was as the prevailing mood in most communes an acute, sometimes inhibiting, awareness of the connectedness of personal autonomy with reciprocity in social relations.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 95–6)
39. 'their distance and dissociation from that society means that communes cannot achieve the status of an institution of society; their dependence on and contamination by that society mean that they cannot emerge as institutions of an alternative society. Unable to establish institutionalised relationships, their life is dominated by personal relationships.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 150)
40. 'Whilst different communes are founded for different purposes, most members join ventures at least in part because of their felt need for mutual support. By the very fact that they are interested in new styles of living they show that they are disaffected from certain aspects of life as it is conventionally led in the West, whether this is merely a dislike of living in a Wimpey-style house or a total opposition to the capitalist system as a whole. In so far as their view of the world is somewhat different from that displayed by the bulk of their fellow men, then the position that they occupy is inevitably a problematic one, in that their commitment to their view of the world is constantly threatened by the refusal of others to recognise it as valid. Like any minority group, their view of life is questioned by the majority, and with time the members of the minority will begin to doubt the validity of their particular ideas in the face of criticism, ridicule, incredulity and the questioning of representatives of what can be termed the cognitive majority, unless they can in some way insulate themselves, to an extent, from such pressures to change their ways of thinking. One strategy involves the creation of communes within which radicals or cognitive deviants may maintain the plausibility of their knowledge. It can be argued that only through the creation of a strong sense of brotherhood and solidarity such as is possible within a community of "believers" can the challenges of the cognitive antagonists be repelled.' (Rigby, 1974a, 6 –7)
41. As Paul Byrne says about the emergence of British New Social Movements in the 1960s: '...We have clear evidence that the "rules of the game" have changed to some extent in post-war British politics. New issues have been put on the political agenda, and new ways of mobilising people around those issues have been employed. This is not a zero-sum situation; traditional conventional politics have continued. It does, however, represent a new dimension in recent and contemporary British politics. Alongside the "normal" avenues of political participation – parties, protectional interest groups and even promotional pressure groups – we have a new form of political action, social movements. These movements have radical aims which question some of the core ideas associated with advanced industrialised societies. The motives of their supporters, and the ways in which they pursue these aims, seem to be significantly different from those found in "mainstream" politics' (Byrne, 1997, p. 9)
42. '... men began a rebellion against their pre-existing gender roles some while before women... men became wary of being drawn into marriage and meeting its economic demands. They retained an orientation towards economic success, but no longer believed they should work on behalf of others. In Ehrenreich's view, beatniks and hippies, who appeared to place in question the life of the hard-working, conventional male, further reinforced the changes already under way, for they scorned marriage, home and domestic responsibilities' (Giddens, 1992, p. 151)

43. A great illustration of the kinds of ideas about parenting that those involved in the counter culture of the 1960s and '70s might share, is given by Laurie Taylor as he writes about a conversation with his son, Matthew:
'I explained as patiently as I could that I had never wanted to be a conventional father. Neither had I been alone. Matthew's mother, despite the many sacrifices she had made while bringing Matthew up on her own, had been equally unready to adopt a traditional maternal role. But this was not, for either of us, solely a matter of biography: it was an ideological choice. Many of the parents we knew back in the sixties shared the view that to regard one's child as some sort of educational or occupational project was thoroughly reactionary. Children were to be left to create their own life, follow their own passions. If that meant that they ended up as a carpenter or an itinerant hippy, then so be it. Didn't Matthew have somewhat similar feelings about his own two small children? "No," he told me, he did not. He strongly believed that his own children needed security and unilateral love and he was determined to do his best to make sure that this was what they got. It was, he explained, quite the opposite of my approach to fatherhood. As far as he was concerned, my libertarian approach to fathering boiled down to little more than a rationalisation which gave me the licence to ignore his needs and thoughtlessly pursue my own.' (Taylor, 2003, p.10)
44. '... One of the advantages offered by communal living was the possibility of being freed from what was felt to be the onerous duty of constantly looking after children. The responsibility could be shifted from the shoulders of the isolated monogamous couple, and particularly those of the wife, to the commune members as a whole. This was felt to be an attraction by most female members, but particularly those who had visions of a definite life project.' (Rigby, 1974a, p. 272)
45. 'Such people personify the links that have developed, and the felt affinity, between the members of the communes movement and the movement for women's liberation, finding their common ground largely in their search to develop an alternative society in general, and in their critiques of the nuclear family in contemporary society particularly...'
(Rigby, 1974a, p. 263)
46. 'The problem of childcare in a nuclear family is that it is a relentless 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week responsibility which can isolate the child-caring parent from adult company and stimulation. If the burden can be shared, ideally it should cease to be a burden at all... The trouble with childcare in some communes seems to be that it treats looking after children as a chore. People don't expect to enjoy it... Also adults are usually more interested in each other than they are in children. So children in communes can easily get less rather than more adult attention than children in nuclear families... New habits have to be learned by all adult members of a household with a small child... If the other adults don't, or won't, learn to be more aware then someone has to watch the child constantly to protect him...'
(Communes Network magazine, June 1985)
47. '...the conflict between the traditionally taken-for-granted definition of the role of the woman in the home as the cook and the dish washer and the practice of living within a community that is seeking to institute full equality between the sexes with regard to work tasks within the group. This is something that can be felt particularly strongly by men, such as the male member of a commune in London who informed me that the biggest personal disadvantage of communal living was the time commitment to cooking and so on.' (Rigby, 1974a, p. 285)

48. 'Communes, then, represent a marginal relaxation of the facticity in which the ordinary family is engulfed. What happens when the constraints of legally enforced monogamy and the wage-work-housework division of roles is removed is not the creation of an alternative system of personal relationships but rather a making plain of the deeper obstacles to equality through which men and women in this society struggle to relate. Voluntarism, and a commitment to self-realisation, far from being a way of transcending these obstacles, turns out to be a way of realising them more acutely. The commonest worry of women in communes, so far as we could tell, was still "What shall I do if he leaves me?"' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 145)
49. 'The aim of communes to create situations in which people can be "more themselves" is in practice susceptible to exploitation mainly, but not exclusively, by men to their own advantage. Given that the terms of reference of male-female relationships have not changed that much, many kinds of "emotional problems" can be made systematically less burdensome by the values of communes – in effect, the male can exploit the female with a lighter conscience in a situation in which she poses as his equal without the strength of real equality to defend herself and in which he can maintain in the face of emotional havoc that "she wants it that way"... enormous pressure continues to be applied from without for children to have "normal" parents and to know who they are. This pressure is especially strong if the children are at school. Because the man is able to assert his freedom within the commune, these pressures tend to be met by the mother's succumbing to the demand that the social role be filled.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 145)
50. 'The largest single source of [emotional and mental] problems is probably also the largest and most socially challenging source of the demand for communes – young mothers unattached to men. These women have simple but irreducible demands to make of communes, for companionship, for social recognition of the value of their labour as mothers – or as non-mothers in the form of substitute mothering so they can work at other things – and for an opportunity for new intimate adult relationship... In a sense her demands do not amount to very much – mainly to the idea that there should be an opening-up of domestic relationships sufficient to prevent the obliteration of her life in that of her child. As a principle, this is a notion widely supported in the commune movement. In the actual life of communes, however, it is experienced as a problem – one much discussed in the pages of *Communes* and in most of the communes we visited. The problem is presented in a language of giving and taking...' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 136–7)
51. 'Femininity was, after all, some protection against this sort of treatment. Ironically, the initial effect of abandoning it as a mode of personal relationships seems to be to make the weaker sex still weaker. For all the extra housework contributed by men in communes – and it is not always all that much – the woman, especially the woman with a child, is not appreciably freed from dependence by the communal commitment to equality in male-female relationships' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 144)

52. 'Teach the young to be told what to do, or in other words, prepare them for life... Can we, especially in communes where we've got the responsibilities, face ourselves and say we are doing the best for our children sending them into the system at such an age and seeing them being formed and trained to become wimpy cashier, bank manager, solicitor and so on. Shaving their legs at twelve or becoming the real cool guy, man? This society that has developed in such a nasty way needs to train children to become part of it. It needs to bribe them with computer games, telly, video, cars, and central heating – hey I can't stop – fashion, discos, Dallas, Dynasty, alcohol... Especially in the cities where the lead in the exhaust fumes drives little children mad. Things, which once were nice to have become needs, addicting, people in order to carry on. People can't face themselves – alienation – mistrust – what the fuck is going on? But back to school, what does it teach? How many raindrops fell in Brazil in 1964, languages (they can learn them five times faster being in the country), that Washington never told a lie... How to be silent, how the teacher is always right even is s/he isn't, how to be better than the rest, how to wake up in the morning remembering the fear of a dream, how to fear.' (From Communes Network, Summer 1986)
53. In his US study, William Smith says that "[Secular] communal living was "hard on marriages"" (Zablocki, 1980, p. 120)... Only 27% of the couples in secular communes were together after a year of study, while 76% of the couples in religious communes were together' (Smith, 1999, p. 102)
54. 'Typically, pair relationships between adults both threaten and are threatened by the commune as a whole; the more stable they become, the more this is the case.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 150)
55. 'Herein lies an interesting and illustrative point. Some of those drawn to a communal lifestyle are seekers who have not found what they need and want in more traditional family forms. Seeking quality intimate relationship with more than one other adult could possibly deepen one's understanding of life and, therefore, bring more meaning to one's life. The communal environment can enhance one's journey to find meaning and once it is found, the communal structure is no longer needed to sustain the search. For one reason or another living in community frees one to search and find meaning. Once this occurs, many leave and return to form their own nuclear families' (Smith, 1999, p. 16)

Appendix Two

1. Original proposal - Life cycle narratives of British Children in British Intentional Communities. From intentional community to entrepreneurial activity? The proposed study will follow the life course of people raised in intentional communities in the UK between 1970–85. The primary aim of the research will be to assess the relationship between the creative individualism encouraged within communes and entrepreneurial initiative, flexible labour markets and non-standard working patterns. The timeframe adopted covers the ascendancy of neo-liberal political and economic doctrines within the UK and provides a temporal boundary for the research. The study will trace individuals' from primary socialisation, through the educational system to labour market entry. A final feature of the study will be to assess the influence of a commune upbringing upon the parenting strategies and repertoires of adults. The study will also make a contribution to sociological knowledge by recording part of the social history of a movement last subject to sociological analysis in the 1970s (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Kanter 1972, 1973; Rigby, 1974a, 1974b). The study will be undertaken using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques using a questionnaire and in-depth life history interviews. A snowballing technique will be used to identify recipients for the questionnaire. Individuals from four intentional communities in Scotland, Wales, the south of England and north of England will be interviewed. The intentional communities have been selected to provide data on different regional/national experiences unfolding within the overall climate of political, economic and ideological change associated with the rise of neo-liberalism. Key Research Questions: What is the relationship between the identities and careers of commune-raised individuals? In what ways are these identities shaped by tensions between an innovative primary socialisation and exposure to formal educational provision? To what extent are these tensions continued, refined or absolved by entry into the labour market? What forms of identity innovation do commune-raised individuals in this process undertake? Do these innovations equip this group to deal with non-standard work patterns and entrepreneurial demands? (From Lucy Rhoades ESRC proposal 1999)
2. Reading. I read literature about communes, new social movements, counter culture; libertarianism and social change in the UK in the 60s and 70s; family, childhood, changing forms of intimacy and relationship; identity, individualism, power and relational approaches to understanding identity; and methodology including autobiographical methods and memory work; feminist ethnography and voice focused research; family and childhood research methods, and collective biography. Key texts about communes, new social movements, counter-culture and social change in the 60s and 70s: Abrams & McCulloch (1976); Kanter (1972, 1973); Rigby (1974a, 1974b); Byrne (1997); Scott (1990); Laran, Johnston & Gusfield (Eds) (1994); Roszak (1969); Rothschild & Berns Wolf (1976), Davies (1975). Other theoretical texts which were important: Giddens (1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2001); Beck-Gernsheim (2002); Butler (1997); Stacey (1996); Blakeslee, Lewis & Wallerstein (2002); Gittens (1985); Laslett (Ed) (1982); Boocock & Scott (2005); Muncie, Wetherell, Langan, Dallos & Cochrane (Eds) (1993); Jenks (1996).
3. 'Although some aspects of family experience are deliberately hidden from researchers, other aspects of family reality are hidden simply because of their apparent mundane-ness. Routine, repetitive aspects of family roles and relationships can be so much a part of taken for granted reality that they are not considered important by participants.' (Daly, in Gilgun, Daly & Handel, 1992, p. 5)
4. 'For my parents and their friends, the idea at the heart of the counterculture was simple: rejection. Rejection of the Establishment's war, its social mores, its institutions, its hang-ups, its corruption and its pantsuits. The counterculture was a social phenomenon, not a political one. There was no hippy manifesto and, unless you count Woodstock, no-one ever called a summit meeting... Their form of social protest was non-participation...' (Cain, 1999, p. 22)

5. 'There is just no way that you can escape being influenced by a childhood designed specifically to influence you. We were raised in a culture intended to teach us to challenge everything everybody else was telling us – to subvert the dominant paradigm. No matter that this sentiment has more currency as a bumper sticker than as a core cultural value of the nineties. You can take the girl out of the counterculture, but you can't take the counterculture out of the girl.' (Cain, 1999, foreword, p. 27)
6. 'Feminists seek a methodology that will do the work of 'excavation' shifting the focus of standard practice from men's concerns in order to reveal the locations and perspectives of (all) women. The aim of much feminist research has been to 'bring women in,' that is to find what has been ignored, censored and suppressed...' (DeVault, 1996, p. 32)
7. 'Schutz's (1971) distinction between first and second order constructs; whereas first order constructs are rooted in the everyday language of families, second order constructs arise from the process of analytic induction. The challenge for qualitative family researchers when inducing these constructs is to preserve the participants' family meanings while at the same time monitoring the infusion of their own family and professional meanings. This may be particularly challenging when researchers have some prior acquaintance with the family issue. Although a case may be made that this circumstance increases theoretical sensitivity to the issue, it may also blind researchers to significant aspects of informants' experiences.' (Daly, in Gilgun, Daly & Handel, 1992, p. 9)
8. 'By locating memory in the spaces of intimacy, Bachelard allows us to conceive of subjectivity as formed around the coincidence, not the polarisation, of being and becoming. For the daydream offers both a connection to the ordinary intimate spaces of the present, and the ability to exist in the 'spaces of elsewhere,' of displacement, outside the constraints of temporal locatedness: the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity... a limitless world' (Ibid, p. 183–5). Far from propelling us towards that stilled time of epic memory and the achievement of unified subjectivity, however, this form of temporal infinity is based around the endless possibilities for subjective becoming that the intensification of the intimate environment can provide, the intensity of a being evolving in a vast perspective of intimate immensity' (Ibid, p. 193). Here, then in the space of intimate memory, we can find a connection between the intensity of the familiar, the personal, the subjective – of corporeal and fragmented being – and the immensity of becoming. This is a different sort of relationality borne from the intensity of domestic space, and forming the subjective from the connection to environment...' (Swanson, in Radstone, 2000, p. 121–122)
9. '...perspective is highly complex, there is no easy invocation of "subjectivity" but rather the exploration of the sometimes subtle and sometimes gross changes in perspective over time including those that take place between the generations as well as writing the life of a single auto-biographer. Linked with this is the way in which a "self" is construed and explored as something much more than "individual", unique in one sense, but also closely articulating with the lives of others, an articulation that can remain every bit as important after these others die... This in turn raises questions concerning the nature of "authorship"; a single hand writes, but the self who inscribes, who is, is herself enmeshed with other lives which give hers the meaning it has. And it is not just "the author" who takes on an ontologically shaky character in these autobiographies, for so too do "selves" in general. That is, these autobiographical selves are both whole or struggling to become so and deeply and irresolvably fractured.' (Stanley, 1992, p. 14)

