UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

All in the Same Boat? A Study of
the Experience of Royal Air Force
Wives Today.

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DECLARATION:

This thesis is wholly the result of work done whilst I was in registered postgraduate candidature, and is based entirely on my own work.

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ABSTRACT
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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ALL IN THE SAME BOAT? A STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF RAF WIVES
TODAY
by Karen Anne Manson

This thesis is based on research carried out on RAF bases in the UK. The main part of the formal research (80%) was carried out on a large operational base in the west of England, anonymised here as RAF Blyton; the remaining 20% was carried out on a remote Scottish base, anonymised as RAF Rockall. Additional observational material was collected at a base in the midland area of England, anonymised as RAF Culswick.

Studies of military wives and families, although not numerous, do exist, tending towards a broad sweep of the issues affecting families. This research is unique in its focus on the married 'patch' and particularly life in the married quarter, and how wives are shaped and survive in this environment. Also unusual is the emphasis on three key issues, emerging as close to wives' hearts. Rather than concentrating on the job, the focus is on marriage, friendship and community. Differences between the experience of wives of officers and non-commissioned personnel is another feature not present in detail in any other study.

The methodological approach is different firstly in that the hybrid position of insider and researcher is employed, securing a level of access which would have been difficult for an 'outside' researcher. Secondly, the research combines taped interviews, questionnaire data and observational material; the unusual factor here being the length of the period of participant observation: 5 years. The thesis comprises an introduction, a methods chapter, three substantive chapters and a short bridging chapter. In the absence of a formal literature review, literature is used and critiqued throughout the thesis.

The study found that wives foster an ambiguous love/hate relationship with the RAF, and that wives are agents, who despite constraints imposed by military life (and awareness of conflict with prevailing social trends) can make important decisions regarding their contribution to and experience of military life. Due to mobility, managing friendships is found to be vital to wives, in the absence of other channels of support. Sadness caused by the superficiality of acquaintanceship and feelings of rootlessness within a community of mobile individuals is highlighted. Formal and informal social arrangements are identified and a desire to belong to the RAF community in different capacities is reported, due to husbands' intense involvement with the job, and distance from family roots. High participation in events on the base is not always found to correspond to high feelings of integration, and awareness of a high level of surveillance on the married patch is noted.

Whilst contributing to policy debates on the military, notably the effect of hiving off services and cuts in defence funding on morale, the thesis also contributes to sociological debates, such as movement and change, hierarchy in community, the elusiveness of solidarity, positive and negative aspects of gossip and the status of marriage.

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This study is based upon the premise that within the context of societal change and military policy change, service wives occupy a relatively unique and under-researched position in society and also in relation to contemporary work organisation. The basic sociological principles which underpin this study are firstly that we are affected by the wider social forces around us and secondly that social behaviour is explained in terms of membership of social groups. From this point, it naturally follows that in studying the experience of RAF wives I am seeking to gain access to their social worlds, and to explore in detail the impact on women's lives of being married to RAF servicemen. I am attempting to explain the nature of the social forces surrounding RAF wives; the pressures to conform; the sanctions against/effects of non-conformity; to look at the different types of groups to which they belong; whether the issue of rank affects wives; the way (temporary) community is generated and sustained; the issue of wives' identity; the crossover between public and private domains; the nature and quality of friendships, and the quality of family relationships.

In essence, the social scientific problems I set out to investigate (which contain the above-mentioned subject areas) fall under the three main headings of marriage and family, friendship and community, which later form the basis of the three chapters at the centre of this thesis. The first and most central problem (from which the other problems flow) relates to marriage, and the idea of being married to the job. Research on occupational wives exists and will be considered below, but there appears to be a dearth of up-to-date research. I wanted to tackle the question of whether there are different degrees of marriage to the job, to ascertain whether RAF wives are more or less married to their husbands' jobs than in previous decades, and to examine the extent to which their lives and choices are affected by marriage. Also considered under the general heading of marriage are the closely related subjects of motherhood (and the way military life changes and usually intensifies, on having a child) and career (the possibilities for which change dramatically on marrying a serviceman). The other two main sociological problems dealt with here follow on from marriage, the second being friendship.

This study considers the extent to which friendship is affected a) by geographical mobility (or a nomadic lifestyle), and b) by what I would describe as 'service mentality' (essentially the taking on of service values by wives, to the extent that friendship becomes contextual, and has little relevance outside the immediate context in which it is conceived: a particular base at a particular moment in time). Research on the contextual nature of friendship does exist and will be discussed below. In terms of this study, I have sought to move on towards another question which is open to debate: whether geographical mobility and distance from family and home means that meaningful friendships can not be developed. I also set out to examine the circumstances within which friendships thrive, and the individual responses of RAF wives to the question of friendship on and off military bases. At one extreme I envisaged women who are married to RAF servicemen rushing out to meet new people on a base, and at the other extreme, (perhaps because of past experience) not venturing out of the house or becoming involved in activities on the base at all. Central to this sociological problem is the function and utility of friendship in military life (where family and old friends can rarely be called on to help).

The third problem relates to community support and control. I have sought to investigate the nature and extent of community support and control within a military environment, and the way in which wives generate and sustain community in the face of geographical mobility. Popular images of military life (as projected by television portraits such as 'Soldier, Soldier') lean towards the idea of a big happy family, an abundance of community spirit, and little scope for loneliness. I wanted to look beyond this idealistic image, and chart the different responses of women to life on a military base: from coping well, to opting to live away from the base, and also to identify the social facilitators of and inhibitors to adjustment to RAF life. I wanted to find out who can 'hack it' and who can not, and the underlying reasons. A thread running through this thesis will be the tension which appears to exist between the military 'ideal' of public ownership of employees' lives, and the modern trend towards privatised lifestyles.

This chapter begins the process of expanding on the sociological problems being investigated, making use of various literature sources to illustrate their nature, explaining why they are worthy of research and showing how key themes emerged (from the literature) and led towards a focus on the three main areas of marriage and family, friendship and community. With the exception of these three subjects, each of which has a chapter devoted to them, secondary sociological problems will be dealt with within the chapters in the main body of this thesis (for example, career and relocation), and although discussed here under a particular heading, may feature in more than one chapter. Such overlap is inevitable in a sociological study of this kind, where the subject matter is not amenable to being strictly coded to particular subject headings.

To consider briefly the importance of existing literature to this research, prior to commencing fieldwork an extensive literature search was undertaken (and is ongoing). Existing literature has been used to crystallise my own ideas, to help me find a way forward capable of extending current sociological knowledge of RAF wives, and also of linking into current debates about defence cuts, hiving off military services and property, changing meanings attached to work, movement and change, the hierarchical nature of community, the elusive nature of solidarity, and changing expectations within marriage. A very important point to make here is that much existing research on military families has been policy driven, and a 'problem' for government is not necessarily a problem for the population studied (Chandler 1987:94). An aim of this thesis is to 'get at' the issues and concerns which present real daily challenges to RAF wives.

In terms of the literature, that distinctive social forces do affect the lives of RAF wives to a greater or lesser extent (greater for those living on the base) is not questioned. Existing studies of occupational wives, in the military and other professions, have shown that men's work does affect women's lives. Most of the major studies of occupational wives were conducted nearly two decades ago, and my work thus attempts to chart the changes which have occurred in the intervening period.

As a result, certain factors such as the impact of feminist ideas, the growth of married women's paid employment, changing ideas about cohabitation, a rise in voluntary childlessness and changing expectations about lifestyles and consumption, (absent in significant measure from earlier studies) will be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, it will be pointed out at various stages of the thesis that although the work *inter alia* of Finch (1983), Callan and Ardener (1984), Chandler (1987), Nicholson (1980) and Jolly (1992) is becoming slightly outdated, some of the patterns identified by them are still discernible today, in terms of the sample studied. This finding of wives being 'frozen in time' is highly significant in view of the current emphasis on individualism and self-interest, which conflicts directly with the idea of a wife being 'married' to her husband's job.

It is also important to note that my research has led me towards the view that the RAF appears to be seen in military circles as less formal, less traditional and less hierarchical than the other three services (army, navy and marines). This suggests that a 'progressive' attitude towards wives and families might be observed, and evidence of initiatives aimed at improving communication between the organisation and wives and families has been observed (for example the organisation Airwaves, which is the official communication channel for RAF families). Whether wives perceive this to be the case is a question posed by this study.

Moving on to look in more detail at the question of marriage to the job, one of the most well-known studies is that of Janet Finch, on the wives of the clergy. She took wives of the Clergy as the subject of her own doctoral thesis, and then went on to write a book on wives' incorporation in men's work. In this book Finch contends that a man's work structures a woman's life and elicits her contributions to it. Painting a picture of a stereotypical domestic sacrificial wife, she says: "....a man's work imposes a set of structures upon his wife's life, which consequently constrain her choices about the living of her own life, and set limits upon what is possible for her...." (1983:2).

The sorts of structures in question relate to where (geographically) they are expected to live, what facilities/job opportunities exist, what level of participation in military life is expected (as well as what type of conduct), and what percentage of time the job takes the man away from home. Such arrangements contain echoes of the post-war re-domestication of women after their temporary liberation into paid work during the war. A munitions worker talking on Woman's Hour stated that "The day after armistice was declared we went out, children in tow, to drop them off at nursery while we went to the factory. Only the nursery doors were barred and we all had to go home. It [Childcare provision] was finished just like that, overnight" (Murray, 1996). Given that society has moved on from that position, having some important choices denied them can be a bitter pill to swallow for RAF wives (albeit they do have other choices, such as whether to make the best of every posting), as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

Marriage, therefore is the starting point for involvement in RAF life, although the institution has been found to impinge significantly on the lives of women prior to that stage of their lives, particularly in the way that marriage is encouraged and almost expected of servicemen, and also the way it invades courtship and affects marriage plans; girlfriends being afforded no status in military terms, and cohabitation being forbidden on military bases (which will be discussed in chapter 3). Resolute heterosexuality within the military is a plausible explanation for this trend, resulting in early marriage and early fatherhood. The military significantly affects marriage, in various ways, which will be touched upon below, and discussed in detail in chapter 3.

It has been claimed that men often have the sense to marry appropriate spouses: who have the requisite competencies to support them in their careers! (Delphy and Leonard 1992). Interestingly, Young (1993) found that in the police force policemen often seem to seek out policewomen as partners, and this is relatively easy in a number of occupations, where prospective partners are met in the workplace. Delphy and Leonard make the interesting comment that: "Even when there are no direct negative sanctions.....there are usually rewards if she is prepared to comply" (1992:252).

They also make the claim that a wife who refuses to behave can be seen in military circles as worse than no wife at all, which again is an attitude obviously at odds with contemporary leanings toward tolerance of individual differences. A very important point has been made in relation to non-conformity: that if a couple divorce (possibly because the wife refuses to conform to the lifestyle) a wife loses almost everything, for example she loses her home if they live on the base, her friends if she has to move away, and she is left with the task of re-building her life somewhere new (Jolly 1992, Delphy and Leonard 1992). Divorce could therefore be seen as the ultimate sanction against non-conformity.

Another important point, which has been considered in detail within this study, is that in a military marriage, the level of husband absence which a job entails can significantly affect a wife's experience of service life, and also can lead to her being categorised in a certain way. If there are many women living in close proximity who are 'in the same boat', then she might find herself in a supportive environment. On the other hand, in some circumstances a wife on her own could feel quite left out of things (especially when living off the service base), as her social status can be seen by others as reasonably ambiguous (and the 'gaze' she is subjected to could be compared to Foucault's production of 'docile' bodies through the disciplinary gaze of the panopticon (1977)).

Because the situation is temporary, wives whose husbands are away are not afforded the same entitlements to emotional or practical difficulties as those who have been widowed or divorced. Joan Chandler (1991) found in her study of naval wives that some wives adopted varying degrees of independence, which could promote anxiety in their marriages, and promote gossip. In contrast, some women were found to put their lives on hold or go and stay with family for long periods, in anticipation of their husbands' return. She found that attitudes to husband absence related to other parts of wives' identities and their experience of marriage itself. Prolonged absence is not such a marked feature of RAF life as navy or army life, but long postings do exist in the RAF, and this is a thread which will help connect my study to existing studies of other branches of the military.

Finally, in terms of service wives being encouraged to see marriage as the 'norm', living in married quarters is an obvious way in which social forces (in the form of the military) can impinge heavily on women's lives, and also where conformity can be encouraged. This conformity can be seen to come mainly from the behaviour and expectations of other wives, and to be internalized and carried out as self-monitoring (Foucault 1977).

In an article in *Signs*, Lynne Dobrofsky and Constance Batterson (1977) discuss the way the military expects conformity from wives, and put forward the contention that the married patch shields women from other role models: such as the never-married, the divorced, widowed or separated (also Jolly 1992). In this way women are seen to be encouraged to see their own social positions as 'normal'.

The role of extended family, and the effect of being separated from them has been identified as a source of anxiety for RAF wives, and will be discussed within the marriage chapter, and also at other appropriate points in the thesis.

Alongside marriage, motherhood has also been found to have a fundamental impact on the experience of all aspects of RAF life, and analysis of this part of an RAF wife's experience will be undertaken primarily within chapter 3 on marriage and family. As mothers of small children, a large proportion of wives living on a military base are at home during the day. One of the reasons for this is the effect of mobility on wives' ability to sustain careers. Of necessity, (the alternative being remaining indoors all the time as 'domestic prisoners', or venturing out into the local community, which usually means a reasonable drive, and venturing into 'unknown territory!') they become involved in various groups on the base, such as mothers and toddlers, wives clubs, and other activities. This can be a positive or negative experience, and many wives in my study described activities on the patch as 'cliquey' or 'gossipy'. The welcome or lack of welcome provided by such groups can affect a wife's whole perception of military life, and Nicholson (1980) found that general dislike of the lifestyle could spill over to dislike of the patch, and thus to a distorted view of life on the patch.

An additional point is that women who have previously had promising careers and would probably still be working if relocation was not part of their husband's job, might find it very difficult to go along to groups and clubs on the base during the day. It can feel quite hostile entering such social situations as the 'new person'. Also, the conversation can seem inane to professional women who are accustomed to mixing with a wide variety of people and being in positions of responsibility. Jolly reports one of her interviewees as saying: "Coffee mornings on the patch are ghastly ......The conversation revolves around trivia - diets, hair, clothes, furniture, flowers - and gossip" (1992:64).

Another group who can find life on the patch very strange, are professional women who do not have children (either through choice or through infertility) and who are not working, generally due to having to move around with their husbands. Without children, women who are at home (including those with school-age children) can feel very isolated. As writers such as Jolly (1992) and Chandler (1991) have argued, women without children can feel very excluded from life on a military base, and lacking a suitable role; there appears to be an unspoken expectation amongst wives that RAF wives should also be mothers (almost as an antidote to isolation). In such circumstances wives can feel they are being subjected to a form of 'domestic' dumbing down, and as reflected in the above quotation from Jolly's work, can resultantly feel resentful; such feelings can spill over into a dislike of the military generally, and to marital conflict.

As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, those who enjoy life on the military base appear to be women who are happy to make a 'career' out of coffee mornings and other social groupings on the military base (and value contextual friendship and acquaintanceship above deep friendships), those who are not interested in paid work, and those who feel comfortable with moving around and meeting new people on a regular basis (which can sometimes be related to previous experience of military life as a child or as an ex-servicewoman prior to marriage).

With regard to friendship, in the experience of RAF wives, it is an obvious conclusion that the nature and quality of friendships will be affected by the transient nature of military life. Writers on occupational wives and on friendship have generally touched on this aspect of military life (or more generally, this aspect of the lives of women whose husbands' jobs require them to relocate on a regular basis). In the military the whole process of making friends is short-circuited in the interests of available time, and as Nicholson (1980) has noted, this can lead to misunderstandings about the practice of friendship, due to cultural differences.

The point that our friends help provide us with our sense of identity and also confirm our social worth is made by Allan (1989). Many of the writers on occupational wives have raised this point, and have given particular emphasis to the fact that wives do have a certain degree of control over the friendships they make and maintain, whereas they have little or no control over other aspects of their lives, such as where they live.

Jolly (1992) expresses strong views about the role of married quarters in shaping women's lives, *inter alia* in terms of the development of friendships. Jolly explores how these social forces are incorporated into women's lives, gauges levels of awareness of their existence, and wives' acceptance/rejection of them, where there is acknowledgement of their existence. She succinctly articulates this problem when she describes military communities: as being sheltered in one sense, but also very transient. She says:

> "Genuine feelings of solidarity and comradeship seldom get a chance to deepen into real and lasting friendship, and while some people thrive on the semi-nomadic lifestyle, others undoubtedly feel a profound insecurity" (1992:53).

Very closely related to the friendship problem is that of community, which is considered in detail in chapter 5. It is a term which is not easily definable, and which is bandied about a great deal in military circles. In-depth analyses of existing community studies have been conducted by Crow and Allan (1994). In definitional terms, they contend that community stands as a convenient shorthand for the realm of local social arrangements which stretch beyond home and family, but are more familiar to us than wider society.

Bulmer (1989:153) has described these social arrangements as "intermediary structures". As a key concept, Hamilton argues that community unites sociology and social anthropology (in Cohen 1985:8).

In looking at community, various theories will be considered in relation to my data, for example, those which relate to community time and proximity and distance. As Crow and Allan (1995) point out, communities are never static; people age and change as the life course progresses, and people move in and out of any community, changing its balance and composition. Another important theme will be that of insiders and outsiders, and the processes/rules involved in becoming an insider, as well as any factors inhibiting acceptance.

The threat of loss of community will also be considered in relation to RAF life, and the way families can feel that they are losing much of their identity as they relocate to new bases or prepare to leave the air force and enter civilian life. The nature of social networks, the strength and utility of community ties and the way social structures are constructed and maintained on a military base will also be examined.

Most aspects of the 'problem' of community relate to living on the military base. This is where wives cannot hide from the almost panoptic (Foucault 1977) gaze of the institution, and the crossover between public and private domains is most obvious. Some resemblance can be seen here to the properties of Goffman's total institutions, and to the assertion that 'Some total institutions exist to carry out a work-task, and it is the nature of that task, and the way it is organised, which causes one set of social relations to pervade all areas of life, at least for a time.....' (1961:5-6). The married quarter, which could be seen as a unique social microcosm, in terms of data collected, appears to be almost an extension of the workplace, which explains the relevance of the foregoing statement.