10. 'I am taking it that love, resistance, acceptance and rejection are connections of belonging, deciding whether to belong and of being given or refused permission to belong. I am focusing on just some aspects of these feelings. Thus, love wants to belong with an other or others, or with a particular social group. In contrast, resistance is not wanting to belong with an other or others, or with a particular social group. These relationships may not be reciprocal. Thus love is also wanting other or others to belong with oneself or with one's group. Resistance is its opposite. Acceptance is the result of some degree of love by others: being allowed to belong with an other or others. Rejection is the result of resistance on the part of others: not being allowed to belong with an other or others. Again, feelings may not be reciprocal. Acceptance is also allowing an other or others to belong with oneself or one's group' (Griffiths, 1995, p. 86).
11. 'We have shown through our own stories that subjectification is necessarily an ambivalent project. One must submit in extraordinary ways in order to gain mastery. Yet mastery need not bind us to the very terms and conditions of our subjection. The idea and the ideal of autonomy, which our theorizing recognizes as fictional, is nevertheless the conceptual and practical linchpin of the appropriate(d) subject. The subject submits to the fictions of the self and gains mastery through them; and that mastery – of language, of the body – provides the conditions of possibility for inventing something new, of seeing afresh, of creatively moving beyond the already known.' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 33)
12. 'By taking oneself and one's own ongoing experiences as the data, in autoethnography the gap between memories and the interpretive analytic work of research is closed. According to autoethnography the richness, subtlety and complexity of the researcher's own embodied thinking and being in the world can be told, brought to the surface of memory and language. In this work it is assumed that the detail of how the researcher is discursively constituted will give insights into how the researcher, like others, is made human in particular ways through their engagement in the social world.' (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 3)

Appendix Three

Material supplied to participants before interview.

Introductory letter:

Hi there,

My name is Lucy and I spent some of my childhood living communally. I am looking forward to meeting up with you very much, to sharing and discussing our experiences of communal childhood, and I thank you very much for being willing to take part.

I am providing you with written material to stimulate you to think about your own experience in relation to my research and personal interests, and to give you a chance to see what you think about my experience and what I've made of it, and to jog your memory or begin a process of mutual remembering and discussion with you about childhoods in communal settings. I am particularly interested in areas where your experience, thoughts, opinions and memories are different from mine, as I am very aware of how my own narrow view and experience may be different from yours and would value your input about how your life and childhood might have been different from mine or where you disagree with my take on things. Of course I am also interested in what you identify with in my concerns and my story. I am also very interested in things I have not thought about but that you are keen to talk about or think are important or have been issues for you. If there are things you believe are important to say about your experience of being a child in a commune or your life since then I'd be very keen to include them in our discussions.

The first piece of writing here is quite large! It's an attempt to think about the process of this research, what I have read and thought about, and experiential autobiographical material about myself as I untangle my own family life and experience of communal life. I am attempting to be as disclosed about myself, my life and my slant on things as I can manage so it seems useful to give you an idea of my life before we meet and begin discussing yours, and your thoughts on mine. Feel free to read as much or as little of this as you wish to, I am aware that you are giving me your time!

The second is a list of potential questions I would like to ask you. I am hoping providing these in advance will give you a chance to think carefully about which questions you're interested in discussing, which you're not interested in or would rather not discuss. At interview I will be asking you to choose which questions we cover in order to allow you to have as much choice as possible in this process. If there are other questions you'd like to add to the list that you think might be useful to talk about please feel free to suggest them. It would be very helpful if you could make sure you read through this list and have a think about this before we meet.

One other thing to mention is confidentiality. This work will be published and in the public domain. Previous studies of communes have sometimes caused difficulties for people who have volunteered to interview (with family members, friends or communities). I will change your name and the name of your community in the text but I will also be writing a brief description of your community and of you that may mean that you will be recognisable to some. It is worth thinking about this in advance of meeting with me and getting into tape-recorded discussions. Please be aware that at any stage in our discussions if you mention something you feel you do not want to be disclosed I am very willing to make a note that this information is not free to be used in the research.

Many thanks,

Lucy Rhoades

Commune Girls – Growing up in Utopia?

Introducing the project and myself...

As I approach this research I am personally interested in deconstructing the 'mis-fit' between my sense of self, my identity, my subjectivity and those of my peers who had had more mainstream or conventional lifestyles growing up. Being raised in an Intentional Community (Commune!) I was painfully aware of the 'interface' between the mainstream and myself as I grew up. My positioning has been a strange mixture - in some ways privileged; white, with access to the social and cultural capital of the middle classes, educated, western; but still having a 'resistant' identity as a 'parent culture,' with different political (and personal) values and moral codes than the mainstream.

I was in some ways raised to be problematic, certainly to be non-conformist, to go against the grain of the status quo. I have fitted uncomfortably and somewhat sceptically into the 'performance' of both mainstream and counter-cultural identities.

As Patricia Waugh says: 'For those marginalised by the dominant culture, a sense of identity as constructed through impersonal and social relations of power (rather than a sense of identity as the reflection of an inner 'essence') has been a major aspect of their self-concept long before post-structuralists and postmodernists began to assemble their cultural manifestos' (Waugh, 1989, p. 3).

I am interested in how my way of inhabiting my self (as a child and later as an adult) has sometimes caused affront to powerful figures in my life – teachers and bosses and lovers, friends and their families. This affront was particularly acute, I think, because I had access to privilege and at least in some ways, critiqued it. I was challenging of gender norms and identities and disruptive of norms about what children should be like when I was young. I am interested in how my 'outsiders' perspective on mainstream cultural myths and ideals and performative identities (ways of being in the world) distanced me from the possibility of adopting those ideals and identities in an unselfconscious way.

I remember feeling as a teenager that I did not choose to 'drop out,' I could never really get in. I realised my suspicion toward 'normal' life was something I had learned as much from my parents rejection of it as from my experience and rejection of it, but my own experience of marginalisation and power negotiation still made it look ugly. As a youngster the myth of 'normalcy' was as exotic to me as my lifestyle in a commune seemed to others. I wondered about the process through which I learnt to 'see through' hegemonic myths (or as I would have said then recognise how messed up the mainstream way of life was) and about the formation of an identity which was questioning of myths and ways of being my peers didn't even notice they were performing, to them it was 'natural.'

My 'outsider' position was unusual because it seemed to me it was not a rebellion against my parents (or my parent culture) but a continuation of their ideals, yet remained transgressive. I looked at mainstream life as a strange performance, I was a spectator interacting from the fringes, but I was, of course, also 'inside' in many ways really, and have been even more so after leaving the commune. That said I have still had another 'identity' to live up to, that of the 'commune kid.'

My parents' generation of communards rejected the mainstream after living conventionally in their families of origin. To my parents (at least when they were younger) conventional lifestyles were uncomfortable, unsupportable, immoral and dull. But I think we 'commune kids' approached the mainstream from somewhere else, less 'outside' than our parents' aspirations, but more 'outside' than most white middle class kids. I have had mixed feelings about mainstream life – particularly when I was punished or rejected by it, when I felt the power of stereotype or of authority assert itself upon me, rejecting or refusing to recognise or validate my 'difference.'

But the negotiation of power and the forging of subjectivity is more complex than the inside/outside idea of resistance my parents lived by back in the 1970's, and the lived experience of commune raised people bears testament to this. I was left constantly inquisitive (and slightly bemused) about people who simply accept the status quo and know how to play the mainstream game successfully without feeling their integrity compromised, who sit comfortably inside their positioning and their power, whose integrity is not challenged by the adoption of mainstream roles or identities. Maybe such people are imaginary, and my 'outsider' position is merely psychic posturing.

As Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet says of a respondent in one of her 'life-story' research projects; 'As for Sophie's key phrase, 'I have always been outside the norm. It is my fate, but I claim it,' it expresses a conflict, which paradoxically reveals, beyond defiance, a shutting up in another closed system of norms: marginality' (Chanfrault-Duchet in Cosslet, Lury & Summerfield, 2000, p. 68).

I was raised with an acute awareness of power, inequality and injustice and experienced a strong sense of marginalisation. At school it was us commune kids, the gypsies, ethnic minorities and the very poor, all pushed to the sidelines, mistrusted, misunderstood, taken the piss out of. I was often marked out as weird and different in a similar way to people with other, less privileged markers – all of us 'had fleas.' I often identified with other 'outsiders' but was mistrusted by them for my markers of privilege. In purely material terms a rejection of materialism and a lack of money meant I did not have the consumer savvy or products to be one of the gang with other middle class peers at school.

As a child I was in some ways encouraged to less dependency, less subordination, at home. But to meet the world, come into the world, to leave home, has involved a re-working of the self to survive. It is a thin line to walk, this 're-making' this 'fitting in', and falling off the line seems to me to hold also possibilities of living without any sense of integrity or cohesion and losing the connection with my desires, my feelings, my values, of falling into ambivalence.

My 'commune kid' identity becomes destabilised when attempting to fit in with mainstream life, the most challenging things I have done have been trying to be inside very mainstream institutions or in social relationship with very mainstream people. I go 'out of bounds' when doing what others often wear as available conformist or mainstream identities in a totally unconscious way. But I have consistently chosen to not stay exclusively within counter-culture, I am not convinced of wanting to, or being able to, stay 'outside' and have had to deal with representing myself, accounting for myself and conducting myself in ways which are acceptable and recognisable 'inside.'

'Communes are... a species of association and a species of encounter' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 25)'demonstration projects for a gentle revolution of the individual.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 6)

These issues of experimental relationship, of how each 'encounter' in relationship is experienced and negotiated are interesting to me. The (comparatively) acute awareness of negotiations of power in the commune environment - issues to do with age, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity and materialism in particular – gave rise to a particular experience of self within and outside the commune environment. One connected with critique of the mainstream as corrupt.

'If a distraught mother asks her son or daughter, "Why, in God's name, are you joining this commune?" she might get the answer: "Oh I dunno, I feel like it." Not much to go on. Mother would be more satisfied, though more appalled, at the prospect of a wasted education, if son or daughter were an articulate Ivy-League drop-out who replied: "Philip Slater says we need a new society stressing co-operation rather than competition, and Paul Goodman shows the need for community as a decentralised alternative to our inefficient, centralised mass society, and just about all the sociologists show that the nuclear family is a complete mess, mother!" The more articulate answer can be extended virtually without limit. As impressive as the conscious reasons for communal living may be, however, we propose to look instead at an important motivating feature of which son or daughter may be totally unaware: the need for a set of categories in terms of which a coherent reality can be constituted... If people cease to share the same determinants of choice (we hesitate to use the term "values" because values are only one part of a comprehensive categorical scheme), then they find it more difficult to understand one another's choices. As a result one not only fails to see the sense behind the actions of others (history run amok), but further, one fails to get the reinforcement for the constellations of categories, reasons, and values with which one is valiantly though privately trying to make sense of one's own experience.' (Teselle, 1972, p. 83–86)

This 'gap' between the whole framing of life between (the 'adult' generation of) communards and their parents (our grandparents) is something it seems to me that I, and perhaps other commune-raised people also, face when coming into more mainstream or conventional lifestyles or coming

into contact with people who do not share similar ways of 'framing' which include not only 'values' but lived experience, and learnt disposition, and find it difficult to 'explain.'

My mother was certainly seeking a kind of family by joining a commune, but was also rejecting her family of origin. She felt she had been 'damaged' by the authoritarian hierarchy and rigid roles and expectations of her family of origin, and wanted something better for herself and for her kids, she tried to stand between me and the 'damage' that people like her parents might inflict upon me. It was a strange and conflicting message for me, my mother's rejection of and rebellion against her own family, yet her strong desire for family and her expectation and desire for family.

In my experience of commune life there was a lack of pressure towards traditional 'life-goals', toward 'achievement' or 'career' or 'attainment of material wealth' people were trying to steer their lives away from what they have been taught are the 'ills' of competitive individualism and consumerism and towards the establishment of strong relationships and collectivity as a 'goal'.

How I try to navigate my future with this particular heritage inevitably raises questions about how 'the family' fits into both my experience of commune life and my adult life. Being 30 at the time of this research beginning I am particularly interested in thinking about whether I want children, a family, and if so how? In a commune? In a nuclear family?

The lasting impression I got from my mother about life for her in nuclear set-ups, was a picture of loneliness and lack of intimacy and support, and this was not just true of her first marriage to my father, but also of her family of origin.