This study seeks to identify the differential reactions of wives to the encroachment of the social force of the military institution itself, into family life. Writers on occupational wives acknowledge this aspect of living in an occupational community. For example, Macmillan (1984), Finch (1983), Young (1993) and Nicholson (1980) all note that wives are more visible on the patch and there is less scope for privacy. As reported by Nicholson (1980), many wives dislike the imposition of other people's standards and behaviour upon themselves and their children, and also the close scrutiny of their behaviour and standards, which others can subject them to in an institutional setting. This can be linked to the work of Grimshaw (1993) who draws attention to the way Foucault's work helps us to see that feminism is not innocent of power; in relation to married quarters the relevance of this statement can be seen in the way that wives (who might feel they are lacking in power and status in some major areas of their lives) can effectively control the behaviour of other wives by example and social sanction for non-conformity.

An obvious point to mention in relation to the crossover between public and private domains is the indirect pressure exerted by the institution on couples to get married, in order to be allocated a married quarter. This can obviously lead to marriage in haste, and also to marriage in situations where the couple are happy cohabiting, and feel they are getting married to conform to institutional rules rather than because they want to.

It has been found that many families want to be in the property market, and feel their lives become their own only when they move away from the occupational setting (Chandler 1991, Young 1993). Where appropriate in the context of this thesis, attention will be given to articulating the differences experienced by wives when living on as opposed to off the military base.

Wives living in the occupational community are much more visible, and vulnerable to having their suitability measured against a notional ideal (Finch 1983), which could also be described as surveillance and the promotion of self-surveillance (Foucault 1977). For example, wives can be expected to attend certain functions related to their husband's job, to behave in a dignified manner and to dress appropriately.

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As will be explored further in chapter 3, wives can also feel pressurised to stay at home and look after their children rather than going out to work.

A final point in relation to institutional encroachment relates to the formal procedures of 'marching in' and 'marching out' of military properties. As noted by Jolly (1992), this is seen by most people as a ritualistic (and somewhat unnecessary) procedure. It is very strict in terms of cleanliness and orderliness, and fines are imposed for defaulters. In Foucauldian terms this could be seen as a "technique for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities" (in Rabinow 1984:207). Victoria Combe, writing in an article in the Daily Telegraph dated 23.3.98, claims that more families buy their own houses because of march outs than for any other reason.

In general terms, researchers have found that some women like living in (or generally being involved with) an institutional setting, some strongly dislike it, and some tolerate it. Wives who dislike living on the patch have in some cases been found to be in the minority but are often articulate and intelligent (Jolly 1992). The differences between wives, and the different extents to which they are capable of being influenced by social forces on the base will be considered by exploring the types of groups to which they belong, and also the groupings (for example, officer's wife, station commander's wife, member of the flower arranging committee) which other wives assign them to, by virtue of their address, husband's job, or outside activities.

Living on the patch obviously involves contact with neighbours, but unlike civilian life, neighbours can change quite frequently, and there is a possibility that families will have several sets of neighbours during one posting. A supportive framework of neighbourly contact can thus be built up, only to be removed as each family moves on to another base, inhibiting the development of community spirit.

This study sets out to discover the nature of the 'glue' which holds the community structure (if indeed it exists) together, in the absence of permanence of tenure (unlike the army, where the whole regiment moves together, and the basis for community is therefore familiarity rather than geographical location). As with other aspects of institutional living, some people cope with the temporary tenure of their neighbours better than others. In addition, stereotyping can occur on the base according to the street you live on, and wives can also find themselves being grouped in this way. For example certain streets can gain the reputation of being friendly or unfriendly, sociable or unsociable, or inhabited by lower ranks or very temporary staff (which will more often than not be gross generalisations).

Another way of grouping wives is according to their husbands' rank, and rank is an issue which has been found to affect (often in a negative way) wives' experience of service life. Several writers have discussed the impact of rank on women's lives, and instances were recorded in my study of wives being treated differently according to their husband's rank. This has been seen to occur within commissioned and non-commissioned ranks, as well as between them. (For reference purposes, appendix II sets out the rank structure of the RAF.)

Categorising wives according to their husbands' jobs can be misleading (and could even be demeaning), as wives come from a wide range of backgrounds and have varying levels of education (Pahl and Pahl 1971, Papanek 1973). My interview sample contains a split between wives of commissioned and non-commissioned personnel, and comparisons/contrasts will be highlighted where applicable.

Finally in discussing the 'grouping' of wives, there are certain aspects of service life which transcend rank and status. Areas which have been identified by my study and by other researchers are church attendance and youth work. In church a high ranking officer's wife will find it much easier to socialise and work alongside the wives of junior airmen than in the majority of other social situations on a military station.

Similarly in youth work, role reversal can be observed, a high ranking officer's wife may be a helper at Brownies, whilst the wife of a junior airman, or indeed a female junior airwoman, may be Brown Owl! (Jolly 1992:60).

The above discussion leads towards the idea that there is indeed a great deal of pressure on the wives of RAF servicemen to conform to an 'ideal' standard. The most obvious pressure is to live in quarters, given the nomadic lifestyle that service life entails. Living in quarters invokes the imposition of certain norms and values on women's lives, and by living on the base women can feel that they are opening themselves to scrutiny. By choosing to live in private accommodation it would appear that they can live privatised lives.

Alongside this pressure to conform are the (mostly implicit) sanctions for non-conformity. A wife's refusal to conform can affect her husband's career, particularly where she refuses to relocate. Sanctions can be directly related to the husband's career. Many writers have acknowledged the difficulties non-conformity of wives poses for the military. Jolly (1992) found that the main reasons for servicemen quitting the service (in her sample) were related to family, and in particular the wellbeing of wives, and children's education.

Given the range of social forces which do affect the lives of RAF wives, and the way these are manifest in every day situations relating to social status and surroundings, using the headings of marriage and family, friendship and community emerged from my initial investigations as the most appropriate way of organising and analysing my data, with the obvious allowance that overlap will occur between chapters due to the subjective nature of the material collected.

Introduction

It is important to chart the nature of the methodological journey in any sociological research project, mainly because unlike studying the physical world, it is not possible to predict the behaviour of humans, therefore there can be no 'set' way of studying human behaviour. As a result, there are no unanimous agreements amongst sociologists about the practice of sociology and how research should be approached. Worsley makes an important point when he says that: "The effect on humans of being studied by other humans is an unavoidable and serious problem in much sociological inquiry" (1992:78).

In effect, the credibility or otherwise of any thesis can rest on the adoption (and possibly ongoing adaptation) of the 'right' methods for that particular area of study, and on the ability of the researcher to explain clearly the nature of the methods used and the reasons they were chosen.

In the context of my research, I found Allan's contention to be accurate, that often it does not seem that the researcher has to make a major conscious decision about whether a qualitative or quantitative approach is adopted, as: "The way the research problem is formulated and the research agenda specified gradually makes it obvious what approach is most suitable" (in Allan & Skinner 1991:177). I will endeavour to set out below the basis of my methodological progress throughout the research project.

Research Beginnings/Finding a (preliminary) Role

Although the issues to be addressed were very dear to my heart, and had been set out in the research proposal presented to the ESRC, starting the research process was a relatively frightening experience. Although 'living' the research in one sense (I was an RAF wife, living outside in the wider community), I had never lived on a married quarters estate and it appeared like a closed world to me.

Living away from the camp, I did not feel like an RAF wife, apart from the detrimental effect the job had on my home life. In effect I set out to establish what an RAF wife is, with the pre-conception that they are shaped and moulded by the experience of living in a married quarter on a military base.

We had no children, therefore I was able to pursue my own career and other interests at will. I had no contacts or friends living on RAF bases, but was eager to gain access to and understanding of it all. I wanted to find out if the experience of living on a military base is different/unique compared to civilian life.

I also wanted to look at the whole experience of being an RAF wife, at the particular coping mechanisms wives employ, at who thrives in that environment, who just 'survives' and who can't cope. 'Conventional wisdom' (Jolly 1996:7) had led me to believe that officers' wives had a different experience to the wives of non-commissioned personnel, and I felt this was another area worthy of investigation. Berger (1966) points out that sociology makes us see the world in a new light, and that the first wisdom of sociology is that things are not as they seem. I was eager to find out if my pre-conceptions, 'conventional wisdom' and the observations of other researchers would be confirmed by my study, and to find out if things were or were not as they seemed! The lack of available texts on the subject confirmed my initial instincts that this is a subject which merits research attention.

Prior to beginning the research, I had many pre-conceptions about RAF life. I felt I was out of step with other RAF wives, or that I was at least in the minority, as I had many gripes about the job, such as the unpredictable work pattern of a C-130 (large transport plane, flying personnel and equipment all over the world) pilot. Experience of going to functions on the base had left me with the distinct impression that wives on the base were happy with their lot. RAF wives seemed like an exclusive club, endowed with qualities of virtuosity and selflessness (akin to the stereotype of post-war wives as sacrificial domestic angels) at a level I felt I obviously did not possess!

They seemed to me to be happy with being under permanent almost panoptic (Foucault, 1977) scrutiny from the RAF and from other wives.

They also seemed happy with what appeared to me to be living on a superficial level day to day: with many acquaintances rather than close friends. Wives seemed happy to take part in whatever was 'going on' on the base, and the base seemed to be their 'whole world'. I was aware that my view was indeed simplistic, and I was very keen to explore and try to find the "truth!".

Experience of living in a remote community (as a native Shetlander) and an acute awareness of the difference between living on the mainland and living on a remote island led me to contemplate doing some comparative research on a remote station. These were the women whom I envisaged empathising most with on a personal level; they are isolated from their families, cannot visit family or friends when their husbands are away without travelling across the water at great expense, and have no kinship network to help with child care. In short, many aspects of their experience appeared to be similar to my own situation.

In effect, I decided that I needed to get alongside RAF wives in order to get to the heart of the research problem. I knew a bit about one part of the picture, living off the base (which I suspected was only a very small part of the equation), but nothing about the area I felt would yield the most fruitful data, that of living on a base.

Settling on a Strategy

An ethnographic approach, combining several methods including interviewing and my own unique brand of participant observation was seen as the right direction to take. The participant observation employed in this study had no clear beginning or end (past experiences and conversations could be recalled and used, and I continue to be an RAF wife, observing other wives). The benefits of this approach have been considerable, in that I never had to actively seek observational data; it was continually landing on my doorstep!

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I found several pearls of wisdom in Gilbert's assessment of ethnography. In discussing the early 20th century Chicago school of sociologists, Gilbert says they: "....emphasised seeing things from the perspective of those studied before stepping back to make a more detached assessment" (1993:156). At the beginning of my research, living 40 minutes' drive from the base, I was able to adopt this approach by visiting the base and then returning 'home' to reflect on the data collected. On moving to a military base however I was no longer detached; I was a researcher who was also very much part of the community of wives.

Gilbert illustrates his point further by using Goffman's work, saying: "Goffman thought that every social group had something distinctive about it and the best way to understand it, to see how it was 'normal' no matter how zany it may seem to outsiders, was to get close" (1993:156). In gaining access to the 'symbolic world' of meanings people apply to their own experiences, Gilbert says that as a methodological tactic, the researcher must adopt the perspective of the members, in an effort to see things as they do. In my case I didn't have to 'adopt' the perspective. I was already a wife; I was a researcher and a potential bona fide member of any wives group taking place on the base: a sort of methodological hybrid. Prior to commencing fieldwork I had not however attended many wives' events and knew little about the base. It was thus decided I should start spending more time on the base: going to coffee mornings, evening functions, visiting the library, in an observatory capacity, and generally becoming more familiar with life on the station, before arranging interviews.

Defining Terms of Reference

An intense reading phase provided insights into a variety of situations and helped to locate my own plan in the wider picture of existing research. A reasonable amount of material relating to occupational wives, in a variety of situations, was located and consulted, (for example, Finch (1983), Chandler (1987 & 1989), Callan & Ardener (1984)) together with literature relating to marriage, friendship, kinship, and community. General methods and sociology texts were also consulted. The literature allowed generation of several tentative hypotheses, and the definition of key terms.

Two main groups of actors were identified: the wives of officers and the wives of non-commissioned personnel, to allow for comparison and contrasting of their lifestyles and life choices. It was decided that some attention may be given to the differences between living on and off the married patch, and living on a centrally situated as opposed to a remote RAF station.

Two bases were identified as the main data collection points: one large, operational base, which for the purposes of this research is known as RAF Blyton and one small, remote base, referred to in this thesis as RAF Rockall. Analysis of the difference between the lifestyles on each of those respective stations was envisaged, at various points.

Initially I planned to look at many more bases, but after careful consideration it was recognised that people generally do move around from base to base (although not as much as they did in previous decades); it is not a static population, and it is possible to speak to interviewees about past as well as current experiences. The main unit of analysis was defined as wives: individual and collective, because I set out to find out what goes on in the minds of women who are married to RAF servicemen.

Locating myself in the research

I did not face any major ethical dilemmas in this area. I presented myself in an overt role as an RAF wife, in the hybrid role of also being a researcher. It should be recognised that this is a fairly privileged research position, paving the way for a degree of access which would unarguably be denied a researcher without the status of RAF wife. As Payne has articulated, in relation to researchers achieving membership of a community "....only a few people in a limited number of settings are ever in a position to have these advantages" (1996:26). There was little or no deception involved in my study, apart from the fact that I didn't announce to all and sundry what I was doing, but I didn't attempt to hide it either, especially if asked, or if an opportunity arose to discuss it.

Field notes were recorded soon after attending events at RAF Blyton, which could be viewed as deceptive, suggesting that an overt approach is not as clear cut as it sounds, because "....short of wearing a sign, ethnographers cannot signal when they are or are not collecting data" (Gilbert 1993:159). Adler makes an important point when he says that most ethnography involves a "delicate combination of overt and covert roles" (1985:27).

My role was never a great issue during the interviewing phase, as during that stage I was not living on the base and was able to maintain the detachment necessary to take data away and interpret them. Some researchers can experience problems achieving the necessary detachment. As Maclean succinctly states in her PhD thesis: "Fieldwork is a complicated and tiring process for anyone, as it involves trying to enter into a social world and stand back from it at the same time" (1997:33).

After I moved onto the station (a different station, referred to hereafter as RAF Culswick), my role became slightly more difficult, and my data took on new meaning. This did not affect the official data collection process, which had been formally completed, but added a different dimension to the analysis phase, in both positive and negative ways. For example, having experienced life on the base at first hand, more questions were generated in my mind and it was tempting to go back to interviewees and ask more questions. It was also tempting to go and speak to more people, for example the station commander's wife, having generated such rich data from speaking to the station commander's wife at RAF Blyton. Common sense however prevailed, as space is limited and there is a point beyond which collection of more data is a futile exercise. The noting of informal observations was however a natural by-product of living on a military base. These observations have inevitably fed into the thesis, and in that sense must also be considered as data. The individuals concerned are referred to throughout the thesis as respondents (a total of 20 have been included), to make a clear distinction between informal data and the formal data collected from interviewees. This informal data gathering is a classic illustration of the futility of expecting research stages to take the form of neat, tidy and easily definable stages.

Rank as a Potential Methodological Issue

One possible area of difficulty could have arisen in relation to interviewing airmen's wives. Their perception of me as an officer's wife could have affected the interaction. This did not present itself as an issue. I did not introduce myself as an officer's wife, just as an RAF wife and a researcher, but if asked I would tell them what my husband's occupation was. I was however very aware of the perceived status of officers' wives in the eyes of (some) airmen's wives at all times, and tried to play down the difference by talking to them as equals and making every effort to put them at ease.

Gender as a Potential Methodological Issue

As a woman, carrying out this research was a relatively straightforward process. I would however argue that it would be very difficult for a male researcher to gain access to this field of research as an ethnographer (as mentioned above, it would also be very difficult for a female researcher who was not an RAF wife to gain the level of access I obtained).

This issue has been highlighted by several researchers. Finch (1984:77) found in her study of playgroups that young mothers gave her access to views which a man would have found most difficult to obtain (especially as some of the views related to men!). Oakley (1981) expresses similar views about the importance of being a mother in her project on motherhood.

There is also an awareness amongst researchers that women are used to being asked to give details of their personal lives. This is an issue which concerns some feminist researchers; Jones notes Finch's comment that: "The ease with which one can get women to talk in the interview situation depends not so much on one's skills as an interviewer, nor upon one's expertise as a sociologist, but upon one's identity as a woman" (1991:210). In terms of my study, it would be appropriate to add the proviso 'another wife' to that comment. Interestingly, Finch says that she has walked away from interviews feeling like women should know how to protect themselves from people like her!

This comment highlights the potential power researchers have to use research material in dangerous or unscrupulous ways, which conflict with the perceptions and values of their interviewees. I would of course argue that I have no such intentions!

Negotiating Access

The first stage of negotiating access was the process of formally requesting written permission from the station commanders at each of the bases chosen, to carry out research on that base. Having secured formal permission from the 'gatekeepers' (Burgess 1984:48), the next step was actually penetrating the wives' 'scene' on the bases.

At RAF Blyton one form of access available to me was through the squadron wives' club, which I attended diligently (and was considered either very keen or a bit strange, for travelling 40 miles to attend a coffee morning or evening meeting!). The wives' club was not very well supported, and it proved difficult to approach people about my research in that setting, but it was important from the point of view of 'getting my face known', developing a few initial points of contact, and engaging in some participant observation; the results of which were written up on my return home.

Through the monthly wives' newsletter I discovered a weekly ante/post-natal support group which met in officers' wives' houses on the base. Eight months pregnant at the time, I plucked up the courage to go along one Thursday morning in January 1996, and managed to attend another couple of meetings prior to the birth of my first son. Again, I was seen as a slight oddity for travelling so far (in far from ideal weather conditions!) to attend, when the other wives had just walked from their houses on the base.

Valuable contacts were established at that group, and together with a military point of contact provided by the station commander on the base and one or two wives I knew who lived off the base, initial access was gradually secured. Access then inevitably takes on another dimension, as it is down to individuals wanting to take part, so it was an on-going process of finding some contacts and 'asking' people to take part.

It is very important to note that having a child lent me a unique legitimacy on the base which I think would have been difficult to secure in any other way. This particular type of access involves gaining inroads into the general conversation (mostly revolving around children), which proved important in achieving a degree of legitimacy amongst potential interviewees, which would be nearly impossible without a child of your own.

As Gans (1982) points out, requesting entry involves the researcher selling him/herself to the group he/she wants to study. He claims that his particular gift in this area (as he has rarely been refused access) is: "....a visible earnestness about wanting to do research, and a quiet demeanour that perhaps tells people I will not be a threat to them" (in Burgess 1982:57). I believe I am endowed with the same gift!

A military contact at RAF Blyton, provided to me by the station commander, was also able to furnish me with relevant information about the station, by means of a telephone request.

At RAF Rockall, access was much more straightforward, due to the existence of a HIVE (Help, Information, Voluntary, Exchange service) run by wives on the base. (A HIVE opened at RAF Blyton after the data collection phase of my research.) As a result of the existence of this service, I was able to locate the telephone number of the lady responsible for the day to day running of the HIVE, who volunteered to find the sample which I specified to her, and to arrange the meetings to fit in with my schedule for visiting the base! For a lone researcher, this was a welcome gift, and one for which I was extremely grateful. That access was relatively straightforward meant that the research could progress as planned, without any major modifications. The irony of moving to RAF Culswick and being surrounded by potential research subjects was keenly felt, when considering the relatively complicated path towards gaining access to interviewees at RAF Blyton, where I had been living off the base.

Entering the Field

As previously mentioned, my role as a researcher was located somewhere in the middle of the overt/covert continuum. I didn't actually announce my presence as a researcher in a every formal and informal setting I entered on the base (because I had other legitimate reasons for being there), but did not hide what I was doing.

In contrast to many ethnographic studies (mostly in 'closed access' situations, such as Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1955), and Humphreys' *Tearoom Trade* (1970)), responses to my research were very favourable. People were interested, I felt, because the subject I was investigating was close to their own hearts. Form (1973:83) asks "why should anyone trust a snooping sociologist?" The answer in this case seems to be because I was seen as 'one of them', the subject matter was very interesting to them, and they wanted to discuss it; trust was thus established. The only disquieting matter was that some of the wives seemed confident that my work was going to do 'some good', and that I cannot guarantee!

This leads into a question of ethics, and to whether or not I led the participants to believe the research would do 'some good'; and I can comfortably say that I did not; I explained that I would eventually be writing a PhD thesis on the subject.

At the beginning of the research I felt it was a distinct advantage to be seen as 'one of them', if only in an honorary sense, whilst still being able to maintain a discreet distance of twenty miles between myself and the base, and to be able to 'go home' and therefore away from the research field. I was happy to 'dip in and out' of RAF life, and on being posted onto a base after the fieldwork I found it at times uncomfortable to be immersed in it! As Gans points out: "Participant observation, then, is the taking of a formal participatory role in a social situation without the emotional involvement that normally accompanies participation....." (1982:54). Being posted to a military base meant however that it became difficult, if not impossible, to avoid emotional involvement.

Using Gold's (1958) typology of the four ideal typical field roles (the complete participant, the participant as observer, the observer as participant and the complete observer) my role was one of observer-as-participant, with the advantage of being involved but not to the extent of influencing what goes on. Had the interviewing been carried out later, when I was living on a base myself, I would have taken on the participant-as-observer role (and this is the role adopted during the analysis stage of the research: when I was still taking observational field notes).

Using Gans' role types, which are based on the "fieldworker's emotional relationships to the people he is studying" (1982:54), my role would have been identified as one of researcher participant: as a researcher who takes part in a social situation, but is not totally involved in it. The other types described by Gans are the total participant: who assumes total emotional involvement in a situation and becomes a researcher again only when writing up has been completed, and the total researcher: who observes without any emotional involvement.

On moving to live on a military base during the writing-up phase, my role as a researcher (I describe myself as such because I found it to be almost impossible not to keep observing and making notes whilst 'living the research', although the data collection phase had officially ended) did veer towards Gold's ideal type of complete participant, and Gans' total participant.

Working as an insider brings problems associated with being very close to the research. Of her own research with women, Reay observes: "....I chose to do research which was central to my own experience. My fear of distorting the often similar experiences of the women whom I interviewed generated a constant sense of insecurity which in turn served to underline my power as an interpreter" (1996:62).

My research was also tied to my own experiences, and this generates a need to be very self-critical, recognising that questions asked and interpretations of data are affected by personal experience, and analysing data with that in mind.

For example, when listening to the testimonies of wives who have never lived anywhere but on a military base, speculating about what they think life would be like outside, it is difficult not to draw on your own experience of both situations. In such instances it is important to bear in mind that your own knowledge is often partial and subjective, in the same way as that of your interviewees! This theme is explored in chapter 5 on community, when views about the base from people who have never lived there are compared to those of people who live on the base and vice versa (and those who have direct experience of both situations).

Gans explores the dangers of identifying too closely with subjects. He says: "He [the researcher] likes some of the people he is studying better than others, because they share his values, are easier to talk with, are more open in interview situations, or are just friendlier.....Being marginal and neutral is a constant strain....." (In Burgess 1982:56). In a similar vein, Payne argues that "Too close a sense of fitting in is seen as leading to a loss of critical perspective" (1996:26), and that researchers are obliged to treat all potential subjects in the same way; which is seen as an obstacle to access that lies within the researcher, and which raises the probability of bias in treatment (1996:21).

In terms of this research I would confess that yes, I probably identified more with wives who shared my views than with wives who didn't. I am not a champion of RAF culture and I could therefore identify more easily with wives who shared my position than wives who were pro-RAF. Being generally antipathetical towards RAF life also afforded me the 'space' required, and referred to by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:102), who say that "it is in the 'space' created by that distance that the work of the ethnographer gets done".

Given that participant observation was not the main research tool, and therefore contact with the main subjects of my data collection was confined to interviews, the fact that many shared my views is not seen as a major concern for me as a researcher.

Interviewees were not pre-chosen according to my level of empathy with them, and the view of subjects I didn't 'gel' with were considered equally important to those I did 'gel' with. I was keen to gain access to a range of different views and perspectives, so it was just as exciting to find subjects who were not on my wavelength as it was to find kindred spirits!

Choosing Methods

<u>Interviewing</u>

Given the nature of the data to be collected (largely to consist of personal narratives from RAF wives), the main methods to be employed were perceived to be qualitative, and the approach to be inductive, to allow for flexibility and the development of emergent themes. Studies of broadly similar social groupings, such as the work of Ruth Jolly (1992/96), Joan Chandler (1987/91) and Patricia Nicholson (1980) have shown that qualitative research yields rich data. As the research progressed, the need for the incorporation of a quantitative element emerged, to complement the qualitative data. McCall and Simmons' description of ethnography reflects the path of my research design. They claim that ethnography includes: "some amount of genuinely social interaction in the field with the subjects of the study, some direct observation of relevant events, some formal and a great deal of informal interviewing, some systematic counting, some collection of documents and artefacts; and open-endedness in the direction the study takes" (1969:1).

Having trawled the relevant literature and generated a set of tentative hypotheses, it became obvious that semi-structured interviewing would constitute the main field research tool, alongside participant observation and a questionnaire. It was felt that semi-structured interviewing, in preference to structured interviewing (where set questions are asked), would allow sufficiently in-depth data-gathering, whilst leaving me enough control to ensure that vital subject areas were covered. It was also envisaged that this method would facilitate greater ease of analysis and interpretation than totally unstructured interviewing.

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Pilot Study. With the above considerations in mind, a pilot interview schedule was compiled, comprising a list of questions to be covered, whilst also trying to encourage the interviewee to talk generally about her experiences, and thus expecting that many of the questions might be covered in general discussion. In practice, this approach did not seem to draw out information in the way envisaged.

Four RAF wives took part in the pilot study, two officers' wives and two airmen's wives. Some of the questions seemed to be repetitive, or in the wrong place, and answered by responses to preceding questions. The interviews did not flow as intended, and it seemed like a chore, just ploughing through a list of questions for an average of two hours per interview.

The interview conversations were recorded in shorthand, and the result of this was that I felt a bit distracted from the discussion; having to concentrate so much attention on writing meant that not enough attention could be devoted to face to face interaction with the interviewees.

Revising the interview schedule. The decision was taken to devise another interview schedule, with four initial 'ice breaker' factual questions: asking how long the serviceman had been in the RAF, how many times the couple had moved during their marriage, and what the interviewee thought of when the term 'RAF wife' was mentioned. The fourth question simply invited interviewees to talk about any aspect of their experience as an RAF wife.   Seven headings followed, relating to marriage and family, career, accommodation, community, friendships, kin and the job.

Within each heading was a list of questions I wanted to be covered by the end of the interview, and again the hope was that many of the questions would be covered in general discussion about experience as an RAF wife. It was envisaged that this approach would allow interviewees more freedom to talk generally about their experience, in whichever order it came to their minds, and that this would be much less labourious than the pilot study.

The objective was to let the interviewee speak freely (taking care not to allow complete digression from the relevant topics!), and to refer to the interview schedule at appropriate intervals to ensure all subject areas were covered.

Revising the method of recording interviews. Given my negative experience of shorthand note-taking during the pilot study, it was decided that, with the interviewees' permission, a tape recorder would be used to record all subsequent interviews, allowing me to concentrate fully on what the interviewees were saying.

Scale of Integration

As the research progressed, the inclusion of a more quantitative measure to complement and lend additional meaning to the qualitative data was seen as desirable. This decision reflects Allan's argument that: "….incorporating appropriate descriptive and quantitative material into the thesis supports the qualitative arguments being made rather than detracting from them" (1991:185).

To blend with the high level of descriptive material generated by the interviews, the concept of a 'scale of integration' was introduced into the research design. From initial data gathering and from personal experience, a working definition of RAF life was devised, consisting of a list of activities.

From this starting point an integration questionnaire was compiled (appendix III). By asking how often wives attend events, how many events, how often they see friends on and off the base, when they see them etc., it was envisaged that a picture of the extent the air force is (or is not) their 'whole world', and how wives generate (temporary) community would start to emerge. The questionnaire was handed to interviewees at the conclusion of the interviews, together with a stamped addressed envelope; 31/34 (91%) were returned.

Interviews were undertaken with several other individuals, to provide additional/alternative insights into and perspectives on RAF life.

I met with the SSAFA Social Worker (Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association and Forces Help Society) at RAF Blyton, who in turn invited me to speak to the Health Visitor in the same building; both interviewees were able to provide interesting and useful information to supplement interview and other data.

I visited Ruth Jolly, the author of two books about military wives and families, and the only author located who deals with substantial material about RAF wives. She provided a valuable overview of her experience in the services, and also of her experience of research in the armed forces.

Towards the end of the data collection phase of the research, I approached the station commander's wife at RAF Blyton. She was a group captain's wife, therefore the wife of a higher ranking officer than any of the other interviewees, but I felt it was important to speak to the 'top RAF wife' on the station where most of my data collection took place, firstly to gain a broad overview of life on the base as she saw it, and secondly to look at the extent to which her perceptions and experience matched or conflicted with that of my other interviewees.

Defining the Sample

It was decided that approximately 15 officers' wives and 15 airmen's wives would be interviewed (and the final numbers were 16 and 18 respectively), to include some wives who lived off the base.

Like all researchers, I was ultimately dependent on the goodwill and availability of individual subjects. Despite official agreement having been secured at RAF Blyton, approaching individuals was left to me.

The first part of the sample was defined by means of opportunist sampling: by using existing contacts, made at the ante/post-natal group, and then using some snowballing, as interviewees told me of others who might be interested in participating. Having exhausted the snowballing process, I went back to the ante/post-natal group and the squadron wives' club to establish some more contacts. Securing the sample was thus an ongoing process. I was always <u>very</u> aware of being in RAF company: assessing the right moment to ask individuals whether they would be willing to take part.

The most difficult part of defining the sample was finding airmen's wives, given my own lack of contacts at RAF Blyton. The squadron wives' club was useful in this respect, as it cuts across the rank structure, whereas the ante/post-natal group is for officers' wives only. The SSAFA Social Worker also provided one point of contact (her secretary, who was an airman's wife). An existing contact who lived off the base provided me with the phone number of her cleaner, who was an airman's wife living off the base, and my military contact at RAF Blyton provided contact with another airman's wife who worked on the base. An acquaintance who worked on the base provided another contact, and then further snowballing was used to secure the rest of the sample.

I feel it is important to mention here that part of the population was certainly 'invisible' to me, as not all women attend functions or coffee mornings, therefore my sample was obtained from the population which was either visible to me or visible to my contacts. I do however believe my sample was diverse and wide-ranging, for a number of reasons. For example a variety of different occupations, for wives and their spouse, (as set out in appendix I), were included, and also the housing experience of wives who took part in this study was varied, with many wives having lived on and off the base at different times during their married life. To illustrate this point, the details of wives 'housing careers' is set out below, starting with details of where they were living at the time the interviews took place.

Table 2.1 Wives' housing experience

Category	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Living on base	12	15
Living off base	4	3
TOTAL	16	18
Living on base with no experience of living off base	8	11
Living on base with experience of living off base	4	4
Living off base with experience of living on base	3	3
Living off base with no experience of living on base	1	-
TOTAL	16	18

As previously mentioned, women were generally enthusiastic and happy to be interviewed; only one person declined the invitation to become involved. I did however find setting up the interviews difficult. Having to approach people 'cold' was always nerve-racking; I dreaded doing it, fearing they would say no. It was often difficult to contact women during the day, and several attempts were sometimes made and several messages left, before I managed to speak to them. Having finally arranged some interviews however, I always felt a real sense of achievement! Little mention of this part of the research process seems to be made by authors, although Newby mentions it in his co-edited book *Doing Sociological Research* (Bell and Newby 1977), as does Gans (1982).

One comment which reflects a similar view to mine was found in Maclean's PhD thesis, when she says: "I found it very difficult to set up interviews and always approached them with feelings of dread. This is probably the common experience of most ethnographers" (1997:43). She gives one example (Bowen 1954) of a researcher sharing experience of a similar feeling of trepidation.

Gans makes mention of his own insecurities: of expecting to be refused permission to talk to people even after the people concerned have accepted him, and also quotes Everett Hughes (1960) as saying: "I have usually been hesitant in entering the field myself and have perhaps walked around the block getting up my courage to knock at doors more often than almost any of my students. (I have been doing it longer)" (1960:vi). Evidence does therefore exist that sociologists often approach fieldwork with trepidation, but it could be argued that the lack of more recent references reflects reticence on the part of researchers to admit to such experiences.

I could feasibly be asked why I didn't advertise for interviewees. My answer would be that yes, I could have advertised, but I did not honestly feel I would obtain the response I wanted. I strongly believe that had the burden of contacting me been left to potential interviewees, only a certain 'type' of people would have replied, namely those with negative views about the lifestyle. Wives without strong feelings about RAF life might not have felt compelled to reply and may have thought they had little to contribute, which is not the case, as I was seeking a mix of experiences. I certainly found evidence that some interviewees doubted the value of their contribution to my research, for example, Gwen (A15) said: "......I wasn't sure if I would be any use or not, because we moved here in January, and that's the first time in five years that we've lived in RAF housing".

I could also be asked why I didn't include wives whose husbands were no longer serving in the RAF (or indeed serving personnel who are also wives). Whilst brief mention will be made at appropriate points to conversations with respondents who were former RAF wives or serving RAF wives, whom I happened to meet, I did not believe it was feasible to include either group (nor co-habitees and girlfriends: who are afforded no formal status by the RAF) in the interview sample, simply in the interests of space; a wealth of data would have been created without the capacity to use it. Indeed Ruth Jolly, who wrote her first book about life within the military, wrote her second book about leaving the military, and located ample material for inclusion in both books.

As mentioned above, defining the sample at RAF Rockall was straightforward, and was arranged by the HIVE coordinator on the basis of one phone-call from me!

The Interviews

<u>RAF Blyton</u>

All interviews were carried out in wives' own homes, and with the interviewees' permission, a tape recorder was used to record the dialogue. Generally the interview setting was informal and comfortable, with the interviewees talking freely about their experiences. Several interviewees were more reticent, perhaps warming up near the end of the interview.

I established early on in the interviewing process that the most important aspect of interviewer/interviewee rapport in relation to my research was the ability to listen, which was a point highlighted by Ribbens (1989). It seemed that interviewees were happy to be 'having their say'. I was given the impression that they are not often asked what they think about RAF life and that this was an opportunity for them to put across their side of the story.

I began by explaining the rationale behind the research, speaking about why I was doing it and with whom (the University and the ESRC). Although I was careful to explain the reasons for the research, I still felt in some instances that there was a hint of suspicion about what I was going to do with the material!

On asking the fourth question on the schedule (inviting interviewees to talk generally about their experience), an amazing range of different reactions and interpretations were recorded. Some interviewees indicated that they wanted me to specify a heading, some wanted me to ask very specific questions (with the result that I ploughed through the schedule as in the pilot!) and some were happy to speak for as long as I would have been prepared to listen, without any prompting at all (although some interruption was of course necessary in order to stick to the relevant topics).

As Lummis has commented: "…..the art of good interviewing lies in being able to keep most of the interview conversational while following various digressions, remembering which questions the flow of information has answered and yet being prepared to question more deeply and precisely when necessary" (1987:62). One interviewee, rather than speaking about general experiences, launched into the worst experience she had ever had. This led me to question the image interviewees had of me. Did they think I was looking for negative responses? Not many wives responded in this way, but this does lend an interesting insight into the differential way people view research and researchers. Or indeed it might just reveal the most important parts of RAF life to these interviewees. Burgess (1984:108) found that several schoolboys in his study seized on the opportunity to speak about a topic he had not intended to cover until the end of the interview, and for them that was obviously the thing they most wanted to talk about. Burgess emphasised the importance of letting his interviewees speak about topics in whichever order they wished rather than break the flow of conversation, and this is very much the approach I adopted when talking to RAF wives. Relatedly, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) contend that inviting interviewees to 'tell their story' enables people to identify the variables they believe determine their behaviour and also allows for direct comparison between cases.

The timing of interviews was tricky in most cases, due to wives' obligations in dropping off and picking up children from school, playgroup and creche, and their husbands' work patterns. In addition, my own family commitments meant that I couldn't be quite as flexible as I would have liked, with the result that most of the interviews took place in the evening, and involved a 40 mile round trip to RAF Blyton in all weathers!

Travelling at night introduced an unanticipated concern, that of safety for a female researcher travelling on her own at night, often with no previous personal knowledge of the interviewees. As a precaution, I always left the phone number of the people I was going to see with my husband, and carried my mobile phone. Although I felt reasonably confident that the people I was going to see were not dangerous, it would be naive for any researcher to make this assumption with regard to previously unknown subjects.

As Jones (1991) notes, this point is largely ignored in methods literature, although it has been the subject of a more recent study (Kenyon and Hawker 1999).