This impassioned piece of writing by one female commune member in 'Communes Network' in 1986 shows the intersection of discourses of radical change and communards desire for 'the best' for children:

"Teach the young to be told what to do, or in other words, prepare them for life... School break – playground – children bursting with energy, anger and frustration, built up during the lesson. Beating each other, tearing the girls' hair, shouting at each other and before going to sleep frightened. Sometimes I stop and look and it makes me so sad. On the other side I've seen de-schooled children, running around and laughing and being happy. Being what they are and standing up for themselves; natural and caring, helping and learning if they feel like it or just saying 'I'm bored' like everyone else. Can we, especially in communes where we've got the responsibilities, face ourselves and say we are doing the best for our children sending them into the system at such age and seeing them being formed and trained to become wimpy cashier, bank manager, solicitor and so on. Shaving their legs at twelve or becoming the real cool guy, man? This society which has developed in such a nasty way needs to train children to become part of it. It needs to bribe them with computer games, telly, video, cars, central heating - hey I can't stop - fashion, disco's, Dallas, Dynasty, alcohol... Especially in the cities where the lead in the exhaust fumes drives little children mad. Things which once were nice to have have become needs, addicting people in order to carry on. People can't face themselves – alienation – mistrust – what the fuck is going on? But back to school, what does it teach? How many raindrops fell in Brazil in 1964, Languages (they can learn them five times faster being in the country), that Washington never told a lie...How to be silent, how the teacher is always right even is s/he isn't, how to be better than the rest, how to wake up in the morning remembering the fear of a dream, how to fear." (From 'Communes Network' Summer, 1986)

As Phillip Abrams and Andrew McCulloch said in their research about communes in the seventies: 'Clearly the pursuit of this kind of freedom [for parents/adults], if it is to be coupled with the more positive freedom envisaged for children, calls for delicate, elaborate and self-conscious organisation of the relationships between children and adults in the commune as a whole. It is this sort of organisation which the constant turnover of membership of most communes and the ideological objection of many commune members to anything resembling deliberate social organisation make extraordinarily difficult. What tends to happen in practice is that, since the self-determination of the adults is after all the main reason for the existence of the commune, and since adults are, as in ordinary families, rather more powerful than children, a balance is struck between the respective freedoms of the child and the adult in which in most cases the parent, especially the male parent, does manage to 'spread the load' of responsibility around somewhat, while quite often the life of

the child is haphazard at best and manifestly insecure at worst.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 148)

Much of the research I've read about communes seems rather cynical about them 'working' particularly for children. But when looking at attempts like communal living, it seems to me really important to remember that this was a movement of hope and conviction, a rebellion against the de-humanising aspects of modern life, a project undertaken both for the sake of parents and by them 'on behalf' of their children.

'In the communes we studied closely, our attention was often drawn in an obviously deliberate way to the merits of communal child-rearing: "You can see what a good place this is for kids." But what we tended to see actually was a remarkable gap between the promise and the practice. There was, to begin with, an impressive consensus about what communes have to offer children: freedom from over-dependence on one or two adults; a wide range of others, both adults and peers, with whom to relate and from whom to learn; a broad-based, non-possessive security – all this adding up to a much greater and more positive opportunity for a child to form a personality of its own.' (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976: p. 147).

Some of the older generation whom I have spoken with about this research project are slightly nervous about their children speaking up about what they think of their communal upbringing. I am sure that the questions (and sometimes accusations) of their children have brought many of their choices into question. I am also sure that it is part of our journey to try to understand our parents experience and choices.

My father often said as I grew up that he didn't want to have children, that he was aware that having children 'tied you into the system' – that freedom to follow your own star became subsumed under the demands of respectability and economic necessity (as well as sheer hard work) that childrearing entailed. My mum had a feminist vision of making children the centre of society, of creating an environment in which social care was top priority, and children were central to that vision. But she, like my father, was also seeking a new identity, for her as a woman, which hadn't been 'road-tested' by any previous generation yet.

My parents and those of other communards were of course not alone in holding such desires or beliefs about family, Laurie Taylor (of my parents generation and ilk) writes about a conversation with his son Matthew: 'I explained as patiently as I could that I had never wanted to be a conventional father. Neither had I been alone. Matthew's mother, despite the many sacrifices she had made while bringing Matthew up on her own, had been equally unready to adopt a traditional maternal role. But this was not, for either of us, solely a matter of biography: it was an ideological choice. Many of the parents we knew back in the sixties shared the view that to regard one's child as some sort of educational or occupational project was thoroughly reactionary. Children were to be left to create their own life, follow their own passions. If that meant that they ended up as a carpenter or an itinerant hippie, then so be it. Didn't Matthew have somewhat similar feelings about his own two small children? No, he told me, he did not. He strongly believed that his own children needed security and unilateral love and he was determined to do his best to make sure that this was what they got. It was, he explained, quite the opposite of my approach to fatherhood. As far as he was concerned, my libertarian approach to fathering boiled down to little more than a rationalisation which gave me the license to ignore his needs and thoughtlessly pursue my own.' (Taylor, 2003, p.10)

This attempt at 'democracy' and giving children the right to 'make their own decisions and be respected' was in denial of the very real power relationship between parents and children, and indeed the 'lesser' power of children in relation to the rest of the adult world, and didn't take into account that as 'unformed' and forming people, children may well come across decisions or situations they don't know how to handle. As a child I remember sometimes feeling too scared, or confused, or simply 'in' my feelings to identify, assert or explain my needs as an adult might do. It often really needed an adult, with the power and skill of an adult, to 'plead my case' and leaving me with the responsibility of trying to do this, while it did teach me a lot about responsibility and self-assertion in some ways, also meant that I had a lot on my plate to cope with and that my needs were sometimes passed over or ignored by more powerful players in the family or community, a situation very far from 'democratic.' Some of the social contexts that I faced (both the 'blended' family of my father's household and the commune and then step-parent

relationships of my mother's household) were quite complex, and these kinds of situation are ones which the adults involved found difficult to negotiate, let alone a child.

I have wondered, too, did the context of commune life leave parents too self-absorbed or busy to parent us? Did the attempts to be 'non-authoritarian' leave us too alone, as less powerful and more vulnerable and less skilled people, in the 'lion's den' of relationships which communes often were..?

'No boundaries, no guidance, no protection. Nothing was sacred. And yet, as a kid, everyone envied me my mother. She let me do anything I wanted.' Elizabeth Shu in an American anthology of writing about girlhoods in the counterculture – (Cain, 1999, p57)

One way of looking at this attempt to avoid the 'smothering' or dominating of children by their parents, giving kids the freedom to 'develop' on their own, was that adults were simply failing to recognise that children seem to need stable dependable relations and may not be able to cope with too wide an array of relationships and still feel safe or genuinely intimate.

In my commune my experience was of forming close bonds and affectionate relationships, of gaining quite a lot from other adults in the community, but my key focus was still my mother, my level of intimacy with her far exceeded my relationship with anyone else at my community. Indeed my relationship with my (by the time we were in the commune, geographically removed) father was a more key focus for me for my feelings of intimacy than any other adult who did live with me at the community other than my mother, including her new partner there.

'It was the possibility of freeing the child from the hazards of personality absorption rooted in the conventional domestic love nexus that was most emphasised when the question of children in communes was discussed: "Children can relate to more people, reducing the hideous friction of the nuclear family prison;" "Excessive dependence on the mother and with it the liability of fixation is diminished in a commune;" "The effect of any one adult and therefore the damage any one adult can do a child is much less;" "In a commune kids benefit from all the vibes of all the other people; they are likely to be more open-minded than if brought up in a bi-parental system;" "Children can relate to several different adults on a deep level, but with less smothering emotional involvement." (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p.147)

Some evasion of the suffocating quality of nuclear family relationships (if they are suffocating?) might be possible through communal living, certainly my experience was that it was easier to 'get away from' my mother's unhappiness or demands in a commune, by literally physically not being around her. When we left and went back into a nuclear scenario my mother was much more focused on me than in the commune when there were plenty of other adults around to interact with (although I am not sure if she felt her 'needs' were any better met in a communal context than in a nuclear set up, and certainly she had much the same level of domestic work on her plate, if not more because the communal house was so large and it's upkeep such a big job, and this was on top of maintaining a smaller 'family unit' much as she would have maintained a smaller 'family' home).

Certainly for me, my 'fixation' on my mother and my bond with her meant that I was as liable to be 'damaged' by her within communal life as anywhere else, it seems to me a this powerful quality of having the power to so affect children is part of the parent-child relationship rather than of the context that relationship takes place within. It seems to me that this may be a quality of the way that children relate to their parents (or perhaps principal caregivers) that lends them enormous power with the child, the evasion of that power seems to me almost impossible.

My mother, like many women of her generation (and mine), didn't want to become her mother, isolated, and overworked, with no identity other than 'mother.' She wanted to create an environment where she would be supported in raising kids, but also free to be a person in her own right, away from the role of mother. She believed that living in an intentional community rather than a nuclear family might offer her that. Both my parents were clearly very unhappy in their marriage to each other.

The whole idea that family is not fulfilling, that experience of 'real' or fulfilling relationship lies outside the bounds of the nuclear family experience is interesting in itself. My understanding was that my mother had seen her own parents as miserable within the confines of such a set up

(particularly her mother who was quite depressed), and had been unhappy in her family of origin as a child. But from what I could gather my father certainly ended up the more suspicious of 'losing his freedom' of the two of my parents.

The following was written by an American women who spent her childhood in a commune, and sums up one version of an ideal of more flexible family relationships: 'I come from two "failed marriages." But with each separation and subsequent addition, those who cherish me grew in number. And my love for my original parents did not diminish. I had ample for all – and so do not believe affection is finite, because that has never been my experience. [I was] the child who would climb into anyone's lap, even if only just introduced, because a friend is a friend regardless of how long the acquaintance. Nothing lasts forever. Each friendship, each relationship, must change, flow through it's cycles, transform endlessly into new gifts, new treasures. If we resist this movement, the relationship shatters, like ice in the moving tide. But if we open to re-creation, then we become stronger with each turn.' *River Light* in (Cain, 1999, p.154/5)

"The problem of child care in a nuclear family is that it is a relentless 24 hour a day 7 day a week responsibility which can isolate the child-caring parent from adult company and stimulation. If the burden can be shared, ideally it should cease to be a burden at all... The trouble with childcare in some communes seems to be that it treats looking after children as a chore. People don't expect to enjoy it... Also adults are usually more interested in each other than they are in children. So children in communes can easily get less rather than more adult attention than children in nuclear families... New habits have to be learned by all adult members of a household with a small child... If the other adults don't, or won't, learn to be more aware then someone has to watch the child constantly to protect him..." Female Commune member in *Communes network* magazine, June 1985

I certainly picked up the message that 'good times' are not times spent with children from somewhere. My father's attitude was that getting embroiled with providing for a family ruined his chance of being the person he wanted to be or achieving his potential as an artist. I watched my mother struggle with parenting two kids on her own, often unhappy and rarely supported or engaged with very fully by her partners, and finding it a strain to meet the demands – economic and emotional – of raising children. I, like many of my peers, am deeply ambivalent about taking on parenting a child, both about my ability to perform the task adequately and how much enjoyment I might get out of doing it. I am fascinated by cohesive nuclear families and how they work (or don't work). This notion of 'believing' in 'family' as a stable set of relationships and a basis for a lifestyle is both attractive and a source of doubt for me.

In 'Wild Child' Suzanne Cody writes a letter to her newborn daughter about how she will learn from the 'mistakes' of her 'counter-cultural' childhood: '[I, Isabel's mama, do solemnly swear:] to let you be a child for your entire childhood. When I turned eleven, your grandpa told me I could leave home whenever I wanted – eleven was old enough to take care of myself. Or, if I wasn't going to leave, I could at least participate in the family as a fully functioning adult. When Grampa had his first free-love affairs that we knew about, he and Nonny talked about it with me – and I was about twelve. I put Nonny and your aunt and uncle upstairs in Nonny's bedroom to watch TV and sat downstairs alone waiting for Grampa to come home from a self-abusive drunken spree to have it out with him.' '[I, Isabel's mama, do solemnly swear:] ... not to leave pot brownies where you might get into them. ...not to ever send you blithely off to school dressed like an extra from 'Hair.'" I solemnly swear that you will always feel safe around the people I bring into our lives – and if you don't, that you will feel able to tell me. One of Nonny and Grampa's friends in particular made me distinctly nervous. If he dropped by when I was alone, he would stick around for a while to chat. Nothing ever happened, but I do remember standing at the kitchen sink one afternoon taking a very long time to wash a carving knife as he lingered and asked me questions about my boyfriends – who they were, what I did with them. I was eleven and hadn't really got around to boyfriends yet (though it wouldn't be long). I just kept washing that knife over and over, rubbing the sponge along the blade as if I were meticulously removing every possible invisible particle of food. One clean knife. We live like this [with Suzanne not working] so I can be home for you, with you, to make sure, absolutely sure that you do have the really important things. When you cry, I am the one who picks you up right away. When you are hungry, you have the comfort of my breast. When you are tired, I am the one who rocks you to

sleep. I know the games and the blanket and the toy you like. I have witnessed every developmental breakthrough and have cheered you on. I want you to feel safe and stable and secure in the knowledge that I am here for you, that I will always be here for you and it doesn't matter how our life looks from the outside. Here, on the inside, things are as they should be. You can depend on me, okay? Okay.' (Cain, 1999, p. 169–70).

In my adult life (from my twenties onward) I have often chosen partners from intact or cohesive nuclear families and still have a deep longing for a sense of belonging in a 'family' which is a less fragmented, complicated and conflicted place to be than mine can sometimes be. But I have thought a lot about my own childhood spent communally, and wondered if it might be an option to try for myself if I did choose to have children.

For me (and I am very sure my sister too, perhaps even more so because she was so little at age two) it was difficult when my parent's marriage ended, despite the fact that they had been so obviously often unhappy together. I suddenly had a lot on my plate, losing my Dad and grandparents (who lived next door to our previous family home and I was very close to) and the familiarity of my home and adjusting to moving to the commune which was not easy because it was so very different from what I was used to. Initially there were many people around who I had to get to know and learn how to handle. Everything was suddenly new and strange. I felt things had to be negotiated with care, there was a lot of fear of being rejected or of overburdening my already overburdened parents. The environment of communal life was a new landscape to negotiate, an adult and complex one, which was added to the new complex web of relations between my parents and their new partners, my sister and I.

I had to learn how to run with the 'wild' and very self-contained (and separate from the adults) crowd of kids at the community, to succeed at being a 'commune kid.' This meant being rougher and tougher than I had been used to, more of a 'tom boy.' Both my parents had new partners on the scene and I was having to get used to a schedule (and mentality) which included two homes (very different from each other) rather than one. There were issues to do with time and spending it in different places which meant that both relationships with parents and with peer group friendships and other interests were a bit stretched for time sometimes. I really enjoyed many things about commune life, but it took a while to adjust.

My sister was 2 years old when we arrived at the commune. It seemed to me she really suffered a lot from the sheer size of the community, the wandering around, looking for mum, and the fact that she was too little to easily survive the 'games' of the kids gang, many of whom were older, and where the currency was size and strength and daring. It was not necessarily the case at the commune that a wandering toddler like my sister would be picked up and comforted by adults around, some of the adults were not particularly 'into' kids and did not see their role within the community as including parenting other people's brats, and the sheer size of the house (a massive old 'stately home' with many out-building and nearly twenty acres of land) could be quite overwhelming to a small child.

I was very concerned to protect my parents from witnessing my difficult feelings and to be a confidant to their pain, which as the eldest I fairly quickly became to my mother and to some extent my father. I was certainly protective of him and very worried about threatening his happiness with his new partner (or being disapproved of by her and getting 'ousted'). I think I believed that because it seemed to me that everyone expected me to be able to cope that I had to, and I was scared that if I didn't 'behave' and had tantrums more bad things might happen, that the whole of our lives might fall apart again, that I might be rejected if I wasn't well behaved, or that my parents might fall apart if they thought I was unhappy. I became terribly concerned with being 'well behaved' in this way, in terms of protecting my parents. Partly to not cause them any extra hassle, but also from a judgemental, moral stance, as I saw it my parents had behaved badly and had hurt each other (and me and my sister) terribly and I became determined to be better behaved than they. I also felt it might have been my fault that everything had gone wrong and thought I'd better be good from now on whatever happened, to not provoke anything awful happening again. There were many models to live up to - pressures to live up to a certain kind of 'commune kid' model of being to gain approval and acceptance at the commune, to live up to being 'good' at my father's house, and being 'good' at school or at friends houses where their parents were more mainstream. There were complex sets of expectations to live up to as I saw it.

Post break-up working co-operatively with each other was difficult for my parents it seemed to me. Tensions remained unresolved. There wasn't as much time or energy for my sister and myself as there had been previously from either of my parents and that there were a lot of new pressures on the situation, so that despite people's best intentions it seemed to me that my sister and I still lost out compared to what we had been used to. After some initial fuss about this change to my life that didn't make anyone change things back to how I wanted them, I gave up on making a fuss about it.

I took up a protective stance towards mum and dad, who were both in so much pain. I remember so many scenes of tears when one of my parents would just start crying and I would be wild with the desire to comfort them and terrified that things were so bad for them, and so lacking in solidity for me I guess. I didn't want to burden them with showing them my pain, I wanted them to be happy, but inside I became terribly anxious. I didn't want to piss off my step-mum or my mother's new boyfriend, (who lived at our commune and soon moved in to our 'unit' or family space there) in case they left and this made mum and dad unhappier. I thought if it might have been my fault that mum and dad split up it could easily be my fault again if those relationships failed too. I started to hide my feelings because I thought they were dangerous to show, I felt I was a threat, that I was dangerous, that I could damage relationships all too easily. At the same time I felt very disregarded.

I became a rather serious child with a lot on her shoulders, unsure where to turn when I needed help or support, full of hurt and anger that I daren't show to my (I now thought) fragile parents. I felt constantly in danger of further loss and started to tread very carefully, losing my childish ability to express how I felt without censorship. Meanwhile the adults were all expressing their feelings right left and centre, there were huge screaming rows when my parents met up, and lots of grief when they were apart.

The community's attitude to kids varied from parent to parent, person to person, there was a generalised idea about getting the 'kids' to take some responsibility in terms of chores and about aiming for some inclusion of kids in the community's decision-making processes. But the main decisions were thrashed out at the 'Friday night meeting' and my memory is that although kids weren't banned from inclusion, they were very rarely present. I am not sure if this was because they were not considered to be old enough to take part, or whether it was just because the kids thought it was boring and preferred to keep out of it or both.

I remember there was quite a strong connection between the 'status' of kids and the 'status' of their parents, although this did not create dissention between the kids, the ones with more powerful parents seemed much more confident about themselves and their position in the community. There was a strong hierarchy among the kids to do with age, and to be popular it was important to be prepared to take risks by climbing the roof and riding bikes over ramps, climbing about the hay-loft or getting into the disused air raid shelter and making things explode.

I remember my sister would often cry miserably for (apparently) no reason, and that she was very clingy with mum and dad. It was the era when common wisdom was that kids were thought to be 'resilient' and predicted to 'bounce back' or 'adjust' to parents separations and the changes to their lives that these separations heralded. The idea that if the parents are happier then the children will also be happier was prevalent. My experience was that the parents weren't much happier, not for years and years to come.

Just as life starts to settle for me being at the community and visiting my Father every other weekend, mum and her new partner decide that they want to move out. They decided to move which meant a much longer journey to get to Dad, a change from ½ hour to about 2 ½. This made me really angry. I didn't want to leave the kids or adults who were now my friends at the commune. I didn't want to move further from Dad. I didn't want to move into a city because I loved the countryside and was animal and horse mad. I didn't want any more change, particularly not ones which involved further loss or separation and which put further strain on my ability to make friends or pursue my interests (all countryside based) or my dad.

For me there were issues about my mother's partner, was he a parent, could he tell us what to do? If he wasn't caring for us like a parent then why did he have more power in the household

than us? When we left the community and went into a nuclear set up with him, this scenario became more acute by far. In a community of many adults and a large space it was possible to deal with my mum's boyfriend as 'another adult' among many, but in a nuclear set up there was much more direct contact and his decisions about what happened in the house and the family had much more direct impact. I was quite unsure about accepting adult authority anyway, feeling as I did, so grown up and left to deal with things on my own. My mother's and my mum's boyfriend's attempts to intervene with me in terms of guidance or discipline were normally resented by me.

For me my place in any group, including my family, was not taken for granted. The constant negotiation of relationships and a constant 'temperature taking' of the emotional atmosphere within those webs of relationship was necessary to survival, very far from a 'taken for granted' background sense of belonging. The trick was to 'read' the emotional environment and offer the correct response, so that offering help (rather than having it demanded by set agreement) was necessary sometimes, but at another time wouldn't be expected.

The move out of the community into 'normal life' was very tough for me. It is hard to come back from such a radical identity as a 'commune kid' one and I found that all I had learnt previously to moving out was not of much use for negotiating such a strange new landscape as the nice middle class area of this new city, with its 'normal' families seemed to me. I had got used to the identity of 'commune kid' 'tomboy' 'country scamp' and these new kids I had to deal with after the move were townies, they were conventional, materialist, their identities were based on clothes and toys and TV, being able to climb trees or make good ramps for bikes didn't cut it here, and there weren't any horses.

I was quite determinedly unprepared to accept any kind of adult authority, and tried to always deal with things on my own. I had the model of non-conformity from the commune, and I had the experience of carrying a lot of responsibility both for my parents and myself as I saw it. I also had a profound sense of insecurity about relationships and little sense of safety or security. I saw myself as another person living alongside my mother and her partner, but treated rather inconsistently as capable of adult decision-making and responsibility and also without full adult 'rights' to self-determination and power within the household or outside it.

I found it very difficult to 'fit in' in school or other mainstream places. My desire for 'a place to belong' was very strong, but I was very rebellious and suspicious of 'normal' people and things. The counter-culture, at least felt familiar. But involved in it were many people who were angry and feeling very alienated from the mainstream without really finding very good alternatives, and lots of drugs and destructive behaviour.

My sense of alienation from 'normality' or mainstream lifestyles was increased by my relationship with my Dad and his household becoming more patchy and spread out, and it became more and more uncomfortable to visit him in his house as he settled into having another family (despite efforts to include me) left me feeling replaced and excluded. It was always hard not to feel that we were seen as lesser citizens of the household with less rights than the children who lived at my dad's house full time. My father's household developed into a more recognisably 'traditional' family set up, but I was not sure if my sister and I were safely part of that set up. It felt like walking on eggshells.

Potential questions or issues to discuss about being a commune kid

1. Did you have a strong bond with your parents?
2. Did you ever have a feeling of being lost?
3. Did you have strong relationships with other adults?
4. Did you experience 'parenting' by non-parents?
5. How did you experience relationships with other people's parents in the commune?
6. Did you form good relationships with parents' partners?
7. How do you think your parent(s) experienced keeping up with the demands of commune life as well as the demands of parenting? How did this affect you?
8. Would you describe your experience of communal life as being complex in terms of social relationships? Did this give you any particular skills or abilities?
9. Were you aware of power struggles in your commune?

10. Did you have any experience of positive interference in difficulties in relationships with parent/s in your community?
11. Did you feel you got enough attention from parents? From other adults?
12. Did some people or families have more say in your community? If so how were you and your parent(s) placed and how did this affect you?
13. Do you believe you were given more adult responsibilities or given them earlier than people you know from nuclear family scenarios?
14. How much freedom did you feel you had as a child?
15. How much responsibility do you feel you had as a child?
16. Were you left to make own decisions as a child? If so do you feel you were equipped to make those decisions?
17. Did you feel comfortable to 'fail' and were adults around you accepting of any failures to make good choices you made?
18. What were attitudes in the commune like about 'life goals' 'success' 'ambition'?
19. Were your talents or interests recognised or supported in the commune?
20. What does child-centred childrearing mean to you in connection with your community?
21. What relevance does the notion 'self expression' have for you in connection to your community?
22. What did it mean to be a 'good kid' in your community? Was this different from in other places and if so, how?
23. Would you be willing to talk about discipline or boundary setting in your community? Was this different for adults and children?
24. How have you been affected by attitudes to discipline in your community as an adult?
25. How much emphasis was put on following feelings in your community? How did you experience this? Has this affected who you are now?
26. How did power and authority work in your community?
27. Did adults have authority over you as a child? Which adults and how?
28. How have you found situations where obedience or taking a lower place in a hierarchy is what you are expected to do? Does this relate to your community experience?
29. Could you talk about any difficulties you have or have had in dealing with authority figures? Do you believe you were taught to distrust authority?
30. Would you describe your commune as being suspicious of 'common sense' ideas that support the mainstream status quo? If so how did this affect you?
31. How important were initiative and self-responsibility in your community?
32. Did you go to mainstream school? Did you have any difficulty dealing with school and schooling?
33. Did you experience any hostility or discrimination against you because you came from a commune?
34. Did you experience any hostility inside the commune towards you or others?
35. Do you think you were/are different from children not from communes? How?
36. Do you think you were treated 'like a child' in your community? How were you dealt with?
37. Do you think you fit in easily with people outside the community?
38. Did you have to negotiate with adults other than your parents to get what you wanted?
39. Were there ever situations where the 'voice' of the group outweighed the authority of your parents?
40. Did you get enough private space? Did you get enough privacy with your parent(s)?
41. Did you feel 'different' and if so did you ever want to be the same as everyone else?
42. What was seen as bad and wrong in your community?

43. Did you have any political awareness as a child?
44. What did you learn about 'how the world is' from your community? How do you feel about that now?
45. How do you feel about difference and diversity? About having to deal with people who are very different from you?
46. Do you think you were a challenging child? How?
47. Did you feel adequately equipped to deal with rules of etiquette in mainstream society?
48. Did your community have unusual practices? How did you experience this if so?
49. Do you think you were adequately cared for as a child?
50. Would you describe your experience of communal life as emotionally fulfilling?
51. What was the physical space of your community like for you as a child?
52. Were there strong ideas about what is 'moral' in your community? Were these different from the 'outside world'? Did you experience any conflict from this difference if so?
53. Who were you answerable to as a child? How was this for you?
54. How did you experience coming into or leaving the commune?
55. Why did you live in commune? How did you come to be there? Why did you leave?
56. How was your relationship with your mother/father/carer affected by being in the commune?
57. What relationships were important to you in the commune?
58. Did you want to live in the commune?
59. Was there any conflict between your needs and that of your parent(s) or other people in the commune?
60. Were your parents together? If so how was that for you? If not how was that for you?
61. Was there any problem for you dealing with changes in the commune?
62. Were there any particular issues about being a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, in your community?
63. What are your attitudes about family now?
64. How would you like to bring up children if you have them? How do you feel about parenthood?
65. What are your attitudes about relationship, marriage, and partnership?
66. What did you pick up about nuclear family life from your community?
67. How do you think children were thought about in your community?
68. How did you get on with other children in your community? Outside it?
69. How did you relate to family members outside the community?
70. Did you have any responsibilities for other children in your community?
71. What did you love about living in a commune?
72. What did you dislike about living in a commune?
73. Do you feel your childhood has influenced who you are now? How?
74. Would you consider living communally as an adult? Have you?
75. What were the things you would do differently dealing with children in community if you were an adult in one?

Appendix Four

Introducing 14 commune-raised women

'Well you can bump & grind
And it's good for your mind
Well you can twist & shout
Let it all hang out
But you won't fool the children of the revolution'
Marc Bolan, Children of the Revolution lyrics

In order to place respondents more clearly I have included in this section descriptions of their original communes and of their life stories and circumstances. As chapters are organised in themes, material from each respondent is scattered through the text. This appendix attempts to lend some cohesion and solidity to each respondent. My respondents all spent time as children (from 0–18 years old) living in communities between 1970 and 1985, so a similar 'generation' can be claimed for respondents, but their individual circumstances varied.

Six communities – similar and unique

Each intentional community had a subtly different 'conscious purpose' and their ways of experimenting with living arrangements and lifestyle varied; over time, each community has undergone enormous internal change too. The following snapshots offer a vision of each community at the time when participants were children, from what the participants can remember of the set-up.

Scotland

A rural community in the wilds of Scotland, with a focus on self-sufficiency and farm work, and in later years, on offering sanctuary to troubled people. This community was founded (and the land purchased) by a large extended family, and expanded to include many other members who were not family. There was no payment for being in the community, but work on the farm and buildings was expected of those who could manage it. The main accommodation was built by members from local materials, with ecological factors high on the list of priorities. As well as this large house there were always other semi-permanent living quarters (caravans and tents) for use by residents; eating was communal, although private space was provided in bedrooms. Childcare was to some extent communal. There were definite rules and principles – ecology and social care or communal responsibility being the highest priorities – with the founding couple keeping a higher degree of power and authority over what happened in the community than later members, and decisions about new members being adjudicated by them. Their vision carried the community, although decisions were reached at weekly meetings where everyone (except children) was present and had a say. Because of the demands of the farm work other paid work outside the community was minimal. Some members were not capable of a lot of work inside the community either: more able members were expected to 'carry' less able ones. Some home schooling was undertaken at some stages but many children went to local schools. Slightly older than the sixties generation of radicals, the founders of this community began with a radical Catholic perspective, but the ethos was not so much religious as more to do with self-sufficiency and ecology, and many of the later members were trendy young things with all the radical politics and alternative ideas of the 1960s and 1970s. Later, once the building work was mostly done, the community took on a therapeutic role – people with emotional problems or difficult backgrounds were regular long-term guests and workers at this community, and in exchange for what labour they could manage to give they would receive a place and care in this community as a kind of healing retreat. At its height in the 1970s the population of the community was about 50 members, but it is no longer in existence.

Charlotte

Charlotte was in the community from when she was a toddler, with both her parents, who were core founder members of the community. Charlotte describes her parents' motivation in setting up the community:

'I think that, for Mum and Dad, what had happened was that by default our family house had become a home for other people as well; other people would come and stay; they fostered two kids from a difficult background – alcoholic, violent – and we still very much see those two as part

of the family. I wasn't aware but lots of people said, "Don't you know how many people were always around" before they even set up the community and so it was a natural progression to do this thing and the whole thing was taking off as a movement. John Seymore's book on self-sufficiency was all the rage – my mum was really into that. She also had quite a religious bent, but the community didn't stay like that; it moved away from that, became, it attracted much younger people than my parents, who were both already in their forties.'