One respondent was particularly keen that I take my child with me, to play with her little boy. I went along with her suggestion on that occasion, but found it very hard to concentrate and did not repeat the exercise. I also found it distracting having interviewees' children present when interviews took place (this happened on one or two occasions), although nowhere near as distracting as having my own child with me.

Interviews lasted between one and a half hours and three hours, with an average length of two hours.

RAF Rockall

Interviews (7 in total, 2 officers' wives and 5 airmen's wives) were carried out in the HIVE (a married quarter, designated as the HIVE), over a two day period. The setting was undoubtedly more formal than at RAF Blyton, but it worked well. With the exception of one respondent who simply did not turn up and could not be contacted at her home, all the wives who took part seemed happy to participate and gave freely of their time, with interviews lasting approximately two hours each.

Equipment/Transcription of Interviews

Tape recording of interviews did work well in most instances, and people seemed to quickly forget that the tape was there. Tape recorders are however notoriously unreliable machines, being of course only as good as their operators. Several cases where the tape recorder perhaps had not been positioned in the best place, or the respondent had a very quiet voice, led to a very difficult process of transcription, and straining my ears to try to hear what had been said on the tape.

People's voices also seem to trail off to a very quiet tone the more they speak about one topic. Background noise can also cause a problem, and the presence of children made one or two tapes particularly difficult to transcribe. As Jones notes: "....the greatest problems in using tape recorders are often the chiming clock or the talkative budgerigar!" (1991:206).

Of course it would have been easier if the tapes could always have been transcribed immediately after the interview, when some memory of the conversation would still have been present. However, after a few days, weeks or even months, it was very difficult to remember the course of conversation, leading to complete reliance on the tape. I have to say that despite some time lapses I was very pleasantly surprised by the transcription process and the absence of 'blanks' in my scripts.

Leaving the Field

Several authors have written about the process of leaving the field of research. For example, Altheide (1980) wrote about the issues involved in leaving a newsroom and Taylor (1991) wrote about an institution for individuals with severe learning difficulties. Writers say that leaving the field involves reflecting on when to leave, managing relationships formed, and deciding whether to return.

In terms of this research, it was relatively easy for me to leave the field concerned with the formal (interviewing) stage of my research, because the end of my field work coincided with the birth of my second child and family relocation to another part of the country. However, on moving to live on an RAF base, I entered an RAF setting I had hitherto experienced only on a visiting level. I then experienced life on an RAF base first-hand and made observations which affected my work. In that sense I was in the unique position of not leaving the field (in terms of the military base) until well into the writing-up phase of my study.

Although no longer living on the base, I am still an RAF wife, and have contact with many other RAF wives, some of them interviewees or respondents in this study; I will not effectively leave the field until my husband leaves the RAF! With regard to managing relationships formed, I made some friends during the research process, but no problems have arisen from these relationships. The individuals concerned know about the research and are comfortable with their involvement, alongside our friendship.

Situational Factors

It seems important to note the role of personal circumstances in the context of this research project. I embarked on the research four months prior to the birth of my first child. I subsequently had an eight month break for maternity leave, followed by one year's full-time study, a twelve month maternity break, a voluntary conversion to part-time studentship, and later a break of four months due to illness. During this study I moved house four times and relocated to another part of the country twice.

These circumstances meant that unlike previous study, where I have been able to focus almost exclusively on the project in hand, I had many conflicting demands on my time. Managing the research in conjunction with looking after two small children, running a home and relocating proved to be a juggling act and a valuable learning experience in management!

Sometimes the time lapse between doing work on a particular part of the project and getting back to my desk proved to be very frustrating, and denied me the continuity I had previously enjoyed in research work. In retrospect however, (although certainly not at the time!) I feel that all these factors enhanced the research process and ensured that the time procured for study was very precious and fully utilised.

Ethical Issues

The two ethical matters which came to light in this research project have been highlighted earlier in the chapter, and relate to covert research and interviewee perceptions of research.

As mentioned, consent was not always obtained where participant observation was the method of data collection, but it did not always seem appropriate to seek it. As Punch argues: "In natural settings involving public behaviour, such as watching crowd behaviour .....or studying avoidance rituals....., then consent seems superfluous and physically unattainable. Any attempt to achieve it in the latter case would only serve to undermine the behaviour one wished to observe" (1986:37).

Every effort was made to recognise that interviewees and other respondents are vulnerable and can be damaged by research. Accordingly each subject has been given anonymity and the bases themselves have been anonymised.

The other slight concern relates to respondent perception of the purpose of the research. Again every effort was made to appraise subjects of the reasons for the study.

Secondary and other Sources

A variety of documents and magazines were available to me. I have studied wives' and families' publications published by the RAF Wives' Association, by SSAFA (The Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association), and by individual RAF bases, which come out quarterly and contain news and views about service life.

The general tone of such publications is quite upbeat, with photos of happy smiling faces attending various sporting events, unveiling plaques, meeting celebrities, and engaging in fundraising activities. Readers' letters and personal testimonies in these magazines do however give some insight into RAF life as experienced by individuals, and have proved useful in writing my thesis. In particular, the magazine of Airwaves, the official communication channel for RAF families, who feed information into the Ministry of Defence, provides in a fairly realistic picture of RAF life.

Another documentary source I have made use of is the official RAF wives survey: both the survey itself (which I was randomly selected to complete some years ago) and the yearly publication of the results of that survey.

In addition, by request, useful statistics (regarding the population at that base) have been obtained from bases involved in this study.

Data Analysis

The data to be analysed comprised field notes, interview transcripts and questionnaires. A search for themes was undertaken at various stages of the research, starting with compilation of the research proposal, and ending with analysis of the interview transcripts, questionnaires and field notes. In the early stages many themes were identified, and the pilot study was used to narrow down the categories for the interview schedule. The interview transcripts were then used to establish the three major themes (marriage and family, friendship and community) which were taken to form the core of this thesis.

Coding of the data roughly followed the Glaser and Strauss (1967) model, which is succinctly described by Allan as follows:

> "The essence of the approach involves 'stripping' particular episodes of action/speech into their essential component elements. Other episodes in the fieldnotes are then scrutinized to see if they contain similar or different elements. Where there is similarity and overlap, modified categorizations can then be generated which encompass and 'bridge' a wider range of phenomena, ones which previously perhaps did not seem to have much in common (Turner, 1981)" (1991:186).

The structure of my interview schedule allowed that in most cases (apart from when interviewees spoke at length about a variety of subjects when asked about their experience as an RAF wife) data were collected in order of themes. Apart from this by-product of the interviewing process however, data analysis began in earnest on leaving the field.

The vast amount of interview data (together with fieldnotes) at my disposal made analysis seem a daunting task. I considered using a computer package, but on reflection decided that the time spent learning the package would be more fruitfully spent manually coding the data. Therefore I began the task of sorting the data according to theme, and compiling the data, in summarised form, in tables. These tables enabled me to start the process of writing.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) emphasise the importance to data analysis of starting to write, and I found their assertions to be accurate. They claim: "Thinking about how to represent our data also forces us to think about the meanings and understandings, voices and experiences present in the data......Analytic ideas are developed and tried out in the process of writing and representing" (1996:109).

As I started to write, to blend theory with research findings, I found that I gained new insights into my data, and also found I needed to go back to the data to search for deeper insights into particular issues than were provided by my initial tables. The result was that I compiled further data reference sheets, for each interviewee, in relation to each of the three main chapter headings, by going through each transcript and noting relevant comments and insights by page. These data sheets, together with other relevant data (from respondents and secondary sources) facilitated the compilation of the 3 substantive chapters, and the supplementary chapters, with the exception of chapter 6.

Additional data analysis, in the form of the questionnaires, was required in order to complete chapter 6, on the subject of integration and alienation. Tables were compiled, detailing the results of each question on the questionnaire. I also took note of any written comments made by interviewees, and compiled data reference sheets, detailing such comments and summarising the results for each interviewee. The tables and reference sheets, together with secondary sources and insights from the interviewee data were used to develop the chapter.

Presenting the Data

The data are presented in a number of ways. They are formally presented in table form at various points within the substantive chapters (it should be noted here to save repetition, that totals do not always add up to numbers of interviewees because on many occasions wives provided more than one answer to a question). Data are also referred to and quotations included at all stages of the thesis. Appendix I lists by name (pseudonym) all the interviewees and respondents referred to in this thesis, and provides short descriptions of interviewees and respondents.

Conclusion

This chapter is intended to give a general synopsis of my reasons for carrying out the research, to show how I located myself within the research, and to explain and expand on the sources of my data. I would stress that the entire research process has comprised a very steep learning curve for me, during which ideas have been tested and revised, and numerous insights into 'doing research', which could not have been gleaned from a textbook, have been gained. Needless to say, my next project will reflect what I learned during this project.

Throughout the chapter I have attempted to provide a picture of the ways in which my findings may be influenced by the decisions I made at each stage of the research, and my own experiences of the lifestyle as the study progressed. By a continuous process of reflexivity I have endeavoured to ensure that in spite of my own influence on the research, it is nevertheless valid.

Introduction

Not surprisingly (since it is the questions of <u>wives</u>' incorporation in men's work that is being addressed) marriage is a theme which is central to this thesis. Being an RAF wife is essentially a direct result of being married to an RAF man, and everything that happens subsequently (such as family life, location, friendships and career opportunities) is heavily influenced by that marriage.

Prior to embarking on the fieldwork I had little appreciation of the delicate interplay between the practicalities, emotions, circumstances and events which are part of RAF life; I had access only to my own experience and, superficially, that of friends. Never having lived on an RAF base, and having relocated only once as a result of my husband's job, at the time of my fieldwork I accorded a high level of naivety to my experience of life on a military base. I had the impression that there were some women who knew what they were letting themselves in for, who blossomed in an RAF environment and whose marriages flourished as a result. I also envisaged there would be other women who would be unhappy with the lifestyle, who would struggle, and whose marriages would suffer. This was a very black and white view, and I saw little possibility of middle ground. I also thought that airmen's wives would generally be more happy with the life than officers' wives, mainly because I believed they would have lower expectations than officers' wives. The actual findings of my research have produced a much more complex picture, with a wider range of experience. I found that some wives cope better with some aspects of the life and others cope better with other aspects, at different times in their lives. It was widely recognised by all participants that choosing to marry an RAF serviceman, or being faced with entering RAF life after marriage, presents a significant challenge and involves living outside the mainstream of society.

Early in the fieldwork process, the accounts of interviewees led to the identification of several key themes related to being married to an RAF man: that being an RAF wife involves learning to be resourceful, independent, self-reliant and adaptable (the alternative being to have a miserable existence), 'putting up' with many eventualities, dealing with threats of redundancy and loss of lifestyle, and handling social control (and/or surveillance), where the 'rules' appear ill-defined and difficult to interpret. Life on RAF bases (and life associated with the RAF) could be seen to subject RAF wives to intrusive surveillance, monitoring and control, but in a way which is certainly more subtle and ambiguous than the processes endemic in Bentham's panopticon, upon which Foucauldian perspectives draw so heavily.

Evidence of an ambiguous love/hate relationship with the employing institution emerged early in this study: pride alongside numerous moans about RAF life. A clear idea was gained of the excitement for a young wife of marrying a serviceman, with the promise of trips away together, and the freedom to pursue her own interests when he is away. But the overriding impression from most interviewees and from the literature is that all this changes if and when children are born, curtailing freedom, necessitating support from relatives (which is not usually available) or friends, rendering husband absence an unattractive prospect, bringing to the surface resentments about loss of career, and increasing the potential for marital tension. A general undertone of many military wives seeing themselves as at the periphery of society was detected, alongside the belief that the grass is greener away from the military, given the conflict between popular images of the new man and the independent career woman, and the lived reality of RAF life.

Outside impressions (like my own preconceptions) are that it is tough being an RAF wife, that you are not in control of your situation and that you have to accept the decisions of your husband's superiors without question. This study found that there are indeed choices for RAF wives. The first choice, and obviously the most dramatic one, is the decision to marry an RAF man, or to follow him into the RAF after marriage; the impact of which is not always apparent until after marriage.

Another important choice is whether to accept or contest the status quo, in the form of institutional requirements (such as postings and detachments), in the face of the daily challenges presented. There are also choices to be made about how involved you want to become in RAF life. In essence, RAF life and in particular RAF marriage is much more complex than any outside impression could convey. In an institutional context, Goffman (1961) showed that although we know what total institutions such as asylums are like, people can carve out their own niches within them, and the same is true of RAF life.

The following two sections take a brief look at the importance of marriage and popular images of marriage. Reasons for including material of this general nature is to gain an idea of what modern women expect from marriage; the pre-conceptions they bring, in order to show how difficult it can be to subsequently face extra demands and conflicts as an RAF wife (notwithstanding the mismatch between expectations and reality in civilian marriages, evidenced by the proliferation of marriage manuals and counselling agencies). In the face of the hardships faced within military life, it will be shown that many women 'latch onto' what they see as ideal images of marriage from civilian life.

The Importance of Marriage in Society/to Women

To emphasise the need for marriage to feature prominently in a study of this nature, it is useful firstly to consider the importance of marriage in women's lives. The way marriage is dealt with in sociological literature emphasises this point. For the majority of the wives approached in a 1960s study, "marriage is the most important thing in their lives, providing them with emotional as well as financial security" (Pahl and Pahl 1971:234). This statement is qualified by pointing out that attitudes to the role of wife vary according *inter alia* to wives' upbringing, education, experience of work and relationship with their husbands. (This argument is explored further below in relation to RAF wives.) It is worth noting here that cohabitation, as an alternative form of commitment has been growing steadily in this country over the past two decades (as marriage has correspondingly declined), the General Household Survey (1997) showing that for women aged 18-49 the numbers cohabiting more than doubled from the late 1970s to the late 1990s.

In the services however cohabitation is not recognised; common law wives being accorded no status by the institution, and cohabiting couples failing to qualify for military housing.

Writers on occupational wives have stressed the importance of marriage to women. Good womanhood is seen to be:

> "....associated with the capable and efficient housewife, the loving and devoted mother, the uncomplaining helpmate and companion of a husband. The gendering of women involves drawing marriage, motherhood and womanhood into the single orbit of the female world (Bernard 1981), into a single destiny. This implies that marriage is the prime identity of women, that wifehood is the paradigm for all women and that women are more married than men" (Chandler 1987:20).

Chandler also makes the claim that "....for all women marriage casts a long shadow, part of the way in which they are defined and categorised is by their relationship to men" (1991:2). Similarly, Finch takes as the central tenet of her 1983 book the assumption that a woman doesn't just marry a man, but his job as well, which shapes her life thereafter, and says that once married it is difficult to "....avoid the consequences of the work of the particular husband whom one has acquired" (1983:151). The act of marriage is thus seen as having a profound impact on women's lives.

Popular Images of Marriage

Having established that marriage is one of the main ways in which women are categorised, it is important to consider the way marriage as an institution is popularly portrayed and perceived in sociological literature and in the media. Marriage is seen as a 'problem' in public and private life, and society as a whole appears to be very interested in other people's marriages (Mansfield and Collard 1988). This interest is ascribed to the contention that whilst the rules of marriage were clear in times past, this is no longer the case. It is claimed that: "The overall impression is that marriage can be whatever you want it to be; there are no rules or regulations save that the spirit of equality should be observed" (Mansfield and Collard 1988:14).

Also relevant here is Giddens' (1992) work on the 'pure relationship', which he sees as a relationship which is free of any other structures, being pursued for its own sake, based on mutual self-disclosure and appreciation of each other's unique qualities, and remaining viable only for as long as either party can derive maximum satisfaction from the relationship. This view has been heavily criticised in many academic circles, notably amongst feminists who point out that Giddens' view neglects the fact that women's freedom of movement out of and into relationships is generally more restricted than men's because, *inter alia*, of their responsibility for children and related inferior financial position. An additional criticism of Giddens' work from the point of view of the population of this study is that a 'pure relationship' is totally at odds with husband absence and the bachelor ethos associated with service life.

A poignant issue in relation to this study of occupational wives is highlighted in Mansfield and Collard's finding that the newly-weds in their survey did not have romantic notions of marriage, but did foster images of sharing, caring and companionship. One respondent in their study said she wanted: "The usual things - a nice home and sooner or later a family and I'd like our life together to be the most important thing rather than his job" (1988:21). The most important message from existing literature appears to be that marriage is difficult in any circumstances in today's society; it is hard for all women to reconcile high expectations of intimacy in marriage and prevailing social trends such as the growth of married women's paid employment, with a role as wife and mother.

The ambivalence at the heart of marriage is given attention by other writers, including Jane Pilcher (2000), who argues that changes over time in the participation of women in paid work, together with an erosion of men's former security in the role of worker have served to break down the association of women wholly with the domestic sphere and men wholly with the sphere of paid work.

Military wives face additional tensions, which fewer wives in the civilian world have to deal with, for example regular mobility and husband absence, which have the effect of elevating a husband's job in importance, above all other concerns.

In addition, there can be a definite conflict between conjugal and military values. "A Service wife marries on the understanding that her husband's profession must take first place, and that its commands override any wishes of hers" (Macmillan, 1984:91). Macmillan also states that: "....the armed services in common with other 'incorporating' institutions steadfastly insist that wives' claims on their husbands remain subordinate to those of the services themselves" (Macmillan 1984:91). This statement links into Coser's work on greedy institutions (1974).

The military conforms to his definition of greedy institutions as: ".....characterised by the fact that they exercise pressure on component individuals to weaken their ties, or not form any ties, with other institutions or persons that might make claims that conflict with their own demands" (1974:3). This is an argument which, in varying degrees, is implicit or explicit in all the other studies of military wives consulted; "other institutions" being taken to include marriage.

One of the reasons the above argument is so prominent in studies of occupational wives is because of the inherent conflict between perceived wider societal trends towards greater domestic equality and shared parenting roles, and the military resistance to such trends, referred to, for example by Jolly (1992) and Jessup (1996), based on notions of the services having 'claims' on servicemen and their families. Perceptions of this kind amongst RAF wives can lead them to feel incredibly hard done by, as shown in my study. For example, one interviewee expressed the opinion that:

> "......most young mothers do not get left on their own to cope soon after the baby is born. My friends who do not have husbands in the RAF would probably be horrified at the idea, and would find it difficult to cope" (Shirley, O3).

In relation to offshore working it has been argued (Solheim 1988) that in traditional marriages the husband's role is seen mainly in terms of economic and practical support, whilst in modern marriages husbands and wives are seen as equal participants in all aspects of family life (that is husbands are more involved than previously in child care and housework; wives are more involved than previously in key decision-making), and that the modern model of marriage can experience more problems and disruption than the traditional model, when the husband is not always there to share marital responsibilities. However, given that the most pervasive theme in marriage literature is the contradiction between the increasing expectations that wives have of greater domestic equality, and the lack of evidence of this happening (Dempsey 1997, Bittman and Pixley 1997), it would seem that this problem is not limited to the military.

Interesting perspectives on ways of coping with the demands of husbands' jobs within marriage are provided by Finch (1983) and Solheim (1988). Finch argues that the work of Callan (1975) and Gowler and Legge (1978) directs attention towards the idea that sexual division in marriage is a key to understanding wives' incorporation, claiming that it is as a direct result of the sexual division in marriage (and the way wives' unpaid contributions to men's work are taken for granted) that wives are even available for incorporation. Implicit contracts, which constitute part of the power structure of marriage, are seen by Finch to be related to the sexual division in marriage.

She uses Gowler and Legge's (1978) article on hidden and open contracts in marriage to illustrate that a conventional marriage (where husbands are seen to derive their greatest satisfaction from work outside the home, whilst wives are seen to derive their greatest satisfaction from work within the home) entail implicit (unstated) as well as explicit (stated) contractual obligations. A vital part of the hidden contract is that "a wife will support her husband's work, in return for which he will provide materially for the home and take some interest in it" (Finch 1983:13).

In terms of my data, a 'class' split presented itself, and it appeared evident that officers' wives in the study harboured more resentment regarding husband absence, unpredictable work patterns and the result this had on domestic roles than the wives of non-commissioned personnel. An illustration of this split follows, in the form of some examples of comments made, firstly by officers' wives:

> "When you are at home it is difficult with their jobs when they don't come home for a week or two weeks, especially with children, there are so many things you have to do yourself.....They are jetting off around the world, and it is quite frustrating when they say 'oh no, not Cyprus again,' when you are stuck at home" (Shirley, O3).

> "It's the unpredictability, it's him saying he's going to come home at a certain time on a certain day and not. It's the fact that work always comes first. He has so much time for work, he seems to work so much, and he doesn't seem to have the time to do things with me and his son" (Jenny, O7).

and secondly by airmen's wives:

> "There are lots of 'perks' with RAF life.....many wives complain about being treated as 'second rate' by the RAF, but they don't recognise that jobs outside the RAF would involve long hours and inconveniences too. My husband is going to the Falklands or the Gulf for four months. We're not looking forward to that, but we'll just get on and cope with it. My friend can't cope with her husband going on exercise for two weeks in the summer with the TA [Territorial Army]!" (Rosie, A1).

> "I try not to let things affect me because it is part of his job. Yes I don't really want him to go away, but it's part of the job and there's not a lot of point in kicking up a fuss" (Helen, A16).

[N.B. These four interviewees had no experience of RAF life prior to marriage.]

Two writers have placed great emphasis on the tensions created within family life by the military. Jolly (1992:13) argues that the military is not an occupation which comfortably allows for a sharing of family responsibilities but is more conducive to traditional role patterns, as the serviceman is never truly off-duty.

She makes the somewhat emotive point in the introduction to her 1992 book, that the claims of service have changed little, but that the claims of family have been changing rapidly in recent decades, and that it is time for the military man (in addition to the military wife, who is seen as constantly doing so!) to reflect on the difficulties involved in sustaining such a complex dual commitment in modern society. Jessup (1996) reiterates these sentiments, and contends that institutional control of private and family life has come to be seen as archaic and intolerable to the current generation of service families.

It should be stated that although 'not talked about', civilianisation of military families is taking place, signalled by increased home ownership, more voluntary unaccompanied service, increased numbers of working wives and a high divorce rate. Jolly (1992) argues that this process is creating dilemmas both for the families concerned and the military machine: which is seen as less cushioned from wider societal influences than in previous decades (and thus open to more resultant marital tensions, when women feel they are being given a 'raw deal' compared to wives outside the RAF).

Turning to the reality of life outside the RAF, Finch and Morgan, writing in Clark's 1991 edited book remain sceptical about actual change in the nature of marriage and find a sharp distinction between the aspiration of the companionate marriage (companionship, teamwork, sharing) and the lived reality, in the light of significant obstacles such as the fundamental sexual division of labour in Britain. This study looked at sociological studies of marriage, dating from the post-war era to the 1980s and found that they are disparate in nature and point to continuities with the past rather than dramatic changes at the heart of the marriage relationship. The complex ways that in the past a wife could be married to the job (which are equally applicable today, especially in the military, as reported by Finch 1983, Chandler 1987 and Jessup 1996) are discussed, as are the way employers could effectively gain two people for the price of one by virtue of occupational status, which could provide "spatial and temporal parameters limiting the wife's spheres of activity" (1991:60).

Dobrofsky and Batterson (1977:675) also make this claim, in relation to the military, saying: "When a man enters the service, the government has gained not one, but two - the man and his wife".

On the subject of continuity with the past, it is interesting to note here the results of a study from the Family Policy Studies Centre and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (1999), based on research into families living in Rochdale, Greater Manchester (Johnston, 1999). A suggestion is made in the report that there are growing tensions between the concept of the male as breadwinner and expectations that men should be more involved with their children. Confusion and role ambiguity is seen as common in families today, for example it is often claimed that fathers have difficulty knowing what exactly is expected of them. The modern man stereotype is seen to clash with the realities of earning a living, and also the concept of breadwinner was found in this study to be so deeply ingrained in British culture, that wives who earned as much as their husbands were still seen as a 'contributor' to the family budget. This leads towards the conclusion that whilst military wives unarguably have to deal with pressures most wives do not face (particularly in terms of absences and mobility), perhaps the military man is not too far removed from the man in the (civilian) street as regards the division of domestic labour.

It is also important to consider the differential perceptions of the marriage relationship which can exist between husband and wife. Bernard (1976) wrote that women often report marriage in less favourable terms than do men. Writing about Bernard's work, Jessup (1996) reports that: "often, indeed, the couple appear not to be describing the same marriage at all, and, in an important sense, they *are* reporting on different marriages" (1996:72 emphasis in original). Ribbens (1994) continues this theme by claiming that women and men in her study seemed to experience different 'family' lives. This is a theme which occurs several times in the literature on occupational wives. For example, Chandler mentions the pitfalls of looking at marriage only through the wife's eyes, but counters this by saying she is looking at her marriage, not his (as is this study).

Penny Mansfield, director of the charity One-plus-One follows up this theme in a newspaper article, saying there is much ambiguity about what 'the deal' is in marriage. She says women can now achieve economic security and status independent of husbands, so they're not looking for a meal ticket, "…. but emotional warmth, reassurance, support and help with housework" (1997:24). Men are reported in this article as being oblivious to changing expectations (contrary to military wives' perceptions of husbands outside the military as 'new men'!). The fact that more women leave their husbands to live alone than men leave wives is given as evidence that husbands gain more benefits from marriage than wives. That families are better for men's mental health than for women's is also reported by Oakley and Rigby (1998).

Also in this vein, Greer says of marriage that: "…..men need marriage more than women do. A man without a wife is fragile; prisons are full of men who never married and unmarried men are more likely to die violently" (1999). She says a wife is an asset to a man, reassuring him, building him up and attending to his creature comforts, but that a husband is not necessarily advantageous to a woman, and also that young men do have great anxiety about relationships, but unlike girls, they are not encouraged to see relationships as the only thing of value in their lives (in a military environment it could be argued that a huge responsibility is placed on the wife for maintaining the marriage, being as it can be, the only permanent feature of her life; albeit a small minority of wives do manage to maintain long-term careers).

Military wives may be erroneously harbouring an illusion that civilian men are 'new men,' and that their husbands are unique in retaining the traditional husband role and bachelor ethos associated with the military, whilst other evidence (Segal 1990, Gillis 1997) suggests that this might not be the case. In effect, Jolly and Jessup's arguments about the military being out of step with the rest of society could be argued to be exaggerated in relation to domestic responsibility.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the way the job affects marriage and family, starting with expectations versus reality, and following through to marriage and motherhood, career, and the cumulative effect of the job on marriage. Many of these themes will be revisited in the two subsequent chapters on friendship and community.

Before turning to the data, it is interesting to make reference to a collection of poems by an ex-RAF wife, Maggie May, who succinctly encapsulates the full range of problems faced by RAF wives. The following poem draws out many of the themes covered in this chapter:

When You Marry a Fellow in Blue

It's not for the weak or faint-hearted
It's an odd sort of life to pursue,
He'll need you to lean on and be his support
When you marry a fellow in blue ...

He'll tell you you're just going to *love* it
All the parties and balls, what a life!
But his job will come first, you'll rate second or third
- That's the lot of an RAF wife

He'll say that he can't live without you
So you're dragged off to Hull or Peru
It's varied and hectic, you'll never be bored
When you marry a fellow in blue

He'll often decide to surprise you
(Well, you'd hate a routine sort of life)
So he'll turn up with three more for supper
Saying: "Chaps, meet my wonderful wife!"

When he's off on a "jolly" the pipes burst
And you simply don't know what to do -
You'll wish you could go home to Mother
When you marry a fellow in blue

You'll live in the middle of nowhere
With winds that can cut like a knife
So up goes the plastic to keep out the draughts
Life has *style*, for an RAF wife!

He'll promise you far-flung horizons
Excitement and fun to live through
... But how can you know what you're *in* for
When you marry a fellow in blue?

(1989:15).

Marrying an RAF Serviceman: Expectations versus Reality

<u>Pressure to Marry</u>

To start at the beginning of the pathway to marriage, writers on military wives have

spoken of the impetus, in a military environment, to <u>get</u> married; the pressure to take this

life-changing step.

Jessup (1996) argues that brief courtships, leading to hasty and often unwise marriage unions, are caused by complicated deployment and training patterns, and by the low cost and military ethos of married quarters. He goes on to say that military employment expands the range of possible marriage partners: because of the variety of geographical settings in which young personnel are located, but at the same time interferes with the development of any in-depth relationship by limiting the frequency of face-to-face contact and shared experience. Mansfield and Collard (1988) echo this sentiment by charting the progress of couples through courtship to getting married, setting up home and starting out on married life together. They claim that certain marriages appear to be divorce-prone, "with the seeds of their destruction already having been sown in courtship", and say it seems that: ".....highly disturbed and disrupted courtships are more likely to feature among couples who eventually divorce" (1988:87).

Evidence of the relevance of this argument emerged in my data. When asked if the job affected their decision to get married, out of 34 interviewees in my study, 9 said yes and 25 said no. In other words, 9 said that their decision to get married was influenced by their husband's job, 5 officers' wives and 4 airmen's wives, a total of 26%, whilst 74% said they planned their weddings to suit themselves, in spite of the job. A lower percentage said timing was affected by the job than I would have envisaged, but the numbers are nonetheless significant.

Four interviewees cited the benefits of a married quarter and the status of being a wife as part of their reasons for marrying and five said timing was the major issue, with the wedding being fitted around available leave or postings. Such factors are seen to act as driving forces towards marriage, but some factors (and in some cases even the same factors, such as the horror rather than excitement of living in married quarters!) can also act as inhibitors to marriage.

One interviewee drew attention to the way the exigencies of the job affect courtship and ultimately marriage, speaking about the short spells of time she spent together with her husband prior to their marriage:

"....we didn't live together before we got married. We didn't really .... the most we'd spent together was two weeks, like you know, in a solid block, you know, before we were married. So I suppose in some respects I didn't know him that well before we got married. Maybe if I had've done, I probably wouldn't have married him! I suppose you don't really know someone until you live with them" (Amelia, O14).

Amelia went on to say that she nearly called the wedding off because of the job; her then fiancé was going to be detached to Italy, and agreed to it without discussing it with her. It seems she was starting to realise what life as a services wife might be like. She said:

"Well actually we nearly.....well actually we did split up over our wedding actually. I was sort of saying how can you just say you are going to go away for 4 months you know, just right over our wedding, how to hell are we going to get married?"

In sum, evidence of the job affecting decisions of when to get married was observed, albeit in only a quarter of cases.

The lure of married quarters and status of being a wife (a girlfriend or cohabitee being awarded no status) were found to be significant features of this decision, (and could lead to marriage at a young age) as was the fact that busy work schedules, detachments and postings could have the effect of limiting possible wedding dates.

Expectations

It would also seem that women enter marriage to servicemen with a wide range of expectations. Some enter wearing distinctly rose-tinted spectacles, not having thought the whole thing out. For example one interviewee Mandy (O12) made this comment:

"I didn't really have time to sort of sit down and think about it really, because we met, got engaged and got married within about fifteen months, and when you're organising the wedding and everything you don't sort of sit down and think 'what am I going to do, where am I going to live?'"

Others have a fair idea what it is going to be like, for example Helen, (A16) said:

"Well I had a little bit of an idea. I had a friend who was an air force wife. I suppose it's like anything really, I tried to go into it with an open mind".

Some say they should have known better! For example, having worked in an associated profession (NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes) management) an interviewee said:

> "I never thought I'd marry into the RAF or anything, having seen, you know, the way they'd been moved around, and I've worked with women who are.....they're dependants in Germany. I thought oh no, it's not for me" (Cassie, A11).

In effect, wives in this study entered the marriage relationship with a variety of expectations about their future: some realistic and many totally unrealistic. All interviewees in my study had interesting things to say when asked what their expectations of RAF life were. This information will be presented below, firstly by categorising wives' levels of military experience, then in table form, providing a broad picture of the results. This will be followed by explanatory narrative. The first table shows a profile of the interviewees in terms of their awareness of RAF life. In all tables the division is between the wives of officers and airmen, giving a total of 18 airmen's wives and 16 officers' wives.

In assessing marital expectations of military marriage, I looked at the level of previous military knowledge held by individuals on entering marriage to a serviceman. Set out below are what I perceived to be the five main levels of awareness on entry to military marriage:

1. No experience or knowledge of the military. Entering marriage with no idea of what to expect beyond media images.

2. Limited experience of the military (early childhood experience or having friends in the military) and partial knowledge of the lifestyle.

3. Having a close relative in the forces and entering marriage with fairly detailed knowledge of military life.

4. As an ex servicewoman, having personal experience of military service, knowing the demands of the job and entering marriage with full knowledge of the lifestyle.

5. As an RAF 'child', having grown up in a military environment with full awareness of the job and the lifestyle, and entering marriage with 'eyes open'.

Table 3.1 Military experience

PROFILE	No experience of military	Limited experience as child	Close relative in service	Ex-serving service-woman	Grew up in services	On second service marriage
Officers' Wives	13	-	1	1	2	-
Airmen's Wives	9	1	-	6	2	1

NB   One officer's wife and one airman's wife fall into two categories. The officer's wife is an ex-servicewoman as well as having grown up in a military environment, and the airman's wife is an ex-servicewoman as well as having entered into a second military marriage.

The following tables divide interviewees into categories based on the above table, and provide a broad categorisation of how expectations match reality in each case, based on the answers interviewees provided to the question of whether expectations fitted with the reality of RAF life. Further explanation will follow each table, in an attempt to assess how far previous knowledge and experience of the military fit with the reality of RAF marriage.

Table 3.2 Expectations v reality: no experience of military life

NO EXPERIENCE OF MILITARY	Realistic expectations, able to deal with the life	More than lives up to expectations. Very happy with life	Shock. Reality short of expectations. Resentful. Fight it
Officers' Wives	7	-	6
Airmen's Wives	4	1	4

Of those with no experience of military life, 2 said that they expected life to be like that portrayed on the television drama *Soldier, Soldier*, 1 officer's wife and 1 airman's wife.

In addition, 1 officer's wife and 1 airman's wife expressed the view that the wider public viewed RAF life as portrayed on *Soldier, Soldier*, when in fact (they argued forcibly!), it is nothing like that. I viewed this as quite significant, in light of the above discussion on the impact of media images of the military and of marriage on society. It is a revealing insight into the actual impact of media images to discover that 2 interviewees with no previous knowledge of the military actually relied on a fictional television series for their information on military life, and that a further 2 interviewees believed that the general public rely on images from this series for glimpses of service life. The individual comments made were as follows:

> "....you watch things on television and think that's what it's like. You watch things like *Soldier, Soldier* and you see wives and what it's like and things like that, and especially if you don't know any [RAF wives], you think oh that's what it's like. But it's not, it's completely different" (Cindy, O10).

> "I did resent it quite a bit to begin with, and we had a few problems because Peter's attitude was 'you knew this when you married me'. But I think before you're in touch you don't know what it's all about, it's all a little bit like....we'd watched *Soldier, Soldier* and thought 'it all seems really exciting'. I never knew anything about the RAF" (Karen, A7).

> "....people watch *Soldier, Soldier* and things like that, where everyone is in and out of each other's houses, and there are parties all the time. I mean there might be, but I just don't happen to be part of it!" (Anthea, O15).

> "So I think, you know, a lot of people view them [RAF wives] as being a little bit dodgy in some sort of way, you know, or you know they think it's like *Soldier, Soldier*. And I think 'not really!'" (Monique, A10).

Programmes such as *Soldier, Soldier* seem to foster romantic notions about military life, but there has been a recent increase in the number of fly-on-the-wall programmes on TV, some of which are about the military, and the contents of these programmes are likely to promote a more realistic (even gloomy) picture of life in the forces, which is perhaps welcome, given that television and other media sources are often the only access the general public have to the life. One such 'docusoap' entitled *Soldier Town* about the garrison town of Colchester was reviewed in the Telegraph dated 5.6.99 in a very negative manner, with the comment that the first part of this series served mainly to show how:

"....young women of the district have rendered military brothels unnecessary in the closing years of the 20th century" (Pile, 1999:12).

In terms of expectations and reality coinciding, there appears to be an almost 50/50 split between those interviewees in my study with no previous experience who have realistic expectations about the life and those who do not (with no observable difference between officers' and airmen's wives). Those with realistic expectations used phrases like "getting on with it" (8 interviewees) and "putting up with it" (1 interviewee). High levels of acceptance, resignation and indeed submission to the lifestyle were observed amongst this group, as well as an awareness of the futility of trying to 'fight' the RAF, as there was no chance of winning. One interviewee (Rosie, A1), in a very positive sense felt that the reality had far exceeded her expectations in terms of travel, accommodation and a good lifestyle. Of those who found RAF life to be a shock, (and seemed to have come down to earth with a bump!) the overriding shock seems for most interviewees to be related to husband absence, long working hours, moving around, being away from friends and family, and their husband's complete dedication to the job. Several interviewees (3 in total) said that they felt so resentful about their 'lot' that they did fight the RAF, although they acknowledged that they would never win.