Charlotte was home-schooled until she was ten. At that point, her parents split up and her mother left the community taking Charlotte with her.

Jasmine

Jasmine moved into the community when she was a baby with both her parents. Her father's parents were founders of the community. Her family lived in the community until she was 14. She went to a local mainstream school. Her parents remained together and still are to this day. Jasmine describes her family's involvement with the community thus:

'[My grandparents] had always wanted to do something, and my mum and dad weren't ready to be on their own; my dad wasn't ready to be a father with children, two kids at that point, one of whom was premature and very young. I think that as a family there was a really powerful ideology around about family and homemaking and Catholicism and being radical and self-sufficiency, so it's kind of ecological, spiritual and also in the face of having lived in London without being able to make anything solid, and being depressed about that hard environment, he was doing teacher training in London schools and just not really managing it, so I think when this came up as an option it seemed like a good idea.'

Southwest

A self-sufficient, eco-activist community in the southwest of England. Three families bought three adjoining smallholding farms with a similar interest in ecology and self-sufficiency, and subsistence farming in line with low technology and highly environment-friendly practices were the main aims of the community. Some of these families were unusually affluent compared with other people who tended to become involved with the communes movement. Other radical politics crept into the ethos of the place – feminism and Marxism – but received much less attention than ecology. More people came to live and work in the community, living in semi-permanent structures on the land as well as staying in the farmhouses. There was no formal 'membership' and therefore no process to decide who would 'join' – mostly, people would come and offer labour for a while and end up staying. A lot of manual labour was needed to run the farm and produce enough food to feed the members, so many people ended up living in the community and working for their keep. Eating was communal. Childcare was not communal, although people in the community all helped with domestic work, and members were expected to be 'child-friendly' if kids needed help or entertainment. Schooling was mainly done in a local 'free school' although some children were sent to conventional local schools. There was no system of rent or bill paying communally; people worked on the farms for their keep. Big Decisions were dominated by the 'owners' but day-to-day running depended on mutual agreement with other members of the community. The work of the land dominated what had to be done, and the community worked out who did it and how. Social rules in the community were not highly developed or formalised, more ad hoc. This community founded a successful environmental magazine and some of its members remain key figures in British environmental politics. At its height in the 1970s there were maybe 30 people living in the community, with many more short-term guests. The farms no longer function as a wider community, though they are still owned by the same people and the magazine lives on.

Leah

Leah's parents bought one of the three farms that constituted the community when Leah was a toddler. Leah has two older half-siblings (who were not at the community and were from a previous marriage of her father's) and one younger sister, who lived with her in the community. Leah went to a local alternative or 'free' school while she was living there. The community was at its peak from when she was four to when she was eight years old, after which time the number of people who didn't own land but had been living and working there dropped off and eventually petered out. When she was ten her parents broke up and she moved away from the community with her mother into a more conventional family home in a city. She then began to attend a mainstream school.

She describes her community: 'I don't remember that much, in the commune that I was in, of people being that hippy dippy. I mean we didn't do things like sit around and have a talking stick or have big meetings, and all that fills me with absolute horror. I mean, "Let me give you a hug and it'll all be better" ...

Lucy- "So what did you do; how did it work?"

Leah – "Well basically, three adjoining farms, each farm belonged to a family all the way through, but a lot of other people came and lived in the farmhouses, in caravans and all sorts of things, showman's wagons, tepees... John up a tree – who lived up a tree [giggles] – not at all hippy dippy. One was a dairy farm, one was an agriculture – cereals and the other was agriculture – vegetables, and umm people came and lived there and everything that was eaten or used was grown there pretty much, well within reason, well not within reason – we made our own candles for light and stuff – which is pretty unreasonable in the 1970s..."

Ariella

Ariella lived in the community from when she was two to when she was eight. Both her parents were there and they remained together until she was eight, when she left with her sister and her mother and went to live in a more conventional single-parent household. Ariella went to an alternative or free school until she left the community when she was eight. After this she went to a mainstream primary school and then a mainstream all-girls secondary school.

Home Counties

A large, dilapidated mansion house with significant grounds was bought with a shared mortgage and set up as a housing co-operative by a group of people who wanted to live communally. They were young, politicised, mainly middle-class, and mainly socialist or Marxist (with a few anarchists in the fray), and ecology and feminism were discussed. Many members had previously been living in London, and in order to become a member a capital investment was required and 'rent' was charged. New members could join only with full consensus from existing members. Although some food was produced and a smallholding was run, self-sufficiency was not the prime aim of the community. Decision-making was by consensus: a weekly meeting was the forum for decision-making and each member had a vote (except the children). Childcare was not undertaken communally although domestic work was, and any adult who was around at the time would look after children who needed help. There was some structure, rotas and division of chores. Alliances and personal power meant that some voices carried more weight than others. Eating was communal, although some private meals did take place in units, and a separate 'kids' tea' was held because the kids wouldn't eat lentils and wanted sausages. Each member had a private 'unit' – sometimes just a room, sometimes with kitchen, bathroom and living room (mainly for those with children). The entire ground floor was communal. Some home schooling was undertaken but the majority of children attended local schools. Most people undertook work outside the community for money, and there was no 'minimum requirement' for work inside the community during this phase of its life. At its height in the late 1970s and early 1980s the population of the community was around 50. The community still exists today.

Cath

Cath came to the community when she was five, with her brother, her father and his new partner, and the partner's two children from a previous marriage, plus her other sister, who was from this new relationship of her father's and was a tiny baby. Her mother remained in London, as did the new partner's ex. Cath remained in the community until she was 14, when the whole family moved into a more conventional house in a nearby town.

Hazel

Hazel lived in the community with her mother and stepfather and their children, her half-siblings, and with her father and his new partner and her two children. This extended family remains central to Hazel's life and she has good connections with other people from the community. Hazel was home educated, only digging into academic study in her mid-teens, when she decided she wanted to go to school. She tried a mainstream school first and then left home to attend a 'free' school, becoming independent at 14. A lot of Hazel's time as a child was taken up with helping her mother raise her other four children, and her contact with people outside the community was minimal.

Sue

Sue came to the community with her mother and younger brother when she was 13. Her mother had decided to join her new partner, who already lived in the community, as she had broken up with Sue's father a while previously, and had been having what Sue described as 'a second adolescence of partying'. Sue at first stayed in the family home, looking after herself, with another family who were tenants. When this arrangement didn't seem to work out Sue had the options of either going to boarding school or joining her mother at the community. Sue went to a mainstream school. She lived at the community until she was 18.

Bridget

Bridget came to the community with her mother and sister when she was two years old. Her parents had separated. Her mother moved in with a new partner whom she met at the community, and her father stayed with a new partner in the old family home. She remained at the community until she was five, attending less than one year of mainstream school while living at the community. After this she moved into a city and a conventional nuclear set-up with her elder sister, mother and mother's partner.

Lucy

I went to the community when I was seven, with my mother and younger sister. My parents had separated. My mother met a new partner at the community and we all stayed there until I was ten, at which point we moved to a conventional home in a city. I went to a mainstream school while in the community.

Wales

A Welsh 'castle', which was originally purchased to house a rural Montessori school: those with children at the school and those involved in teaching or running it gradually all moved in so that a live-in community developed. Later, others who were less directly involved with the school began to move in, and other 'outsiders' remained involved in running, or being students of, the school. Meals were communal and money was worked out communally. Most people at the community did not work outside it and none of the children went to schools outside the community until they were too old for Montessori schooling. There was no 'joining' fee: it was more a case of how the bills were going to be paid each month, which was worked out communally. Childcare had a high priority and was genuinely communal, although parents had greater contact with their own children than other adults did.

Jody

Jody moved into the community as a toddler with her mother and stepfather. Her mother and stepfather split up while they all lived in the community and her stepfather moved out when Jody was ten. Jody was schooled at home in the community until she was eleven, when she went to mainstream school. Jody and her mother were the last people left in the community when it finally closed when Jody was 14. Jody has no siblings.

Southwest

A community that grew up in the mid-1970s around a centre for troubled children in southwest England. This community was very isolated and it was through necessity that some of the people involved in teaching and working with the children who came to the centre also lived together. People had separate houses or apartments to live in but it was still very much a group enterprise. Funding was gained from Education Authorities and Social Services to pay wages and keep the centre running. The main focus was the 'clients' – the kids who came to live at the community. The community had about 20 staff with their families, and about 40 'clients'. It is no longer running.

Natalie

Natalie came to the community with her two sisters and her parents when she was nine. Her parents were very involved in the setting-up of the community; they were both active in the community 'school' as teachers and youth workers. Natalie went to a mainstream school nearby. Natalie's parents broke up when she was 15 and her mother took her and her sisters to live elsewhere.

Emma

Natalie's younger sister, Emma, came to the community when she was seven. She also went to a local mainstream school. She left the community when she was 13.

East Anglia

A country manor and farm in the East of England. A group of middle-class London intellectuals and socialists ganged together to buy this huge old mansion house. Living arrangements were split into private family 'units' and larger communal areas. Food was cooked communally. Childcare was left to parents, but a spirit of co-operation meant there was a large degree of support from other parents and adults. This community is still running. Work is undertaken outside but there is a lot of work to do on the organic farm that is central to the project, too, so some people only work within the community.

Megan

Megan was born in the community: her parents had lived there for four years before she was born, and she lived there with both parents. They broke up when Megan was eight. For a while Megan's mother stayed in the community with a new lover, but tensions made it too difficult for this to continue and her mother moved out of the community when Megan was eleven, while Megan stayed behind with her father and elder brother. She stayed until she left home.

Heather

When Heather was a tiny baby her parents moved into the community. She has two older brothers. When Heather was three her parents broke up and her father left the community. Heather went to the local mainstream school. Her mother had 'various boyfriends' but when Heather was nine her mother met another partner and Heather moved out of the community into a household with her mother, mother's partner and brothers.

Appendix Five

Women and girls, gender-roles, femininity and feminism

'Build me a woman,
 Make her ten feet tall.
 Build me a woman,
 Make her ten feet tall.
 Don't make her worthless,
 Don't make her small.
 Build me someone I can ball,
 All night long.'

(The Doors, 'Build me a Woman', lyrics)

I both enquired into participants' impressions of gender in their communities of origin, and opened up discussions about how it was for girls being around (and implicated in) the sexual politics of these counter-cultural spaces. What effect has being brought up in environments, which often had prominent feminist ideas, ideals or at least rhetoric, had on how participants now feel about themselves as women? Participants reflect in this appendix on how they felt and feel about feminism and conventional femininity.

Early on in the research, issues about gender emerged as important and relevant to my enquiry. Indeed, the pilot interviews threw up so many conversations about feminism and femininity as 'issues' in communal life in the memories of participants that I decided to limit the participants to women only, and allow a greater focus on the experience of girls in communes rather than trying to deal with the gendered experience of boys as well. The literatures of the 1970s about communes (Rigby, 1974a, 1974b; Abrams & McCulloch, 1976) posed strong questions about domestic arrangements, gendered domestic work and childcare and the notions of equality in communes, as juxtaposed with actual lived practice. Particularly with reference to childcare and children, these researchers left these questions largely unanswered.

Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to truly answer these questions either – at least not from the perspective of the adult women involved in participants' communes, as my focus deals directly with the children. None-the-less because of participants' interest in discussing issues to do with feminism and femininity this appendix attempts to include our discussions in these areas.

Participants have memories from childhood, and in some cases quite vague concepts, of notions which were called 'feminism' or 'women's lib', which are attached to all sorts of experiences of social life inside and outside their communities. This vague labelling and stereotyping of feminism and feminists was borne out in participants recollections. My participants' engagement with feminist practices and principles (which were apparent in their communities at least enough that participants have recollections of these notions) was through the eyes of a child, albeit a female one, and this cannot constitute an adult engagement, critique, nor interrogation of feminist ideas and practice in communal spaces. They picked up notions from the atmosphere around them without necessarily having an intellectual response but rather an emotive or emotional one. This does not mean that these responses are not valid. I was listening from a perspective that intuitively hears the emotion and the feeling of what is being said (the struggle with identity and belonging involved) rather than being engaged with the intellectual or political discourse – issues which they are skirting.

It is important to note that the opinions expressed in this chapter do not represent an intellectual engagement with or researched critique of feminist women in communes, or of feminism in communes from the standpoint of adult women. Without interviewing the adult women in participants' communities it is impossible to get a clear idea of what kinds of feminist ideas and practices were being brought to bear by adult men and women in these spaces. The literature available about British communes in the 1970s and '80s does not directly engage with a study of feminism in these spaces(although it does talk about gender in communes and looks at inequalities which the researchers noticed between men and women in these spaces). Even if there was direct research of what kinds of feminisms were in play in communal spaces each

commune is different and the experience was not of the same communities that my participants lived in as children. Each community was very different in its way of engaging with such political ideas – if indeed even those communities could be seen as having a cohesive ideology (which is debatable, in my memory of my community). Individual members did not necessarily agree about such matters or form clear or cohesive group ideologies. There is some American literature about feminism in Communes in the USA (Kanter, 1972), but this is not necessarily easily culturally transferable to the UK. And again, it does not interrogate what kinds of feminism were being practiced, for example, using notions of feminism which assume a single movement with aims that are to do with the topics of equality: equal pay, childcare being shared equally between men and women, housework being shared equally between men and women, women being capable of doing traditionally 'men's' work. In participants' reporting there was an atmosphere of 'consciousness raising' in their communities which they experienced as challenging in some ways, and formed a core of their experience of conflict in their communities – debate, argument and struggle, which participants were nearly all uncomfortable with as children in their recollections.

The amount of information about the adult realities of communal spaces that comes out of the memories and musings of participants can be limited, but there is a lot of information about the subjective recollections and opinions of participants as children. This is perhaps an uncomfortable scenario as there is no way to examine the participants' claims critically against other perspectives. There is neither past literature nor any of my own primary research with adult members of participants' communities. Those commune spaces are now lost in time. There is no way to enter those spaces to make my own observations or conclusions that might contrast or challenge the perceptions here. I can draw on my own memories and impressions of my own experience, but obviously these recollections are as subjective – as much from a child's perspective, and as potentially full of woolly assumptions, emotional reactions and responses. This makes the research of feminist ideologies particularly difficult position to analyse. All my efforts to clarify what kinds of feminisms adults in those communal spaces were practicing have been so far unsuccessful. What I have ended up with is a somewhat vague notion of feminism that has come through the eyes of children – albeit children who are grown now and speaking as adults. It does not appear that many of my participants have had ongoing discussion or engagement with the adults from their communities about just what the adults did believe or why their feminist practices were what they were.

There is an assumption on participants' part that they know, but when asked to elaborate the responses are often quite unclear about what, how and why certain practices or ideals were the way they were, or what the conscious attempts to include ideals like equality between men and women were. That said there were some strong themes, which emerged from many, if not all participants about women and feminist ideas in their communities. These impressions were powerful for participants even if they were, and are, not clearly understood or elaborated.