It has thus been established that entering military life with no experience of what it will be like is hard, and in this study virtually half the interview sample said they found it easy to adapt to the lifestyle, and half did not. This would indicate that factors other than previous experience come into play in determining how well an individual adapts and adjusts to the RAF lifestyle, such as career expectations, closeness to family, sociability, and sympathy for husband's vocation. These and other factors will be revisited later in this chapter. The following table sets out the effect of pre-marital experience of the military on interviewees in this study.

Table 3.3 Impact of previous military experience

EXPECTATIONS VERSUS REALITY		
Limited experience as a child	Used to feel sorry for RAF wives. Realistic now, gets on with it. Very supportive of husband.	
Airman's wives	1	
Close relative in RAF	No easier knowing what it would be like/resentful of RAF	
Officers' wives	1	
Ex-servicewomen	Knew what to expect. Accept it with a few 'moans'	Never envisaged marrying an RAF man, knowing what the life was like
Officers' wives	1	-
Airmen's wives	5	1
Grew up in services	It helps to know what to expect. Accept it with a few 'moans'	
Officers' wives	2	
Airmens' wives	2	
2nd marriage to a serviceman	Very realistic, happy with the life	
Airmen's wives	1	

The first interviewee mentioned in the table indicated that previous (negative) knowledge had not prejudiced her in any way against military life; her attitude was positive and she was very keen to make the best of it and to support her husband. She said:

> "I'm sticking behind my husband 100%. I mean yes, I'm a career person, but his job comes first, definitely" (Amy, A18).

For the second interviewee, with a close relative in the RAF, previous knowledge had not served to cushion the effects of the lifestyle. She was resentful of the institution and tried to fight it, whilst acknowledging that it was a good life and that she was lucky to have had relatives at the base they were posted to, to show her the ropes. (An instance of the ambiguous love/hate relationship between wives and the RAF.)

In the case of ex-servicewomen, for all but one interviewee, being in the services themselves seems to have helped considerably in adapting to being a service wife.

They displayed awareness of the pressures of the job, and of the culture, coped better with husband absence and mobility, and seemed to fit in more easily than those with no experience. Comments included:

> "I felt we were very much a part of similar kinds of environments I suppose" (Suzanne, A12).

> " .....I suppose it's been an easy transition for me, having been in the air force, and having done the same job as my husband" (Lucy, A9).

The airman's wife who was not happy with the RAF way of life resented her husband being away, the distance from her family and the loss of her career. She said:

> "It's the first time it's really hit me that I haven't got a job or anything, and I just feel very RAF all of a sudden" (Cassie, A11).

Although they knew about the job, all ex-servicewomen but the one who had grown up in the services did have gaps in their knowledge of what a wife's experience of RAF life would be, although they had a vague idea, and didn't seem too shocked by the actual experience.

Growing up in the forces appeared to equip interviewees with knowledge of the lifestyle from the viewpoint of all family members and put them in an advantageous position in preparation for service marriage. All four interviewees recognised that their experience helped them to deal with service life, while acknowledging there were negative as well as positive aspects related to RAF life. The following comments help to illustrate this point

> ".....it's in my blood really" (Diane, O9).

> ".....I suppose I knew sort of more than anyone what I was letting myself in for .... It's just what you know, isn't it?" (Serena, A17).

The interviewee who had been married to two servicemen had also been in the services herself. She was happy with the life and still enjoyed travelling around. Some regrets were mentioned in relation to loss of career and rootlessness, but she was generally very positive about the life, very realistic, and recognised (as well as being able to deal with) the drawbacks. She said:

> "I'm fairly lucky in that I'm a pretty adventurous soul.....I mean I do get bored if I'm in the same place for too long anyway" (Vanda, A14).

As envisaged, previous knowledge of the lifestyle in all but two cases did help interviewees to cope with marriage to an RAF serviceman. In the two cases where it didn't, other factors clouded the picture, in one case resentment at distance from family, husband absence, unpredictability, husband's choice of occupation and difficulties in sustaining a career. In the other case long working hours, husband absence, unpredictability and career difficulties were elevated by the interviewee in importance above any positive aspects of RAF life. Of those with no experience of RAF life, certain key factors emerged in determining whether they would deal with RAF life in a positive or negative manner.

Most prominent in preventing a happy transition to marriage to a serviceman were high career expectations (and particularly the loss of a promising career, which will be discussed below), age on entry to the life (older entrants, with more outside life experience appeared to harbour deeper resentment to restrictions placed upon them), a need to live close to family, difficulty in coping alone during husband absences: especially with young children, and dislike of life on the RAF base (perceived cliquiness, gossip and introversion), which will be discussed further in chapters 4 and 5.

Facilitators of an easy transition to RAF life included adaptability, age on entry to the life (younger interviewees without established careers or extensive outside life experience seemed to adapt more easily), sociability, low career expectations and willingness to take on any job at any level to fit in with a husband's job, resilience and the ability to cope with family responsibilities in the absence of the male 'head' of the household.

The Lived Reality: What is an RAF Wife?

The military career is a prime example of how, on marriage, women can be expected to match up to an ideal. This claim could certainly have been proved to have substance in times past, and still to a large extent today, judging by the responses of many of my interviewees.

This extract from the preface to a novel by Thomas Fleming entitled *The Officers' Wives*, and quoted as being taken from an army officer's guide, shows the nature of the competencies expected of a military wife in the past:

> "The Army wife.....is equally at home in a cabin or a mansion, a fine hotel, a transport. She is a good mother and rears her family, generally, under conditions which would seem impossible to her civilian sisters.....Her sense of Duty, Honour and Country are those of the Army itself" (Fleming 1981:i).

Dobrofsky and Batterson provide another good example of the 'military ideal', in this quote from a very dated American handbook by wives for wives, which most definitely advocates conformity to the status quo! "Don't allow yourself to be a 'new broom sweeping clean', but try to step into line with the other wives and be part of a proud community" (1977:675). Parts of these statements still have relevance today, as will be shown.

Wives are sometimes viewed as 'spectators', who can never really be part of the military, partly because of the need to maintain aspects of a 'bachelor-group ethos' (Jolly, 1992). This is an important theme, which is central to my research, and which will be explored in more detail below.

Marriage would seem to be the most important factor in the process of defining what being an RAF wife entails; the marriage relationship potentially being the only constant thing in a woman's life. As will be discussed later in this chapter, when that goes wrong the consequences can be much more devastating than in civilian life because a wife loses her lifestyle and home as well as her husband.

It is important to recognise 'hidden' work carried out by wives; work which may be invisible to anyone else, but which is nevertheless of vital importance to the wellbeing of the family unit, and can be more onerous than in civilian life, due to mobility and husband absence. It is claimed that wives provide moral support in many different ways. The work of Micaela di Leonardo is discussed by Delphy and Leonard (1992).

She looks at women's maintenance of kin contact between households, which is seen as an important part of our cultural expectation of satisfying family life. It is recognised that this task, which includes developing, maintaining and ritual celebration of ties, such as visits, letters, telephone calls, presents and cards, takes time, intention and skill, and is largely women's work, which often tends to be unseen and unrecognised by husbands (this argument is also put forward by Wellman (1988)). Such work becomes very important in the military world, as couples move around, leaving friends behind or being left behind by other friends on a regular basis; husbands can appear unconcerned at maintaining contact, and wives seem to take on this responsibility, which becomes steadily more onerous as the years progress, but vitally important because of the desire for roots and contacts. One interviewee who was quite new to RAF life confirms this point when she says:

> "....Rod's terrible for doing it. He's been in the air force so long, and oh he's hopeless when people move.....but I'll make that better" (Melissa, A5).

Images of RAF wives: Interviewees in this study were asked to describe their image of an RAF wife. Interestingly 71% of interviewees responded in a broadly positive vein: 63% of officers' wives responding positively, and 78% of airmen's wives. This slightly higher percentage on the part of airmen's wives could support an earlier hunch on my part that airmen's wives are more accepting of the lifestyle, even grateful, whereas officers' wives (perhaps with higher educational achievements and career expectations, as will be discussed below) seem to expect more and to be more willing to fight the system, regardless of the outcome. Key words and phrases used to describe images of RAF wives are set out in the following table.

Table 3.4 Images of an RAF wife

Positive Images	Negative Images
independent	alone
good life	struggling
sense of belonging to something	away from family
resilient	no support
flexible	no identity
able to cope	no life of your own
chameleon	no career
adaptable	2nd class citizen
50% of RAF: support group	cosseted
mobile	cushioned from the outside world
able to pick things up and let things go	derogatory term
	you are a number

Two interviewees said that prior to marriage they thought being an RAF wife involved flower arranging and coffee mornings, twinset and pearls. Two further interviewees said they were teased by friends about becoming an RAF wife and told they would have to conform to an image, and wear 'a little scarf' in the case of the officer's wife, and tracksuit bottoms, a sweatshirt and trainers in the case of the airman's wife! The range of responses to this question demonstrates again the extent of the love/hate relationship between RAF wives and the institution. The following section moves on to look at what happens when children enter the equation.

Marriage and Motherhood

The main manifestation of motherhood in relation to my study has emerged as the way the arrival of children irrevocably changes the experience of being an RAF wife. Motherhood obviously changes life for all women, in a myriad of ways. For example, Ribbens talks of "entering into a whole new social world" (1990:1) on meeting with other mothers for the first time, Bailey 1997 reports on a similar experience. In addition, the arrival of children is generally agreed to change the marriage relationship, leading to the creation of a different sort of social unit (Ribbens 1994), an altered social structure of the family and new source of emotional complexity (Chandler 1987). It could also be argued that children detract from the notion of the 'pure relationship' (Giddens 1992) by the creation of structures over and above the marriage relationship in order to care for children. As with marriage generally, expectations women have about motherhood can differ greatly from the lived reality. In the interests of space, a full discussion of that aspect of motherhood will not be undertaken. It is important however to mention the assertions of writers on family and motherhood, and also participants in my study, that having children can unbalance couples (who hitherto had what they saw as equal partnerships), as gender inequalities come to the fore, and mothers typically become more involved with children than men (Jamieson 1999:48). Relationships can revert to what is defined as natural within family ideology; women taking on household and child care responsibilities and men assuming the role of breadwinner (Charles and Kerr 1999).

Full-time caring for children has been shown to alter the pattern of the marriage relationship, to the extent that the revised pattern is hard to break, even when household circumstances alter (Allan and Crow 2001). Motherhood thus has profound implications for the marriage relationship generally, and some additional factors come into play for RAF wives (as well as other occupational wives whose husbands are employed in jobs which make similar demands on them).

As an RAF wife, from being virtually 'untouched' by the military (many authors including Jolly 1992 and Chandler 1987 claim that women without children are excluded from life on the base, and evidence of this was found in my study), a new mother living on the base can be plunged into RAF life and become 'available' for surveillance and advice from others on the base; indeed many interviewees said that the arrival of their first child marked the start of their involvement in 'RAF life', and the start of its heavy impact upon them, for example in moving them away from their families, and taking their husbands away from them at a time when they felt they needed them most (this theme is explored further in chapter 5).

The importance of young children in shaping the social structure of women's lives has been recognised by writers on community, kinship and friendship. For example, Allan says that young children: "…..have long been a dominant focus of mothers' identities, shaping the pattern of their social participation in numerous ways" (1996:13). Similarly, in Foster's study of two difficult to let housing estates, she found that one woman had not become involved with neighbours until she became a mother. Foster says: "It was not until she had a child and was at home that she began to feel isolated and in need of company" (1997:8). Bell and Ribbens (1994) also report that women in their study became involved in child-centred networks when their babies were several months old (the early months having been described as lonely and difficult by many women). Several instances of this pattern were recorded in my study, for example, one respondent reported on her experience of arriving on a new base with a newborn baby, and sitting feeding her daughter in the chair, looking out the window, feeling lonely and thinking "there must be women out there somewhere in the same position as me" (Josephine, R18). Another respondent, Sophie (R2) felt very isolated on arriving at RAF Culswick with a 3 week old baby, and said "It sounds pathetic now, but one night I said to my husband 'I know I'm not everybody's cup of tea, but I must be somebody's'!"

Maclean, in her 1997 PhD thesis, based on a study of a remote Scottish highland community, also makes mention of the fact that it was easier for newcomers in the community studied to fit in if they had young children.

The data reported below contain echoes of these arguments, together with some new insights into life as a mother on a military base. The remainder of this section will look at the pressure to start a family/timing of children, how life changes on motherhood, the ways wives can be seen as wives first and mothers second, and the effects of distance from family/husband absence.

Pressure to Start a Family/Timing of Children

Constant relocation and resultant difficulty in forging a career, coupled with a lack of suitable roles for childless women on a military base, and even loneliness during husband absence (Chandler 1987), can translate as pressure to have children, despite the consequences not always living up to expectations.

Chandler found, in terms of her doctoral research on the wives of Naval ratings, that many young wives were turning to motherhood to ease the loneliness caused by their husbands' absence, and to give them an opening into networks of other young mothers on the base. The other side of this coin, discussed by Jolly, Nicholson and Tremayne, is that young mothers at home (in particular those living far away from their families) can find themselves in a vulnerable position due to the "....many minor crises which occur with young families" (Nicholson 1980:7).

In addition, the timing of children can be affected by the demands of the job. When asked if the job affected the timing of children's arrival, a mixed response was recorded, and is set out below.

Table 3.5 Job affecting timing of children

Was Timing of Children Affected by RAF?	Yes	No	Totals
Officers' Wives	6	10	16
Airmen's Wives	6	12	18
Totals	12	22	34

Significantly, of those who said the job did affect the timing of childbirth, 2 officers' wives and 2 airmen's wives said it didn't affect timing of their first child but was a major consideration in planning a second child, indicating that having experienced the pressures of being married to an RAF serviceman with one child, the decision to have another can be more difficult. Some comments from interviewees follow:

> ".....it's affected our decision to have a second one. Because I wouldn't want..... it was quite hard going with Oscar.....I know that if I was on my own for weeks on end in that same situation, it would be really difficult for me to cope with" (Jenny, O7).

> ".....planning for a second child has caused problems because he's going to the Falklands in October, so you tend to think you've got to decide do you want to be pregnant while he's away or do you want to wait until he comes back.....I do resent it a little bit because you think that's something you should just really be deciding between you. Nothing should influence that decision really. It's something you should do when you want to, not when it fits in with your job. A few people I've spoken to have been in the same boat as well. I think there's quite a lot of strain put on you" (Karen, A7).

In essence, having experienced motherhood as an RAF wife, these interviewees harboured no romantic illusions about a second pregnancy and child.

How Life Changes When Children Come Along

There was unanimous agreement amongst the 30 interviewees who had children that life as an RAF wife changes immeasurably when children arrive (in line with the arguments of Foster, Allan and Maclean above). A total of 27 wives said that they only started feeling like an 'RAF wife' when they had their first child, because it was then that they started to be involved with other wives on the base, and establish a life on the base which is completely separate from their husband's role or their activities as a couple, on the base. Prior to having children most of these women had worked full time and socialised away from the base (further discussion of this issue is contained in chapters 4 and 5).

The tables below look at the ways in which life changes, as seen by my interviewees (the first table relates to those who have children and the second to those who have no children). Again, interviewees may feature in more than one category.

Table 3.6 Changes heralded by motherhood

How Life Changes	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Become more involved on base, meet more people when you have children	7	12
Homesick for mother	4	4
Hate husband going away, feel like single parent	4	3
Exhausting and harder than expected	2	1
Feel lost once children go to school	1	2
Husband misses out by being away	2	-
You can't go out/away when husband is not there	2	-
Moving becomes more difficult: moving children	-	2
Difficult moving with a young baby and knowing no-one but husband	1	1
Rank becomes an issue as you go along to things on the base	-	1
Difficult to socialise away from the camp	1	-
Felt anxious and trapped when pregnant and away from family	-	1
Confidence takes a knock	-	1
TOTALS	24	28

Table 3.7 Changes heralded by motherhood: childless women's views

How life changes (as perceived by wives who don't have children)	
OFFICERS' WIVES	
Jane	Difficult to plan for it. Must be hard to bring up children away from extended family
Amelia	Doesn't know if she wants children because of husband's job and his dedication to it (but would love children)
AIRMEN'S WIVES	
Amy	Doesn't want children yet. Feels you get 'taken in' more on the base if you do have children
Suzanne	Difficult to plan for it, want to both be in same place. Treated better with children, better house!

A very illuminating picture of life as a mother on the RAF base was provided by the interviewees. Note the perceptive quality of the concerns voiced by those who don't have children, in that these same concerns are present to varying degrees in the comments of those who do have children. It is interesting to note here that whilst societal trends are moving towards more women choosing not to have children at all, RAF wives can feel left out and something of an oddity because they do not have or want children. In the same way (although not explored in this study) infertile women can feel very left out and inadequate in an environment based around children's activities, especially if they do not have a job.

In line with the literature discussed above, most of the mothers in my study said they did get more involved on the base when children were born, that they missed their families, and that it was difficult to pursue other interests/work because their husbands were often away. Three wives said they felt lost when their children went to school. This is an important consideration; having made the effort to become involved in military life (which largely revolves around young children) wives can feel very isolated when their children go to school, especially if this transition coincides with relocation to a new base, where the process of integration can be more daunting without a small child to take along to events (see also page 176, chapter 5).

Interestingly, women in this study did feel they were in a position of being socially "'held to account' for their children's behaviour" (Ribbens 1994:87) and constrained by the standards set by mothers and other people on the base in what could be described as a Foucauldian sense. As articulated by Ribbens, women as mothers frequently find themselves being subjected to unsolicited and unexpected advice and judgements by others (1998:33).

Examples from this study include two respondents (Edith, R9 and Wendy, R15) who recounted stories of pressure from other mothers to send their children to boarding school (for which financial assistance is provided by the RAF), and an interviewee who told of her unease with the rules of RAF child care facilities (which are exempt from social services inspections):

> "I went to put Henry's name down.....And they went 'oh yes, they come for five mornings a week', and I was thinking 'five mornings', that seems like an awful lot for a three year old, because I was sort of thinking two, and maybe building up to three just before starting school, you know, to break him in gently, and they were like 'oh we find it better with five mornings',.....I was thinking 'oh, that seems a bit strange'" (Monique, A10).

In effect, life changes in a wide variety of ways for RAF wives when they become mothers; in addition to the general shock of becoming a mother, and the change in status society associates with this transition, they are faced with many new 'rules' and practices on the base which they have not had to deal with before, and are expected to meaningfully interpret and act upon.

The overriding concern of participants in this study in relation to child rearing was seen as the huge responsibility of having children as an RAF wife; being prepared to take full responsibility for bringing up a family in the face of husband absence (in line with the arguments of Finch 1983), and increasing resultant pressure on their marriages. In relation to pressure on marriage it is important to mention Ribbens' 1994 study, in which she found that most mothers who took part saw the marital relationship itself as put on the 'back burner' until a future time when the children had left home (due to lack of 'couple time').

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This assertion has implications for RAF wives, whose marriage is the basis for entry to the RAF lifestyle, and often the only constant in their lives. Women in my study generally put across an image of striving to maintain the marriage relationship in the face of difficulties (by attempting to juggle many balls at once). Associated pressures were reported by some participants to be capable of leading to marital breakdown, and this subject will be discussed further, later in this chapter.

Wives First/Mothers Second?

In discussing motherhood, and as a connecting thread between marriage and motherhood, it is interesting to look at the way three studies (Chandler (1991), Jolly (1992) and Pahl and Pahl (1971)) consider the contention that in terms of incorporation in men's work, women are seen as wives in the first instance and mothers in the second instance. The clearest manifestation of this assertion, cited by all three authors, is that children are often separated from their parents, for example being sent to boarding school to avoid disruption of their education as their parents move around from place to place.

It could be argued that in practice not all wives (who are seen as agents and not helpless victims) allow their husbands' jobs to take precedence over their roles as mothers or succumb to pressure to send their children to boarding school, as the choice does exist of whether to follow their husbands regardless of other circumstances (a justification for this decision was given by Edith (R9) in my study: that family is more important than continuity of education), or to remain in one place whilst their husbands are posted elsewhere, coming back to see their families at weekends. Each choice involves sacrifices, but choices do nevertheless exist. Some examples from the data follow, firstly of a wife with experience of 'weekending' and boarding school, secondly of a wife with experience of 'weekending', and thirdly of 2 wives with objections to both options.

"we'd been married a year, and we were in Cleve, and we did a few months to London, where he stayed up during the week and came down at weekends, and then it was eight months up at Culswick, and he lift shared with another guy. But it meant every other week that I didn't have a car. It puts strains on any marriage when you only see each other at weekends. They come home.....there's a poem in the [Maggie May] book about them coming home at the weekend with their dirty washing, and then there might be work or something which needs doing over the weekend.....our two daughters went to boarding school.....one was born in Bavaria, one was born in Yorkshire, they went to school in Somerset and we lived in Wiltshire.....They don't really have a family home or a family village to say well that's where we're from. It's the sort of thing people say when they're getting to know you, you know, where are you from" (Mary, O1).

".....the whole family was at stake. Living apart was fine.....I think it would have been okay if the children had been older, but they were quite demanding, because the twins were only three at the time, and Andrew was six. He'd just started school, so it was very hectic on me when Colin was away, and when he came..... well it wasn't that I couldn't cope, I could, it was just.....it's just the volume, you know, you're just so busy. And when he came back on his four days off he wasn't used to the children, and they all wanted Daddy at once, and he was used to the peace and quiet, and I would think 'oh Gawd go back again, give me peace, I'll get back to normal'. It wasn't that we had arguments or anything like that, it just became.....you became, you felt like you got in a rut, and you needed to do something to get out of it" (Lucy, A9).

".....Robert's 8, so he's only got 3 more years left of primary school, so I don't want to be moving about too much, and I wouldn't send them to boarding school" (Gwen, A15).

"I don't want to work.....If you had your own career you'd have to have your own house and your husband come and visit you at weekends or whatever, that's what they have to do isn't it?" (Josie, A6).

As shown, as families move around, wives are expected to 'pick up the pieces' and 'sort everything out', which constitutes a clear manifestation of the obligations conferred on wives by the institution. As Finch (1983:83) asserts, employers benefit significantly from the work of wives: whom they do not employ and to whom they have almost no legal obligations. Added to the responsibilities shouldered by RAF wives is the fact that they are required to cope with RAF life and motherhood without the help of extended family.

Distance from Family

Wives with young families can find themselves in an increasingly isolated position with no family or close friends at hand to give them a break with child care, especially when their husbands are away. Military communities and indeed probably other occupational communities such as the Shell community studied by Tremayne (in Callan and Ardener (eds) 1984), can provide a supportive network for young mothers, and many interviewees in my study did value children's activities on the base very highly (discussed further in chapter 5), whilst most of them yearned for more family involvement.

Ribbens found that women in her study of mothers valued the contribution of their own mothers very highly. Given popular images of the demise of the extended family, Ribbens was surprised at the significance of the relationship and the frequency of contact between the two women, and also between sisters (1994:78). Overall, she found that maternal grandmothers could be important in 4 ways: as the most appropriate substitute carers in the absence of husbands; as an important source of female company; as a resource available during the day when things were going wrong, and as a confidante with whom to share child rearing concerns. Women in my study were generally denied such support, and spoke of longing to be able to see their families more. Some examples follow:

> "It's strange, because the rest of our families live very close together, you know it's all like brothers and sisters just round the corner and that sort of thing.....
> when we first had the kids, I think you just need that support in a way, ...just somebody to say you know, 'you're doing alright sort of thing'. You know, just to have them while I have my hair cut, just little things like that" (Monique, A10).

> "We never went out for months and months because we didn't know anybody enough to leave him with them, which was quite difficult. Whereas perhaps if we'd have been at home we would have gone out a lot more.....left him with family and that" (Karen, A7).

> ".....for reassurance, even just phoning up and saying 'I think they've got a temperature, can you come round'? .....there were times when I was seriously homesick for my mother, especially when I was carrying her and then when I had her, just for that reassurance. You know what it's like when you're pacing the bedroom floor and the baby's crying its head off. You just want somebody that you can easily phone" (Mary, O1).

Some wives tried to bridge this 'gap' by having their parents to stay for long periods, or going 'home' during husband absence. This was found to be disruptive to their lives on the RAF base, to prevent integration into the RAF community (see pages 150/1, chapter 4), and to lead wives into the uncomfortable position of living "between two worlds" (Haour-Knipe, 2001:212).

In the military, added to denial of the resource of extended family, is the denial of husband, when he is called away on postings and detachments (and this is discussed further later in this chapter). As reflected in table 3.10, several wives said that as mothers they felt vulnerable when their husbands went away. The extent of extra responsibility placed on wives in this position has received little research attention, and masks the presumption by employers "that wives will 'cover' for domestic responsibilities during periods of absence" (Finch 1983:81), and the resultant ability of employers to disregard the fact that male employees have children. Consequently, it can be very difficult for RAF wives to sustain any sort of career, or even to attend educational courses, due to unpredictable working patterns and lack of suitable child care.

Marriage and Career

The way the RAF lifestyle inhibits wives from building successful careers is a subject worthy of attention. An interviewee set out the problem succinctly, arguing that a lot of the unhappiness amongst RAF wives stems from work and being out of work. She asserts that adaptability is the key to RAF life. She goes on to say:

> " .....I think RAF wives fall into two categories, you've got the ones who seem to get on with it and make a home wherever they go and get a new job wherever they go, and then you've got the ones who maybe didn't realise: didn't know what to expect, and that are unhappy, until finally they perhaps buy a house where they come from and then their husbands carry on moving around and they stay where they are. And I think the key is definitely adaptability" (Vanda, A14).

A similar argument was raised back in the 1960s by Friedan, and referred to as 'the problem that has no name'. Friedan argues that there is a voice within women which says "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home" (1963:19).

Relatedly, Jessup (1996) relates to the rise in educational standards amongst spouses and resulting reluctance to be classed as 'dependants'. He echoes the arguments of Jolly (1992) when he says:

> "Highly educated people are in general more self-reliant, and a clash has ensued between them and the service community culture, which they identified as benevolent but paternalistic and controlling" (1996:120).

The following table charts individual responses to the question of how marriage to an RAF serviceman has affected their careers.

Table 3.8 Effect of marriage on subsequent career

Category	Career unaffected /not a career person /take whatever job's going	Job has affected career /difficult to have a career as an RAF wife/usually involves weekending	TOTALS
Officers' Wives	5	11	16
Airmen's Wives	7	11	18
TOTALS	12	22	34

As demonstrated above, no major class split between officers' and airmen's wives is observable in relation to wives' views of the effect their husbands' jobs have had on their careers, with 31% of officers' wives and 39% of airmen's wives saying the RAF hasn't affected their careers and 69% of officers' and 61% of airmen's wives saying their careers have been affected. This perhaps serves to emphasise the growing importance of career to women in all walks of life. A difference was however discernable in relation to their attitudes towards the air force. Several airmen's wives mentioned pride in the fact that their husbands were in the air force; a sentiment which was not recorded in relation to any officer's wife. Two instances of wives who felt 'out-of-step' with other wives on the married patch were recorded. In both instances the wives were professional women, who felt they were in an ambiguous position living amongst other airmen's wives. They felt they had more in common with officers' wives.

It is interesting in this day and age that 31% and 39% of wives respectively were quite happy to fit in with their husbands' careers and take on any jobs which were available. This finding contains echoes of the assertions of several writers (for example Walby 1986 and Summerfield 1984), that part-time work was set up specifically for women, to ease post-war labour shortages <u>without</u> undermining men's expectations of linear careers and the range of services they received from women in the home. This argument complements that of Finch (1983) that wives contribute significantly to their husbands' employers by freeing their husbands from all domestic responsibilities and allowing them to undertake work as and when the employer requires, and in being available at any time to perform whatever domestic tasks need doing. Examples of wives who fitted into the category of cheerfully facilitating their husbands' careers follow:

> "When I was working I always managed to get a job. Sometimes you have to lie [about your husband's job] but there are jobs.....I'm not a career person. I'll take anything, it doesn't bother me. In Germany I worked in the airmen's mess and then in-flight catering. Here I've worked in catering at Wanton, and in the chicken factory. I'm very glad to be able to bring some money in, whatever amount" (Rosie, A1).

> "I'm a hairdresser, so I can do that from home. In Germany I used to go around the patch, I still carried on, and now I've come back here I work two days a week in the village.....and I do some from home, I work around the school...... Occasionally when my husband says he's going away I have to lose some custom, but that's not very often" (Ann, A13).

Amongst the wives who did struggle with disruption to and loss of career, several very interesting and revealing insights into the dilemmas faced by RAF wives in seeking employment were recorded. A selection follows:

> "The RAF has had a large impact on my career.....especially during training it was difficult for me to know what kind of employment to go for. I did my Masters and then took on short term contracts. I have not been able to use my Masters because of having to move.....I took on a 6 week computer course and luckily had a friend who would look after my little girl when my husband wasn't there. But the unpredictable hours are still a worry" (Shirley, O3).

"Well I would have liked to have gone back to British Ferries after I had Oscar. I would have liked to have gone back part-time; they had some good schemes going. If Bob had a normal job, and he wasn't away so much, then I could have done it, but I couldn't face the prospect of both of us being out of the country. What if something happened to Oscar? I did actually think recently about re-applying to go back, then I thought about it some more, and I just can't do it, it's not fair on Oscar" (Jenny, O7).

".....I couldn't get a job in Germany. In Lenton nobody wanted to employ me because they knew I was RAF and wouldn't be staying that long, which I think is unfair, because I might have been there three years. I have taken shop jobs, but I just wasn't happy, it wasn't what I wanted to be doing, as I am a secretary" (Marion, A3).

The general message from this study was that RAF wives (especially those with children) can work if they are prepared to take 'whatever is going', and be unconcerned about a long-term career. Even when children are school age, the work taken on by wives is usually part-time, due to childcare responsibilities. And as Ginn and Sandell (1997) point out, a return to part-time employment following childbearing can allow women to perform dual roles (albeit by undertaking a 'second shift' (Hochschild 1990)), and is usually associated with downward occupational mobility and lower earnings. This is a fact most RAF wives accept, although some (not included in this study) do manage to sustain careers throughout childrearing, at a price, usually by staying in one place while their husbands come home at weekends.

It has been claimed that it is seen as more acceptable to stay at home and be a housewife when children are small (Pahl and Pahl, 1971) (and this also seems to be the case in terms of more recent studies of the military). Pahl and Pahl found that some women who were at home with young families seemed jealous and suspicious of working women, even criticising the child care of working women as a way of proving they themselves were doing the 'right thing' by staying at home. An interviewee in my study cited a recent example of one wife saying to another ".....you do realise you're the only working mother on the base" (Betty, O8). This type of behaviour demonstrates the insulated nature of military bases, and also the potential for surveillance and social control.

Looking at images in the press it seems fair to suggest that staying at home to bring up children is seen as more acceptable than less than a decade ago (which is a fortuitous development for RAF wives who often have little choice and as shown in this study, can feel out of step with society in so many other ways). In the wake of various nanny and other child care scandals, abundant research into what is best for young children, and government emphasis on 'traditional family values', the merits of bringing up children are starting to be more readily acknowledged. A Mori poll in 1998 found that almost 85% of adults believe at least one parent should stay at home with children under five. This is not necessarily what people <u>do</u>.

A Sunday Telegraph article by Catherine Elsworth (23.8.98) cites figures from the Office for National Statistics, showing that 55% of adults thought mothers with children below school age should stay at home. The article goes on to point out that although many mothers want to stay at home, some say that they are driven back to work by financial pressures. Ian Mackay of Families need Fathers is quoted as saying that:

> "There are such pressures on families to be successful and have beautiful homes, but many parents are now starting to realise that there's more to life than this and that being with each other is what counts" (p8).

In the military, wives living on 'the patch' are surrounded by people living in houses of a similar standard. Most other mothers stay at home, not least because of the impact of continual relocation on their employment prospects. Resultantly, the potential for other role models and alternative lifestyles in their immediate living environment is significantly decreased. As demonstrated above, a working mother on the base can be seen as an 'oddity', and as such a 'threat' to the established order: which in the Nineties appeared to be in more in line with prevailing ideologies than in the 1980s. Another reason for staying at home observed during my study is that constant relocation can mean children have little stability or constant sources of care in their lives, if their mothers go out to work (and they have to be placed with carers after school).

In another Telegraph article (10.6.98) Meghan Cox Gurdon speaks about the merits of staying at home with children. She says that she and her contemporaries are all university graduates, and it was a painful transition from journalist/working mother in London to full-time mother in America, but that she is happy with being at home. She claims:

> "Staying at home in the Nineties has, for many educated women, become what getting an MBA was in the Eighties: a mark of achievement and status. Not that everyone sees it that way, of course....." (1998:19).

This statement is very interesting in that it contains a hint that part of society sees staying at home as 'dumbing down', but she doesn't see it like that. Some women in my study were of the same opinion as Gurdon, while others felt they were being 'dumbed down' because of lack of opportunities open to them (by virtue for example of location and lack of child care).

Several wives made mention of the difficulty associated with undertaking education, training or even sport, in the face of unpredictable work patterns and child care requirements, and of compromises being made. An example follows:

> ".....it's frustrating as well that all I do is look after the kids, and because of Simon's job you know it's like you can't commit yourself to a particular thing unless you know you've got good child care, and good child care's hard to find, unfortunately.....Simon's on a reasonable wage, but it doesn't cater for paying for extra child care for me to sort of you know do something that I'd like to do, like I could do my Masters, you know, on the OU, but financially it's just out of reach ....I'll just have to wait until the kids are older then I can go back out to work part-time or something, and then I'll be able to challenge myself a bit more..... You just can't commit to.....I used to play basketball, and I started playing when we came down here, but the trouble is you can't commit yourself because I can't phone up at the last minute and say 'oh sorry can't play, hubbie's got delayed'.... everyone I know has got kids the same age. It's quite hard to ask, and of course I'm a bit reluctant just to get 'anybody' to do it. Round here there's lots of cards in windows, and you can tell that they're all just like schoolgirls.....you don't know these people.....it gets difficult to find somebody you can trust really, especially with a baby" (Monique, A10).

Several instances were recorded of husbands taking part in sports activities outside working hours, and also attending social events, which in all cases caused the wives in question to feel resentment of their unequal position in this regard.

As Allan and Crow (and others including Finch 1983) assert, mothers organise child care and cover children's illness and holidays, whilst "....husbands are typically freer to participate in work related activities outside standard hours.....formal or informal" (2001:95).

As demonstrated above, and as Allan and Crow assert, child care is predominantly seen as a female responsibility (in society generally), "carrying significant consequences for mothers' economic and social activities inside and outside the home" (2000:73). For RAF wives, additional factors come into play which serve to further complicate their roles as mothers, such as lack of extended family assistance, unpredictable working patterns and husband absence.

Cumulative Effect of Job on Marriage

As demonstrated so far, the job does affect military marriages to varying degrees. The responses by wives to the question of how much the job affects their marriages were wide ranging and very illuminating.

<u>Does the Job Affect Marriage?</u>

To the general question of whether the job affects the marriage, only 4 people categorically stated that the job didn't affect their marriages: 4 airmen's wives at RAF Rockall. The 2 officers' wives at RAF Rockall made the comment that the job had affected their careers more than their marriages. The remaining 30 interviewees recognised that the job did in fact affect their marriages, and commented on the particular aspects of the job which affected them most, and also the aspects of their own lives which were affected by the job. Four interviewees in total said if they'd known more about RAF life, they would have thought twice about marrying their husbands: two airmen's wives and two officers' wives.

Set out below are some individual responses given by interviewees to the question of whether their marriages have been affected by RAF life:

> "....you don't marry the job.....well you do, but you don't set out to marry the job" (Jane, O4).

"You marry them because you love them and you want them home. I wouldn't recommend it to anybody. I think people who have nothing to do with the forces do not understand. I mean my mother-in-law said to me 'you know what you married', but you don't know" (Paula, O6).

"I'm sure that if we'd had a more stable life we would have had a more stable marriage" (Yvette, A4).

"Well let's face it, the forces, it does test your marriage to its limits. I mean if you don't have a job and you haven't got children, and say you don't drive, you know, and all the RAF camps are out in the middle of nowhere....." (Suzanne, A12).

Inherent in their comments was evidence of the conscious sacrifices they felt they had made in the face of their husbands' careers; some had made the sacrifices willingly and some less willingly. As discussed in the previous section, a definite change in attitude was apparent once children entered the equation, since this had the effect of introducing a powerful constraint on women's lives.