As I considered my participants' life stories I had some key questions to ask about growing up as females in a communal environment, and about what they had accepted or rejected of available female subjectivities from those environments. I was interested in what strategies they had employed in relation to gender and to feminist ideas that most participants claimed were present in their communities. Key questions (which emerged from pilot interviews originally) were: What constituted being a 'good' woman or girl in a commune and, how had participants experienced gender roles in more mainstream life in comparison? What are respondents' images of femininity and thoughts about what being a woman is all about (in relation to their childhood experience)? In participants' recollections how did they see gender roles being played out in lives lived in communes, and what did they know about the ideals their particular communities held (which they were aware of) with regard to gender? What 'role models' did participants remember having from the older generation of women in their communities and how did they respond to those role models? What role did relationship with other women play in their lives as children and, now as adults, were their relationships with women still affected by their childhood experiences of women and feminism? Is there a conflict between the kinds of female identity they learnt at home and what they have developed as they have interacted with more mainstream spaces – grown up and gone out into the rest of the world? What examples of participants' desire to belong, resistance to belonging, acceptance and rejection, could be gleaned from our discussions in regard to feminist ideas and mainstream notions of femininity?

Big strong women?

"Well the primary care of the children was still the women's... The men were all too busy being intellectual and flirting with everyone else" – Leah

To investigate the childhood imagery that respondents had of themselves as girls, of women inside and outside their communities, of notions of gender, equality and of feminist ideas in communities, I approached questioning participants from differing directions. I attempted both to attempt evoking memories of childhood and imagery of women (available female subjectivities), which were currently powerful for participants, and to discuss respondents' management of their own identity as women and their negotiation of that identity internally in relationship with both hegemonic and transgressive ideas and people. Common themes did surface, the most common of which being the idea of the 'strong woman', which many commune-raised women feel they saw modelled in their communities. Being a strong woman, in participants' overall reporting, involved being challenging of sexism, refusing to accept being patronised or disrespected in talk or action, being outspoken and opinionated, being physically strong and doing physical tasks (like driving tractors) that were traditionally 'male'; working for money as well as doing domestic work or childrearing, valuing women and girls highly, being unwilling to be submissive to men or their desires in order to gain approval or support from men; demanding (although not always getting) equal sharing of domestic labour and childrearing responsibilities with men.

Heather displays awareness of the gendered issues that affected her mother and her mother's peers. The struggle for liberation and the resistance of the identity of selflessness that they saw as inherent in traditional femininity, or female roles in society. Heather also describes a culture in which the struggle to refuse duty and to break out was common to adult identities, whether male or female, and one in which children's identities and role were being reinvented along with adult ones:

"I remember, even as a small child, there were things that were my responsibility, things that were my brother's responsibility and, you know, there was no 'Boys don't cook dinner'. If it was his turn to cook dinner then he cooked it, and it was the same in [my friend's] family [also in the community]. They all took turns cooking, cleaning – all the housework things, although [their mother] does the majority of the housework. I don't think she is expected to; she does it because she wants it done, kind of. [But] I think that that whole generation of women basically came from homes where that was the case – where you were expected to do all that and I think it's quite difficult to get away from all that – the mum was always expected to do all the chores. It's really hard for her, even though she's a feminist. It's hard for her to just not do them and accept that she has as much right to just not do them as everyone else has."

Cath has a proclaimed feminist agenda and is unembarrassed to claim an interest in women's liberation, or 'gender liberation', as she describes it. She picked the question 'Would you call yourself a feminist?' from my page of questions and was keen to explore it, to share where her experience of gender relations and feminist ideas, and of living in close and experimental community, had led her thinking in relation to this question. Cath was raised in the community by her father, with her mother not present. She describes her mother as 'a liberal feminist, not very extreme', but drew a lot of her imagery of living life from a feminist perspective from her father's partner, who lived with them within the community. Cath said of her view of feminism and women's liberation:

"I believe in liberation, and I believe there is something to be liberated from as a woman and as a man, for women to liberate themselves from men's definition of being a woman and for men to liberate themselves from their own definition of being a man."

This awareness of power and positioning, the power of gender as a potentially distorting, or restrictive force, makes a lot of sense, in the light of Cath's description of the general ideals or awareness she feels she was taught in her community:

"There was awareness of power dynamics in intimate relationships, like from a psychological point of view as well as a political one. They kind of mixed. The fact it was so democratic there. Within the community every voice was valued. People were encouraged to speak up for themselves – made you aware of when things weren't fair or equal or democratic. Also, it was always about here and outside, so from a young age we were led to believe that the outside was the opposite

of what we are trying to create here – that out there it's a big bad world and people are always trying to step on each other and use/abuse each other. Everyone outside is on a huge power trip. Men are sexist; people are out for themselves and don't care about less powerful people – are out to gain what they can at the expense of them. All the time we heard that, just all the time."

I certainly remember approaching 'outside' men with a suspicion or assumption that they might be sexist or misogynist. Watching my friends' fathers, to see how they treated their wives. Bristling when I felt I was patronised or dismissed by men. I don't remember exactly where this idea came from, but it must have been around me quite a lot for it to take such root. As a child, as well as a female, I often found powerful male figures would reinforce my suspicions through their (as I saw it) insistence on imposing their own authority, and their refusal to relate in a 'democratic' way – a way that allowed my perspective and wishes (or their daughters') as much validity as theirs. Was this gender or age? A prevailing ethos (if not always reality) in my memory of my community was one of refusing to accept being discounted or silenced, of refusing to toe the line out of fear of another's power or from blind acceptance of another's authority. Inside the community, the challenging of authority, of adult as well as of male authority, was often greeted with fairly good humour and encouragement (as compared to my experiences of making such challenges outside the community environment). It was all part of learning to stretch your wings, finding out who you were and what you thought, finding out how to assert yourself, and part of a politicised refusal to support hierarchy or inequality. It was seen as building up a confidence that would help you survive the slings and arrows of external systems of domination and oppression.

Power was of course present in communal life, and all was not as idyllically equal as the utopian ideal Cath and I have just paid tribute to. The model that I remember being lived out by the adults in my community was less than entirely consistently utopian as far as power dynamics and actual practice of 'equality' were concerned. Being a 'good girl' in my community involved questioning what you were told and challenging other people's authority. I certainly remember women being vocal and sometimes fiercely argumentative in asserting their views within my community, far from the 'submissive, sweet and long-suffering' model of conventional femininity. That is how I remember 'straight' women being portrayed, oppressed women who hadn't had their consciousness raised. Although the final outcomes of those communal power struggles, where the real power lay in my community and exactly how it was asserted and played out, was probably difficult for me to identify very precisely then, let alone now in retrospect through the veils of memory. The 'model' of women's assertiveness or even aggression as being as acceptable and as usual as men's is one that has remained in my mind. More in line with traditional notions of female subjectivity, I also remember a strong imperative towards being kind, considerate and understanding, although I do not think this was specific to girls but across the board with children of both sexes. A sharply developed morality about being a 'good person' and caring about people and about the world combined with anti-authoritarian attitudes to create an image of strong women who spoke out not only on their own behalf but on behalf of other marginalised or less privileged groups, who nurtured a suspicion and dislike of privilege and power based on gender or anything else.

A 'female' vision of communal life?

Charlotte described a childhood landscape peopled by 'strong' women in her community, and her experience of a certain kind of power or strength, which in our wider discussion she identified as being 'not power over other people, not like telling people what to do, but not being pushed around; everyone having a positive input into group decisions and everyone having a say'. She describes her memory of gender amongst adults around her as a child:

"Being a child in that environment there were some very strong women who I think really led the community in a way. They were very powerful but in a very gentle feminine kind of way. There did seem to be a kind of strong ethos of equality between the men and the women. As a child it certainly would not occur to me to turn to a man for one thing and a woman for another. You just turned to whoever was nearest, whichever was there. The tasks and the roles were very much shared and I think that was very much down to the women who were there. I can think of this one woman in particular, she was absolutely wonderful, she didn't really lose any sense of being feminine, from my perspective, she was always very much a woman, but she did all the things the men did on the farm. She was very strong. So, I never saw much difference between

men and women, except that the nurturing, the support, especially in that time from eleven upwards [after her parents had split up and her mother left the community], came from women, more so than the men, even though after then my dad was the only parent I had left there properly.’

Charlotte had described her community as ‘not totally democratic’ – there was leadership. The final say was given to the members who set up the community [Charlotte’s parents, who first had the idea and set up the community, and later some of the longer-staying members], but everyone got to have a say and was listened to and their ideas taken on board. This final say was not gendered. Authority was equally shared between her parents. Indeed her mother’s vision (which was inspired both by a deep Christian faith and by radical notions of community and social care and responsibility). Charlotte describes this as being central to the community as a whole. The careful management of group decision-making in such a way as to make everyone feel heard and included, as well as the work of nurturing and maintaining relationships and supporting people, has traditionally been ‘women’s’ work and therefore is a traditionally very female notion and ideal. This notion was allowed to prevail in this community by Charlotte’s account, as a dominant mode of operation with this idea of democracy, non-hierarchical equality and commitment to ongoing relationship as potential alternatives to more hierarchical models of social relationship.

The valuing of relationship and connection and the rejection of hierarchy as a viable solution to group dynamics seem to be closely connected with female experience or subjectivity and feminist ideas in our culture, or at the very least are feminised and seen as ‘soft’ (for ‘soft’ read: unreal or irrational, not of the ‘real’ world). It is interesting that some of these commune-raised women report that, in some communities these values were in evidence: powerful women had a voice and attempts were made towards equality with the men around them, and new forms of masculinity with less emphasis on denying these ‘soft’ aspects of human experience were encouraged or accepted. Other communities’ attempts to remodel gender roles and redistribute work with less reliance on gendered stereotypes were often less than successful. Previous research into adult life in British and American communities in the 1970s was quite critical of the reality of how domestic work (childcare, emotional work, housekeeping) was distributed, and many claimed that, while women took on a lot of ‘masculine’ work, men were less willing or able to take on their reciprocal share of ‘feminine’ work (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Kanter, 1972).

There is evidence of this situation coexisting with a notion of strong feminist women in these comments from Charlotte. One gains a sense that gendered work (in terms of the emotional work of supporting and nurturing) appeared to be still carried out by women in her community, more often, or more effectively than by men – thereby echoing the myths of more traditional or conventional domestic arrangements. Even women who were not Charlotte’s mother have lodged in her mind as more supportive of her than her father was. When her mother decided to leave, these women stepped in, in a way in which her father, in Charlotte’s estimation, didn’t. The trauma of separation for her father might be an explanation for this, but this is not Charlotte’s view of the situation. She describes the separation as ‘really quite amicable’ and stresses that the period during which her father’s care was eclipsed by the support of women was one lasting many years (from ages 11–18), not a finite period of adjustment or trauma.

Participants echoed Charlotte’s view that women’s evaluation of relationship and of non-hierarchical models of relating, were important influences on the social landscapes of their communities. The discussions I had with participants would suggest a strong consensus amongst these commune-raised women that a female generated model of how social life should be conducted was prevalent in their communities, although how successfully this model was actually put into practice varied from community to community. There was some consensus among participants from the same communities about whether those communities lived up to non-hierarchical or egalitarian models. None of the communities participants had lived in seemed, in their eyes, to have created a model of relationship which was ‘equal’ for all members (including children) in practice, but many reported a strong attempt and much discussion with this kind of model as an ideal. Gender equality, particularly in relation to domestic labour and childcare, figured strongly in many of the participants’ discussion of their community’s striving towards ‘equality.’

Freedom and gender roles

In the same community as Charlotte, but in contrast to her experience, Jasmine reported she didn't experience any kind of prerogative given to being a 'strong' woman or girl, but did end up with strong notions of equality as part of her expectations of life:

"I didn't get any sort of fixed ideas about gender stuff. I think I am just much freer in a way. I think I am actually quite girly in a sort of way, but on my own terms... There were some traditional gender divides at the community, to the extent that my mum didn't build the house. Women didn't do really heavy work. People did what they could, physically. [But] everyone cooked, everyone cleaned – including the kids, which was fine. Actually, it's one of the things I thought was good. [And] it wasn't a big issue, gender: at least it hadn't struck me as one, in the community. [But] the funny thing is, that it has struck me in the last year how I take for granted that my partner will look after our kids, and that I will earn money and do what I want as much as he does or more, you know? Whoever shouts the loudest, negotiates best, gets what they want – nothing is given. Recently I have noticed that loads of couples don't work that way at all. The woman has to negotiate from nowhere to something, and the man doesn't negotiate, he just moves a little bit once she clamours hard enough. [And] I just spotted this, I mean my sister is married to someone who is quite chauvy [chauvinist] in my view, and I notice it."

Jasmine is arguably recognising a certain way of negotiating power that does not begin with women in an unequal power position, despite differing physical abilities that in more conventional cultures might present a basis for unequal power relations. Her comfort with 'being quite girly really' can be interpreted as not feeling that being recognisably feminine would have automatically left her with less power or acceptance in her community. That contrasts with the experience of some other participants who felt strongly disapproved of in displaying traits or presentations of self that could be recognised as 'conventional femininity'. As I shall discuss later in this chapter. Jasmine's 'taking for granted' equal participation in domestic and childcare work by her partner, as well as her sister's 'clamouring' to get fuller participation and more equal treatment from her partner, shows a fundamental position that assumes a right to and expectation of equality, which is arguably still less than a dominant expectation for many women. So, in Jasmine's comments, the ideal and the reality of equality are presented as normalised and common sense to some commune-raised women (at least to her), taken so much for granted that they are only brought into focus as specific to their experience in contrast to and in relationship with behaviour and people from more conventional perspectives, such as Jasmine's 'chauvy' brother-in-law.

Resisting the resistance

Heather's view was one of women being more powerful than men in her community, and of their views predominating:

"One of the things that is so obvious to me about my community is that it's a matriarchy. The women there are powerful people, always have been, always will be. They hold the power to everything that goes on. They always have done. There's a lot of really kind of feisty feminist women there, which personally I can't stand. Feminists just irritate me so much, I mean feminists who get extreme – people who get offended by taking their husband's name when they get married, that kind of thing. I find it so intensely annoying. I think you are not doing your cause any favours by dealing with things like that. You're not dealing with cases where there actually is inequality, you're dealing with a stupid issue for the sake of it. There's no point..."

Heather's comments remind me of my own feelings as a young woman about this thing – 'feminism'. The elaboration and discussion about gender inequality made the world seem an overly dark and forbidding place for women and for myself as a girl to grow into and explore. While one is learning how to deal with the world on its own terms and to fit in, it can be difficult bringing a politicised view to bear, and in my experience as a young woman displaying and acting on awareness of gender issues often created conflict and disapproval. The world is not necessarily friendly to young girls who do not 'fit in' with conventional notions of femininity. This resistance and conflict is illustrated by Heather's irritation with showing your colours as a feminist unless it is 'necessary' – unless there is something significant enough to be worth the fight, unless there 'actually is inequality'. Communal spaces were, by the accounts of all participants, hotbeds of conflict and debate, and an oft-repeated complaint by participants, was their perception of the

pettiness of adults in causing conflict in their communities, whether this was the dirty teacups or complaints about sexist behaviour.

It is worth noting that Heather is one of the youngest of my respondents (in her early/mid-twenties). Her experience was of living half her life inside the community and then having to survive a conventional teenage experience in a nuclear-family set-up. I found that the older commune-raised women felt a stronger and more willing identification with a politicised version of feminist ideas. This could be because they are older and therefore more confident and less concerned about 'fitting in'. It could be because as they have grown into womanhood, their life experience has validated the feminist ideas they were exposed to as children, or it could be because the younger women's experience of becoming a woman took place at a time when some of the early battles of feminism had been (at least partially) won. For the current generation of young middle-class women having a career, and money, is taken much more for granted. Often it is only as women get older that they realise that there are still inequalities for them in the world of work – as they reach glass ceilings and have to make difficult choices about children and career. It might also be because feminist ideas are less prominent or 'cool' in a post-feminist world, whether inside intentional communities or in more mainstream life.

Heather's mother is deeply involved in alternative medicine and therapeutic work and Heather's world-view is very informed by these ideas. Her way of viewing potential problems borrows heavily from therapeutic ideas of self-awareness and self-responsibility, with a focus on early childhood, family of origin and individual experience as influences on how one experiences the world rather than a concern with political or social change. Jasmine's parents are both involved in psychotherapeutic work, and her ideas were also informed by psychotherapy, yet she was less resistant to a politicised feminist agenda than Heather, and had a stronger awareness or acceptance of the socially constructed nature of individual reality. This might be to do with Jasmine being older and also having children, that she had become more politicised in some way by that experience. The commune-raised women who were (or had previously been) living with partners and those with children were the ones who had most sympathy with the feminist ideas and the feminism of the older generation of women in their communities, and perhaps this household or domestic negotiation with men and the difficulties of juggling motherhood and work gave them an experience of gender inequality that younger respondents didn't yet have.

Heather's comments illustrate a picture of resistance inside Heather's community to hegemonic notions of gender and gender roles. It shows an unusual negotiation of identity, one that begins with a marginal viewpoint (feminism or women's liberation) as a dominant one. Heather in many ways had a fairly acute awareness of potential gender inequality and displayed a similar sense (of the rightness of, or her right to, equal or respectful treatment from men) to the one Jasmine showed in many of her comments about her working life and her relationships with boyfriends. Yet she was keen to show her resistance to feminist ideas and her separateness from feminists like the ones she had grown up with, saying that her friend Megan was 'much more of a feminist than me'. This display of resistance of that feminist stereotype was common to a few of the participants in this study and was definitely a common enough theme in my discussions with participants to be seen as a fairly common reaction.

Being ten feet tall?

Megan's view of her family life in the same community as Heather (she stayed in the community with her father after her parents' marriage broke up) was very different to Heather's impression of a community run as a matriarchy. She illustrates the way in which participant's experiences or their telling of them could vary hugely from family to family within communities, or from person to person in their experience or remembering of that experience. This can be confusing for my analysis as it makes generalisations difficult to defend. In relation to gender and gender roles there was a lot of contradiction between what many participants described as the ethos of their communities and the way things really worked in practice. Some participants were wryly aware of this and others presented their communities as very egalitarian, but then described how woman ended up doing much more emotional, domestic and childcare work than men – without drawing any attention to the difference between the rhetoric and the practice they were describing or remembering.

Megan was happy to describe herself as a feminist and did not have such strong criticisms of adult women in her community who identified themselves as feminists as Heather did. She said:

"In some ways my parents were quite traditional, there was still a similar structure, a paternalistic structure. Dad was the final disciplinarian."

Despite her closer alliance with feminist ideas she, like Heather made a point of separating herself and her mother from 'extreme' or 'aggressive' feminism. She goes on to say:

"I don't remember my mum being a really hard-core feminist. She wasn't aggressive at all, but you know, her opinion was as valid as my dad's, if not more so at times, and while we were all at the community she was the main breadwinner [...] He didn't earn money for a good ten years at least. In that period they shared the responsibilities of childcare – very much so... I can remember he did probably more of the housework than my mum did, more washing up. He changed my nappies, washed my clothes... it was quite equal."

This shows how the context of communal life (along with the possibilities of female employment) did allow for a flexibility of gender roles and domestic arrangements. Nevertheless, alongside these attempts at new ways of organising family life and gender roles, the enduring structure of the traditional nuclear family in its patriarchal form was still in evidence in Megan's description of her family while it remained cohesive. This combination of trying to break the mould but not totally managing to was a common reflection by many participants of their observations of gender roles in their communities.

Megan spoke quite passionately about her experiences of gender inequality at work, saying that all the bosses were men, all the admin people women, and that she got annoyed when the boss called the admin staff 'girls' because she was a woman, and proud of it. In her community, she explained, there was a definite sense of pride in the attainment of womanhood, one that helped her to expect respect for that position of adult femaleness. She found being called a 'girl' offensive, in the same way a man would find being called a 'boy' disrespectful. Megan talked about being slightly trapped in the identity of a 'strong woman' – about often ending up carrying responsibility where men didn't, particularly with regard to earning money in relationships with men. She connected this with the model her mother had provided of being the chief earner in the family, and her sense of responsibility for her father after her mother left him seemed to me quite strong, and had perhaps shaped her view of men's vulnerability and need to be looked after by her, or her sense of men's lack of capability. Megan said that she found it near impossible to be 'weak' and in this echoed concerns of other participants about having to be 'big', 'strong' and 'tough'. Whilst quite willing to engage with the trappings of femininity (she trained and worked as a beauty therapist after leaving school), she was firm and politicised in her talk about expecting respect for qualities other than her appearance. Megan seemed politicised about gender roles, and also not politicised. Some of her notions about gender equality she describes as being formed in response to her upbringing in the community, and to ideas she heard or experienced there. These she talks about as taken for granted truths. This is particularly interesting to me because it is such a strong example of being raised within a resistant culture, so much so that it becomes a common sense norm rather than a consciously resistant stance.

Land Girls?

Like Megan's feeling that she had to be strong, some participants described a scenario where they did not feel 'allowed' to be 'feminine' in the sense of being beautiful or decorative, passive rather than active, vulnerable as well as strong – as all hands were needed for work, including outdoor farm and building work. According to participants, many of the adult women in their rural communities (many of which were inspired by an ideal of self-sufficient living, producing all the food needed for the community on the community's land), could rarely afford to hang back from getting their hands dirty along with the men even had they wanted to. Many of these women found their ability to be hard physical workers a source of pride. A prevailing ethos in some of these rural communities, participants reported, was that women were generally approved of if they were 'strong' and 'hard-working', rather than delicate – as their labour was needed. This was seen as being connected to feminist ideals by some participants.

Cath describes the culture of grafting that developed to get the huge old house her community inhabited up to standard and to work the land that the community owned:

"The women who came first [after the community was set up in the mid-1970s] were very strong, physically. They got stuck in and worked a lot, I think equally to the men. There was a lot of work to do getting the house habitable and getting the grounds producing food for us. As time went on, and the movement changed, new generations came in. I didn't see as much grafting. People took it easier. There wasn't the frenzy of activity all the time. It's funny but I remember the women were always more visible in their working."

The emphasis on self-sufficiency and living off the land, and in my memory some romanticism about a return to 'honest labour,' led many women back to an experience of rural life that was closer to that of peasant than hippy hedonist. The more work there was to do, the more emphasis there was on this kind of identity and ideology –perhaps the peasant labourer of Marxist ideology (I know that my community had many adult members who were influenced by Marxist ideas). The less room there was for women to be conventionally feminine and for men to see them in this way.

Heather echoes this idea of the working woman in her community, but notes a distinction between different modes of being, different identities available for women in her community, contradicting some other participant's feeling that femininity was 'not allowed':

"It was definitely the case that it wasn't practical to be feminine there. It's run as an organic farm. It's dirty, it's messy. You can't get there without walking on an unsurfaced road, so you're gonna get muddy if it's wet. So, in that sense femininity is just impractical – skirts and stuff. [But] I don't think people were frowned upon as such for femininity. Something I remember clearly, one of my earliest memories was my mum used to wear floor-length skirts and petticoats because she was a hippy and they did that, but when I was young she had two modes: her 'skirty' mode, and then her messy dungarees for doing the cows, type of thing. That was always fine. You could be practical or pretty, either/or, and either way was fine, but I suppose it was out of necessity. I do remember, as we grew older we used to play with make-up, and the girls there still do – you know, wear far too much make-up and then it moderates itself and it's fine. There is a hard core of ardent feminists who always look scruffy and farm-type, but I don't really feel there's disapproval of femininity."

Cath again points out that the ideology that created the identity of the 'big strong land girl' was not only connected to feminist ideas:

"It was those that do, those that did, and those that didn't do. It was about how physical you could be, how useful, how much help you could be, for both sexes, that was what was valued. I remember times – maintenance weeks for example, when there was a lot of work to do and men and women were the same. They did the same things: mucking out the cows, driving tractors, carrying hay bales, cutting hay, digging, always doing the same stuff that the men were doing... It has coloured my expectation at a deep level. I believe that men and women can all do the same stuff. Because I had my dad and brothers, and my dad's partner was very practical and hard working, I had to do everything my brothers and dad could do. So I learnt that I could... Everyone had to cook and wash up, clean the house – there was that rota thing – even if you were crap and it tasted crap, you still had to cook whether you were a man or a woman, so I expected men to be willing and able to do stuff like that. Without question of whether they should or shouldn't. Everything was about democracy, about everyone mucking in and not refusing to do what needed to be done."

The anti-bourgeoisie and anti-intellectual-elitism element of Marx's ideas about making everybody labour on the land like peasants, and breaking down divisions between men and women because they were all workers and everyone needed to do the work, are potentially apparent in Cath's comments, and her strongly socialist parents may well have been directly inspired by such ideas. The breaking-down of division between genders and the downplaying of the sexualisation of women is seen here as almost a by-product rather than a directly tackled issue in this community.

Bridget echoed an experience of this kind of practical attitude to the large amount of work that needed doing in the same community as Cath:

"The kind of environment we were in was not oriented like that, chores and tasks weren't gender-oriented. Women would build walls and muck out the cows, and men would make dinner and clean. There wasn't that kind of division."

The domestic work described here, is included as part of the general work that everyone needed to do, and was not given lower status than other kinds of work. Many participants described how both men and women would do both domestic and other work in their communities, and many of them described how women seemed to them to still end up doing more of the domestic, emotional and childcare work than men.

Many participants talked about how they felt they had been empowered to think of themselves as capable of traditionally 'male' activities and felt happy that they had gained this sense of competence. They also often talked positively about the experience as children of witnessing men doing traditionally 'feminine' work such as childcare, cooking, cleaning, emotional and social work towards the maintenance of relationships within the community, and how this showed them that men are just as capable of these tasks as women.

Like many participants, Charlotte talked about older women in her community as inspirational role models that encouraged her to expect equality with men, or respect from them:

"I guess you're inspired by the strong women, kind of idolised them.[But] it was a healthy respect and I never doubted my strength as a woman because of what I had seen. I had never seen women being weak or second to men in any way at all. [And] I suppose that it applies to all sorts of things not just gender. [But] when you see that, you see someone having an idea and then being able to actually live it and that unquestioning sense of equality and accepting differences in a community... I find it really shocking still. It absolutely incenses me when people can be racist, bigoted, sexist, and I suppose it's this little dream of life being all equal and lovely, and it somehow embeds itself in your mind and you carry it with you. [And] although I am totally an adult now and I've seen so much crap in the world, it still doesn't stop shocking me sometimes that people can actually think like that. So, in a way you are kind of cosseted in a community aren't you? You don't realise that out there, there are people who think completely opposite to this – who don't respect women; who think anyone who is different from them, whatever the difference is, are alien; who won't accept difference, while still retaining respect. A lot of my feminist ideas came from my mother, who is a strong feminist, but I think that more than anything it's seeing it; seeing the example of women doing it for themselves, getting what they need out of life, which inspired me."

Charlotte's community had a strong focus on social care and they took in a lot of people who were needy in some way, often people who were stigmatised in mainstream society, and she has a strongly inclusive attitude in her adult life. Her description of the haven that she remembers her community providing and her anger when she encounters inequality in the world speak loudly of the power of living an experience of community that attempts to promote equality and inclusiveness as an ethical stance. Gender equality is seen here as a necessary part of a range of accepting difference in many forms whilst maintaining equality.

The shopping mall and the wider world

My participants often included in their ideology, attempts to live 'outside the system' – towards disengagement with the capitalist/consumerist 'system' that was seen as embodying inequality that often went together with a move towards self-sufficiency. This combined with feminist ideas to distance members from 'buying' notions of femininity, along with the products and marketing that serviced those notions. The trappings of consumerism, including fashion and beauty, were neither affordable to many commune members nor approved of by many in some communities. This meant commune-raised girls, who often had to cross into the mainstream world regularly as children going to school and as adults emerging into the world, experiencing a clash of cultures between home and the rest of society that sometimes centred around gender.

Cath's experience beautifully illustrates this clash in action and shows a strong sense of an identity created in an ambivalent way, with full awareness of the social power relations that are present in that process. Her consciousness of the process of becoming sexualised is acute:

"My tactic in terms of surviving at school was look like everyone else. Not in like a high-heel way, but wear what other people... My whole strategy was to be anonymous. When I started to grow boobs and stuff I hated it. Boys started to notice and comment, and I hated it. I used to cover my hair up and really hide. I used to have self-loathing. I used to wear really baggy clothes and hated it – being seen as sexual. I felt utterly dirtied by it. That gave me loads of problems with men for a

while. I hated men for a while – not ones I knew, but boys, you know, strange men. I was always hiding from them. I couldn't bear it. I just didn't want to be looked at like that. It took me a long time to get comfortable with myself. I just didn't want to be looked at like that."

Cath connected these feelings she had with her sense of wanting to be respected as a woman without being sexualised – something she connected with 'the mainstream'. Cath knew that different rules applied at home in her community and outside it:

"It was difficult how being a woman was when I was not at home in the community. The way people related there was about who you were, what you stood for and what you said, not about what you looked like in a sexual way. None of the girls at home were trying to impress anyone in that sexual way, and I think the boys looked for personality. My brothers certainly looked for someone who was similar to me and my stepmother, primarily personality before anything else. What we said always mattered more than what we looked like. You felt utterly respected for your opinions, and that was the first line. The other stuff didn't really matter. How you appeared wasn't as important as who you are."

The pressure of conventional gender roles became acute for Cath at adolescence, and the narrowing of identity along the lines of gender was experienced by her greater awareness (at least in retrospect), along with a comparative awareness of cultures of gender being different inside and outside her community:

"I thought I was a boy until I was about 12 or 13. There was that whole tomboy thing in my community – you had to be gritty. I hated secondary school. I would gnaw off my left arm rather than go. For me it was being put in the lions' den of just awfulness. You were supposed to look a certain way. The girls all got really girly and boys stopped talking to you as if you were a human being at all. That didn't happen at the community between boys and girls – not in the way we talked to each other no. There was a divide in terms of difference of interests. The girls used to want to sit in their rooms and talk, and the boys... I dunno what they were doing, but we thought it was stupid whatever it was... but we still talked to each other: the boys and girls, like we always did. I felt a pull between being a boy and a girl, because I am both, and I am neither. I like both things. I didn't want to sit and talk all the time. I wanted to do stuff and play as well, I still do. I like stuff like video games and driving, and rough play and stuff, which is supposed to be masculine..."

One of Cath's stories showed her being made over in the image of conventional femininity and being aware of the process:

"When I arrived at secondary school I turned up in jeans and a rugby shirt and trainers, which is what I always wore, I was taken back to a new friend's house at break by all these girls and they took me and put me in a dress and put make-up on me. It was awful. I had blue eye shadow and pink lipstick and a dress – and we're talking 1980s pastels. In the end I found the way to fit in with both boys and girls was to be a clown, just not participate in the marking myself out thing. I was still very much a tomboy – even as a teenager, really."

Cath's ambivalence about gender continued into her adult life, when she came into contact with female subjectivity in another culture:

"When I started working at an office in Colombia [South America] in my early twenties, I went there looking very English, and I got transformed like that [snaps fingers]. I was the doll. I went into the office and the women said: Right, you've got to do this with your hair, we're gonna take you down, give you a manicure, pedicure. We're gonna give you bras that lift you up, and you know, formed me into this Latin Woman image – and I let them do it, because I wanted access to that culture. [And] I looked like them and I talked like them. [And] that was my plan, to get inside the psyche of that society, and to be utterly accepted by people – which I love, when they think I am one of them, as a society like that. [And] then as time goes on, with that trust, I start to challenge what they believe in, from that position, start to throw in some questions, raise some issues, but knowing that I would never be rejected by those people, that they would never reject what I was saying outright because they feel that I am one of them. Does that sound really calculating?"

Cath is engaging here in subtle variations of belonging and resistance, for while basically seeking acceptance and wanting to belong. She also doesn't want to belong completely. She marks her resistance to belonging totally to this Latin model of femininity in a tentative way, hoping to work

out a persona that includes other aspects of her sense of self while avoiding rejection, as well as attempting to bring about a change in the surrounding culture through consciousness-raising: 'Start to throw in some questions, raise some issues' – a totally condoned and approved-of practice in her home community by her account – a form of consciousness raising. The conflict involved in this, and the amount of energy it took, proved difficult for her in the end.

"Well, after four years in Colombia I felt pulled all over the place – about who I was as a woman, how I was supposed to be as a woman. Because of my upbringing, I would look at myself in the mirror and say, 'Who are you?' 'Where are you?' 'What are you about?' 'What are you picking up?' 'Am I losing myself here?'

I couldn't define the lines any more, didn't know the boundaries. I started to feel restricted by that, me as a woman: being an object on someone's arm, people looking at me, and saying things like 'Oh you're quite intelligent really' and I'm 29, I'm not married, why do I not have a boyfriend? Stuff like that. The pressure of society was on me as if I was born and grew up there, and I had to keep saying to myself: 'Don't feel bad, it's not your country'. [And] I felt like one of them, but it became tiring. I got tired by the act. I started to challenge less because it wasn't getting me anywhere. It's hard to keep a sense of yourself if there aren't people around you validating what you think is you. So I would find these sticking points where I would kick against being 'made over'. I did find a group of women who were more like me, but they were a bit hostile because they judged me for looking feminine, and for not having my hair shaved short, even though inside their minds they thought more like the real me than the feminine me."

This negotiation of belonging and her sense of being a visitor in a culture she is not part of and was not formed by, are features of Cath's experience of what she describes as 'the mainstream' and reflect an experience that she often seemed to have in Britain as well as abroad when coming into contact with dominant ideologies – particularly in relation to gender identity. Her sense of saying to herself: 'don't feel bad, it's not your country' arguably also extends to her view of mainstream spaces and people, of whom she says: 'I totally don't expect people who have been brought up conventionally to think like me because they haven't had my experience, have they? They don't know any better.' Her lack of acceptance by feminist women in Colombia because of her membership of another group, women who look feminine, was also seen by Cath as a flaw in their ability to think beyond female stereotypes. There is a sense in Cath's talk of being outside of dominant ideologies or hegemonies and being able to see through stereotypes more easily because of her childhood experiences, of being always already resistant, of being formed as a person within resistant identities and therefore more free. This is particularly strong in her description of her relationship to gender and the experience of being a woman.

Being a girly girl in a tomboy world

Another experience of resistance for some participants was borne less from Heather's sense of not wanting to be marked out as strongly feminist than it was from feeling that aspects of the self do not fit in with feminist ideals in those communities. Along with avoiding the restrictions of femininity and valuing women's qualities that might be seen as masculine in mainstream culture (assertiveness, aggression, independence, strength...), some participants described a kind of a disavowal of any kind of softness or vulnerability for men and women. Bridget found that she did not feel tough enough to be approved of in her community, which in her view had a strong 'tomboy' ethos among the female children. As well as valuing the strength and toughness among adult women and men, she found that she valued other qualities of being human – of being female:

"I was very much brought up in that community environment and by my mum to have a very feminist outlook, ideology – is that the word for it? [And] actually, I spent quite a few years fighting against it, because it kind of represented everything I felt uncomfortable with about the commune. It was kind of rammed down my throat, I suppose. I didn't feel like I had another option. All I knew was that to be a woman in a kind of 'middle-class nuclear-family' situation was kind of wrong somehow, or subservient, or umm... I think that femininity wasn't really allowed and I was quite a sensitive little girl and kind of quite longed for a bit of femininity, I guess. The impression I was given was the kind of stereotype – that you had to be a strong woman – and it didn't seem very soft, umm... Which I didn't like very much. I kind of always imagined you could be strong, but you didn't need to be masculine to do it. [But] there was you know, that kind of idea that if you were

feminine, you were pandering to a male audience and you were therefore quite subservient and done over ... The image that I was given was that being a woman wasn't a nice thing to be, even if you were a strong woman. It was like, you were always being done over in one way or another and that the world was going to be unfriendly to you because you are were a woman – so you had to be tough to survive. [And] that your life would suck [giggles] inevitably. [And] now it's like, in some ways, that's true. I mean, all the things they were all banging on about, I have seen that too, but I don't know. In terms of rejecting certain things that they had been brought up with, they were very moralistic about it. So being materialistic wasn't OK; being macho if you were a boy wasn't OK; being really girly if you were a girl wasn't OK. It just wasn't OK... It wasn't a case of 'It's your decision' – like they made out it was actually really judged and disapproved of. You were then becoming what they had rejected."

In the same community, Cath talked about a similar valuing of traditionally 'masculine' qualities:

"From a gender point of view it was a hard lesson for girls. If you didn't want to play rough, you were in trouble. In fact, for any kid who didn't want to play rough, or who couldn't look after themselves physically, it was a harsh environment. I am not sure what value system that was, but everyone, all the kids, had to be physically tough and it wasn't acceptable to not be. In the end we all had to be like boys. We were all tomboys or boys. Why couldn't people play with dolls? They didn't encourage boys to play with dolls and the girls weren't approved of for doing that either – can't make them into good little women; too oppressive, too sexist – so we all did boy things; fought each other and climbed trees and stuff – very rough and tumble. You needed to be strong and tough."

The perceived freedom (both in the community and in the self) to have qualities that are both traditionally or conventionally 'male' and 'female' differs noticeably between participants from different communities. The version of femaleness that was described as modelled and approved of fluctuated in the participants' communities. Some were softer than others, and some (like Cath and Bridget's), seem to have instilled some sense of shame about displaying traditionally female qualities. In avoiding the 'oppressive gender roles' of 'the mainstream', it is arguable that in some instances a new, yet still restrictive version of acceptable female subjectivity was created instead. For commune men, as well as women, the issue of confronting and embracing aspects of self – that are less rough and tough than this subjectivity allowed, was described as socially unacceptable by participants. The idea that outside community life, women would inevitably end up being 'done over' – as Bridget describes, – a potentially powerfully restrictive place for women (who might presumably wish to leave home at some point, and are being presented with an image of there being nowhere safe for them to go). Bridget also talked about her perception of the intention of 'feminist' ideas in her community being to liberate women and girls. But her experience of how she was 'supposed' to be left her feeling constrained and narrowed in what was acceptable to display nonetheless.

Leah described an internal negotiation between the idea of 'conventional femininity as weakness' (a submission to, or acceptance of 'oppression'). Her desire to be sexy and feminine empowered by this negotiation with 'conventional femininity' in some ways enabled her to take part in mainstream social life – involving finding and owning a powerful sense of sexuality and sensuality:

"I would definitely say I am not a girly girl, but I wouldn't say that I was unfeminine. I don't not wear things that are probably quite umm... I think what I wear looks nice and sometimes quite sort of provocative and sexy... What I am wearing now [a fairly low-cut and tight long-sleeved top with tight jeans and trainers] is quite kind of sexy, but at the same time I wouldn't cry because I broke a nail or have any problem schlepping through fields or brambles or climbing trees, y'know? [But] I quite like high heels sometimes. I don't think they are mutually exclusive, but I guess for some people they are. You can't be both..."

There is a core ambivalence in Leah's notions of femininity and feminist ideas, an awareness of the situated and contextual nature of feminine norms, but also a sense of struggling to make sense of received notions of feminist ideas in a way which has integrity to her. As consumerism is so intricately involved in identity in our culture, engaging with social life outside the intentional community would be likely to mean learning how to skilfully navigate marking an identity through appearance and dress. The disapproval of this, which some participants reported as a feature of their communal backgrounds, did not stop participants, as they grew to become teens and young

women, from wanting or needing or having to learn how to do performative femininities. These needs accrued disapproval at home in their communities, but were needed in order to feel confident in their 'mainstream' life. To be intelligible is necessary for social contact. As young people in most of these communities went to conventional schools, there was no getting away from having to deal with the clash between the anti-materialist, anti-consumer, feminist values of home and the need to fit in and to be intelligible in the outside world.

In participants' reporting this need to fit in and be intelligible becomes more acute as these women leave their communities and have to find a way to fit in to the mainstream. With less 'validation for who you think you are', as Cath said, they move from communities into a mainstream culture with different female subjectivities and rules of relationship and engagement than those they experienced as children (none of these commune-raised women live in intentional communities as adults). Resistance to their parent culture's unwillingness to engage with mainstream consumer culture (and its gendered nature) could be seen as a necessary part of these women's development and independence – as there are few spaces as radically 'outside' these systems of norms as the ones that intentional community offers. The experimenting with other ways of 'doing' femininity than what was condoned or modelled at home allowed some participants a sense of greater freedom in their opinion.

Conclusion

Some of my participants reported recollections of strong codes of acceptable (resistant) forms of being female in their communities, and these could be tricky to negotiate without feeling ashamed of traits that were still affiliated to 'conventional femininity': notions that remained unexamined for many participants and were almost universally described as for example, vulnerability, softness and emotionality as well as submissiveness.

For some participants as children this could be difficult, and they have carried some sense of being socialised almost as boys, with macho expectations of early independence and 'strength' along traditionally masculine lines, and other qualities being less acceptable. In their adult lives all my participants retain a sense of the importance of gender equality and women's liberation, although many also feel a strong need to embrace 'softer', more traditionally feminine, aspects of self and still see this as in some way rebelling against 'feminist' ideas they picked up in their communities. How much this paints a true picture of the actual 'feminism' at play in their communities amongst adults is hard to know.

Some participants remain dubious about how much women were actually equally sharing the hard work of parenting and domestic life with partners or other adults in community. What they witnessed was far more complex than a simple 'equality' lived out in a utopian way. Amongst all participants there was a common appreciation that equality (also a fairly unexamined concept in terms of what it really entailed practically) is a good idea and that men and women 'should' be equal. These values are strong amongst all of my participants and almost taken for granted in a way that they become invisible against the questioning of the minutiae of how that might be achieved better than their parents culture managed. Fundamentally these are a group of women whose experience of communal childhood has instilled within them a strong questioning of gender as a fixed or given notion, and a strong imperative towards and expectation of equality with men.

Some of the ways in which participants have challenged, rejected or questioned ideas which they see as 'feminist' seems to be connected to the more general mood in some communities of being self consciously 'outside' of or 'alternative' to the 'mainstream' and participants desire to be able to fit into the 'mainstream' when they want to. This extended to feeling that they wish to be able to engage with performative gender identities that they see as being more conventional or mainstream than those they witnessed, or learnt, in their childhoods in intentional community.

For me another question also emerged from my discussions with participants: a sense of the conflict surrounding political as well as feminist ideologies in their communities. Living with an atmosphere of conflict and debate produced (in participants' child's view, or recollection) by the expression of such political notions and related attempts to alter practices in the social spaces of intentional community, was not easy for some participants. They recounted just wanting all the fighting to stop. In some ways there is, in discussing feminism with participants, a sense of

participants simply disliking living with conflict, tension and power struggles as children, and feeling disrupted and affected by such an emotional atmosphere. This sense of uneasiness is also carried over to participants' sense of other political or practical debates within their communities. These were less elaborated upon in our discussions, as this research focuses on women, girls and their situated experience of feminism and femininity. Other political notions didn't necessarily get such attention. This focus came from participants - out of the pilot interviews, in which participants showed a desire to talk and think through their relationship with feminism and how their childhoods in intentional community contributed to that relationship.

There are some vague notions surrounding the label 'feminist' in participants' responses and recollection; some assumptions that the categories of 'conventional femininity' and 'mainstream' are real and distinct from communal spaces and identities; and that there is a reality to intentional communities as genuinely 'outside' the mainstream and radically different enough from it to be recognisably and distinctly 'alternative' world-views and opinions. This is interesting in itself, and seems to me to show a strong belief system, which is likely, from participant's reporting, to have been how intentional communities saw themselves at the time of participant's childhoods.