The following table sets out the individual responses recorded. Note that many of the responses indicate that the job affects marriage indirectly rather than directly, that is, no direct mention is made of marital tension, but it is indicated that factors such as mobility and disruption to career do indirectly affect the marital relationship. Interviewees mentioned more than one factor which affected their marriages in the majority of cases.

Table 3.9 Effect of job on marriage

Effect of Job on Marriage	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
career	8	8
husband absence	7	4
mobility	4	2
unpredictability	5	-
no effect	-	4
mobility as an obstacle to career	2	1
child care difficult and support lacking	2	1
pressure of work	2	-
rootlessness	2	-
mobility affecting career and schooling	1	1
loss of identity	-	1
people know your business	1	-
loneliness	1	-
RAF comes first	1	-
closer as a couple	-	1
choices taken away	-	1
TOTALS	36	24

Career is thus a major consideration for officers' and airmen's wives. This was an unexpected finding; I expected more officers' wives (who I perceived to be employed in predominantly professional occupations) than airmen's wives to be concerned about their careers.

As demonstrated in the above section on marriage and career, sustaining a career as an RAF wife is fraught with difficulties. It was widely recognised amongst wives involved in this study that it is easier in professions such as teaching or nursing, to pick up a job in the face of constant relocation, and also to fit in with children's needs (for example by working night shifts or doing supply teaching) but equally recognised that this does not constitute a career. Examples of this viewpoint follow:

> "I stuffed my career and gave up the chance of promotion by going into a day diagnostic unit and moving to be with my husband. I won't do the unsociable hours or we would never see each other. I've chosen to take the secondary career and to have stable hours. We want to start a family" (Jane, O4).

> "When I married my husband I knew that my career, well I didn't have a career, I was a teacher, I still do teach, but there's no way I'm going to make headmistress" (Mary, O1).

Jamieson (1998) claims that women's weaker economic position, particularly in the labour market has long ensured their greater dependence on marriage for economic survival, and that divisions of labour allocating responsibility for child care and domestic work to women makes marriage an occupation for women. The following section emphasises the heavy burden of responsibility for child care and other domestics responsibilities which falls on RAF wives, due to husband absence.

Husband Absence

Husband absence seems to constitute a bigger concern for officers' wives than for airmen's wives in this instance. One explanation could be more acceptance of this aspect of the job, (in the form of authority) on the part of airmen's wives, and the extent to which airmen's wives feel they have an alternative. Studies have shown (Chandler 1987) that officers' wives tend to have wider social networks and can be seen to be more self-reliant in terms of sustaining and making use of different dimensions of contact (by using the telephone; maintaining contact with and seeing friends and family who live a long distance away; visits can be regular and valued, if infrequent).

By virtue of wider networks, it has been found in this study that officers' wives in many instances compare their 'lot' unfavourably with friends and relatives outside the military (for example, Shirley (O3), page 48).

It is interesting to note that Chandler's 1987 study concluded that the wives of non-commissioned Navy personnel found absence more difficult to deal with than did officers' wives. Reasons put forward by Chandler were that many of the wives of ratings (unlike the wives of officers) found that whilst an option existed to become very involved on the married patch, they sometimes found the associated claustrophobia and cliquiness unbearable and chose to opt out of life on the base, and in the absence of other satisfactory channels of contact, this left them in a vulnerable and lonely position when faced with husband absence.

Several authors report that in relation to husband absence, partings and reunions were particularly stressful, and that a major problem was often faced in reintegrating the husband into the family following prolonged absence. Such instances were recorded in my study, although a direct question on this subject was not posed. In a later book, Chandler argues that husband absence for women in her sample provokes "a roller coaster of emotion" (Chandler 1991:66). She goes on to say that wives "....fought a sense of desertion, constructed a new way of life and were gripped by a certain apprehension on his return". Clark and Taylor (1988) also noted that partings and reunions incurred mixed emotions in wives of North Sea oil workers.

Both authors found that reunions can fail to live up to expectations due to tiredness and the stress of the journey home, and that this can lead to misunderstandings, short tempers and communication difficulties. Chandler makes mention of the adverse effect answerability to returning husbands can have on marriages. That is, wives may feel they have been coping admirably in their husbands' absence, and then have to face criticism from their husbands regarding decisions they have made and action they have taken.

It is argued by Chandler that the hard lessons of coping alone cannot be unlearnt on a husband's return, which can obviously lead to tension, and possibly a power struggle in the relationship. Examples from my study of the stress caused by partings and reunions follow:

> "You are left to manage every eventuality. That can be annoying when they come back, they must have in the back of their minds that you are 'just coping' because they automatically assume the authoritative role straight away, questioning things, 'why did you do this, why did you not do that?'" (Jane, O4).

> ".....when he comes back I think he expects to be able to walk in and you be all lovey dovey.....and I think the pressure's there that if you have a row, which every couple has, there's pressures to make up before they go on their next long trip away. Trevor's done a ground tour [administrative job involving no flying] and our personal life was so much better because he was always there in the mornings and we had the weekends" (Paula, O6).

> "We actually argue more when John's away a lot, because he intrudes into my life, and it does feel like my life....." (Penny, O5).

Mobility

Another prominent theme seen as affecting marriage was mobility, which in many cases was also related to loss of career, disruption of children's education and sometimes loss of friends. One interviewee made this point strongly when she said:

> "I think you have to have a very stable marriage and really love the person you're with, to be willing to give up jobs and friends" (Vanda, A14).

This is an excellent illustration of the importance of the marriage relationship in the face of constant upheaval. When you relocate, you only have each other, your 'emotional eggs are all in one basket'. Small irritations in relationships have the potential to inflate into major problems in such circumstances (Haour-Knipe, 2001). Jolly argues in her 1992 book that strong marriages grow stronger and vice-versa in the face of such constant disruption. Jolly has also expressed the view, borne out by this study, that there are times in a marriage (early on, before children) when it is easier to move around.

The 4 interviewees who claimed their marriages were not affected, cited other compensations in RAF life such as travel, social life, and the need to support their husbands, as replacing the importance of career and permanent residency in their lives.

<u>Conflicting Demands</u>

Another question addressed by this study relates to conflicting demands faced by RAF servicemen: from the RAF and from their wives. This ties in with the issue of career, discussed above. Wife's career was an oft-mentioned bone of contention between husband and wife, together with long working hours, unpredictability (which was mentioned by 5 interviewees), difficulty booking leave and long absences. A theme which emerged during the interviews was the high level of awareness amongst wives of the way the job comes first in most situations. Most interviewees acknowledged that the job comes first in the majority of situations. These themes will be discussed in the following two sections.

Public and Private Domains: This topic moves the debate into the more general realm of family life, and one of the most interesting and relevant points (in relation to my study) emerged as the question of public as opposed to private domains. Several writers have commented on this aspect of marriage to the 'job'. Callan (1984) argues that in situations of incorporation the domain of the 'private' seems to become available to the incorporating institution, and in a similar vein Young argues that 'the police' pervades family life no matter where the policeman and his family live (that is, on a police estate or in their own house). Finch (1983) also addresses this point when she emphasises the naïvety of some sociologists in presuming that the public and private spheres can be approached as separate entities. This is a very important point, stressing as it does how difficult it can be for a wife to forge an identity which is separate to her husband's job, even when she does not live in an 'occupational community'.

The overlay between work and family is explored by Finch (1983), and the focus of her study is not wives as mothers, nor the family as a unit, but wives. Like Pahl and Pahl (1971), she argues that sociological literature which treats family and productive work as analytically separate spheres is 'theoretically naïve', and goes on to say that writers who approach the subject in this way serve:

> "not only to hide women from sociology, but to leave sociologists......with inadequate conceptual, theoretical and methodological tools to analyse or explain the shifts in activities between the domestic and the public arenas" (1983:5).

Finch argues that the notion of separate spheres is in itself an ideologically constructed view, which sociologists reinforce every time they take it for granted. She also argues that the subject of wives' incorporation in men's work has often been neglected (although it is not totally absent from literature relating to the sociology of marriage and the family) for this very reason: that work and family have traditionally been viewed as separate spheres. To illustrate this argument further, Chandler and Young both make the point that whilst conventional families (civilians) appear to possess the right to have a 'private' domestic sphere, others, such as the military and the police are scrutinised. Chandler argues "The privacy of the family is a privilege of the conventionally married" (1991:6). All of these comments, together with the data from this study, direct attention towards the theories of Goffman and of Foucault, who in different ways both concentrated on surveillance within organisations where individuals are physically separated for long periods from the outside world. Whilst RAF wives are not prevented from interacting with the outside world, or 'surveyed' in an absolute sense, the data collected show that forging contacts away from the military base can be difficult unless they are in employment outside the base. In addition, wives can feel that they are being watched and monitored, and that the public invades the private domain, in a variety of ways.

Jolly (1992:100) gives two reasons why the military authorities feel they can cross over into the private sphere. Firstly she says that because the military enterprise is a team effort, good morale must be ensured, and secondly that it intervenes in 'private matters' because employees don't have much freedom to change their own circumstances (that is, they can rarely reduce their hours, change their posting or even leave immediately).

'The home/work balance' is seen as a 'problem' by Marks (1988), who cites the work of Small and Riley (1990), as an example of this. Small and Riley assert that the 'business' of each of the domains of home and work is certainly different from, and possibly disruptive to that of the other; many of the interviewees and respondents in my study resented the intrusion of the military into the private sphere, said that it caused conflicting demands within the household, and would agree with this assertion.

I did find however that some families managed to resist surveillance to quite a large degree, simply by keeping their lives 'private' and staying away from RAF events. This is a more likely outcome for childless couples or couples with grown-up families (which will be explored further in chapter 5).

Wives living on military bases, especially those at home with young children, can have little choice about whom to associate with. Their families usually live some distance away, their contemporaries are likely to be military wives whose husbands could feasibly work alongside their own husband; the potential in an occupational community for keeping spheres of home and work separate is thus greatly reduced. Jolly (1992) argues that the time is right for reflecting on the difficulties involved for husbands in sustaining a dual commitment (to work and family) in modern society.

The table below shows how many interviewees in this study accept and how many resent the intrusion of the employing institution into their private lives; how many say it does cause conflicting demands in the household, and how many say that family actually comes first. In one case the elevation of family over job was attributed to disillusionment with the RAF (in terms of career progress).

Table 3.10 Response to intrusion of institution into private life

JOB COMES FIRST: RESPONSE	Accept	Resent	Family comes first	TOTAL
Officers' Wives	10	6	-	16
Airmen's Wives	13	2	3	18

Marginally less resentment was recorded in the case of airmen's wives. The obvious explanation would be that they perhaps have fewer expectations of successful careers (although this is not borne out by the data recorded in table 3.14 above), or presumptions that their wishes or needs might take priority. As previously mentioned, this could be changing (McRae, 1986) with more professional women marrying non-commissioned RAF personnel. As previously mentioned, two interviewees in this study fall into that category.

A great deal of sadness was expressed by some interviewees that the job had such a big part to play in the whole of their married lives. Resignation was also recorded, of the fact that they would always come a poor second (as in the Maggie May poem on page 55).

Best/Worst Aspects of Being an RAF Wife: A broader picture of specific resentments and also the contradictory nature of some wives' comments (in terms of the love/hate relationship observed in many cases) is set out in the following section, which looks at what interviewees perceived to be the best and worst aspects of being an RAF wife. The first table is deliberately amplified, to provide a clearer insight into the (difficult) relationship many of the wives in my study have with the military institution.

Table 3.11 Positive and negative aspects of 'marriage to the job' (Officers' Wives)

Name	Best Aspects	Worst Aspects
Alison	Moving around, seeing the country. Being part of church community	Not belonging to a wider community
Amelia	Quarters	Husband's total dedication to the job
Anthea	Moving around (before schooling affects)	Lack of maintenance on quarters. Can't plan holidays/visits away
Betty	Social life	Postings you don't want
Cindy	Travel	Everybody knows your business
Cynthia	Social life	Being called 'wife of'
Diane	Social aspects. Social acceptance	Leaving friends behind
Jane	He likes it. Well paid	Him going away
Jenny	Social functions	Jealous of colleagues/excluded from 'flying talk'
Mandy	Social aspects	Him going away, especially at short notice, and for long periods
Mary	Moving, trying different things	Rootlessness
Paula	Pays the bills/for private school	Unpredictability
Penny	Summer ball. Good salary	Him going away/effectively becoming a single parent
Sally	Going for nice meals	Lack of privacy/losing friends
Sharon	Camaraderie amongst wives	Loneliness. Feeling like a 'single parent'
Shirley	He enjoys it. Good pay	Unpredictable hours

Table 3.12 Positive and negative aspects of 'marriage to the job' (Airmen's Wives)

Name	Best Aspects	Worst Aspects
Ann	Seeing other countries	Being separated
Amy	Accommodation, steady income, security	Moving, especially for a short tour
Carolyn	Friends and contacts	Lack of help in leaving when husband was ill
Cassie	He's happy with his job	Having to live the RAF life, follow husband. Man's life doesn't change, wife's does
Gwen	Seeing the world at RAF's expense	Rank structure and how it affects wives/march outs
Helen	Security	Generalisation of RAF wives, not being your own person
Josie	Security of job and housing	March outs
Karen	Quarters. Facilities on base. Security of job	Choices taken away
Lucy	Sociability - balls and functions	No sense of belonging or identity with anything
Marion	Security. RAF looks after you	Being away from family
Melissa	Facilities on base. Time off. Travel possibilities. Friends	Moving
Monique	Security of Job	Unpredictability of job
Rosie	Travel, accommodation, good lifestyle	Moving the children. Long hours
Serena	Going to different places	Moving children/march outs
Shelley	Good lifestyle, conditions and pay	Everybody around in the RAF. No social variety
Suzanne	Facilities on base, safety net in times of trouble	Being cosseted from the outside world
Vanda	Community-type spirit	Intrusion into privacy
Yvette	Accommodation (used to be security, and community in Germany)	Moving

The following tables break this information down to show how many officers and airmen's wives expressed views on each particular subject.

Table 3.13 Advantages and disadvantages of being an RAF wife: positive aspects

Best Aspects	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Good employment conditions	5	10
Social side	7	1
Moving/travel	4	4
Security of job/base	-	5
Camaraderie among wives	2	2
He enjoys it	2	1
Facilities on base	-	3
Good lifestyle	-	2
Community spirit	-	1
TOTALS	20	29

Table 3.14 Advantages and disadvantages of being an RAF wife: negative aspects

Worst Aspects	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Moving/Rootlessness	1	6
Husband absence/being single parent/loneliness	6	-
Unpredictable hours/can't plan	3	1
Lack of privacy	2	1
March outs	-	3
Not belonging to a wider community/cosseted from outside world	1	2
Losing friends	2	-
Being 'wife of'	1	1
His total dedication to job/jealousy of his work	2	-
Postings you don't want	1	-
Lack of quarters' upkeep	1	-
Long hours	-	1
No social variety	-	1
Being away from family	-	1
Choices taken away	-	1
Lack of welfare help	-	1
Wife's life changes, husband's doesn't	-	1
Rank structure	-	1
TOTALS	20	21

Some surprises were recorded in the above tables. For example, so many more of the officers' wives valued the social side of the air force. The question thus emerges of whether there is less laid on for airmen and their wives; judging by the data this does in fact seem to be the case, and will be explored in chapter 5.

More airmen's wives say they value the 'security' of the job. A possible explanation for this could be that officers' wives take more interest in and know more about government policy and the vagaries of the job, and are more realistic about future prospects. Airmen's wives also seem to value the facilities on the base more than officers' wives and as mentioned above, officers' wives seem to resent their husbands being away and having unpredictable work patterns more than airmen's wives. The following example is of an airman's wife who freely admits that she doesn't understand very much about her husband's job.

> "....we'd argue.....because he'd say 'you don't understand it, I've not got a choice,' and I'd find that really hard to get my head around, that you know, they'd stick him on guard duty at the drop of a hat.....I think that's probably my sort of lack of knowledge really of the RAF. I've never really got myself that involved in that side of it. I'm not really one of those wives who knows all the ins and outs and the rules and regulations" (Karen, A7).

In Table 3.14 march outs emerge as a greater concern for airmen's than officers' wives. This could be because they can't afford the contract cleaners which many officers' wives use (march outs receive further attention in chapter 5). In general, an overriding air of practicality seems to reign amongst airmen's wives in this study, despite the differences between them. Officers' wives seem to have higher expectations, which appear to be in line with their contemporaries and family outside the air force. The following section looks at the most drastic effect the job can have on marriage: separation and divorce.

When Marriage Fails

This subject was not explicitly covered by the interview schedule, but relevant data were recorded and it is an important part of any discussion of marriage. After a brief discussion of what some of the literature says, I will set out relevant themes and data from my study.

A point is made in the incorporated wives literature in relation to military marriages which I consider to be rather contentious. Macmillan (1984) argues that service marriages (despite their potential drawbacks) have a good record for stability, and that this is seen to some extent to be a product of service discipline.

Soldiers and sailors are also thought to make good husbands as they are used to looking after themselves and thus appreciate their wives' work. Whilst there may be some truth in Macmillan's assertion, I am certain that the overall picture is far more complicated than she suggests, and in the absence of statistics to justify this claim I would regard it as essentially subjective and partial. Indeed Jolly (1996) argues that although the military authorities claim the divorce rate is low, their statistics are incomplete. Jolly cites evidence from the work of social statistician John Haskey, who found that for the year 1979 the armed forces had a higher divorce rate than any other occupational group. Jessup (1996) reports that SSAFA claimed in November 1993 that the marriage breakdown rate in the British army was more than double the UK average. An interesting article appeared in the Sunday Telegraph in March 2000, reporting on a report from the Liberal Democrats, showing that armed forces personnel are twice as likely as civilian couples to get divorced because of the strain of service life. The report showed a (rising) rate of 2% in the Army, 3.8% in the Navy and 3.4% in the RAF, compared to a (falling) rate of 1.07% for the civilian population.

Adultery has always been an offence under military law, and the consequences are quite severe, with quick or 'hardship' postings for those guilty of the offence. It could be argued that this is seen to act as a deterrent against marital infidelity and ultimate separation and divorce. Particular stigma has always been attached to having relationships with other serving personnel, and in particular commissioned officers having relationships with non-commissioned personnel, but the rule was always applied equally to civilians. This code of conduct has recently been relaxed, and this was reported by Rachel Sylvester in the Sunday Telegraph 20.2.98, following: ".....a number of high-profile sex scandals involving soldiers". The revised discipline and standards paper, or military rule book, states that whilst it is still an offence for service personnel to have affairs with each other, this rule no longer applies to adulterous relationships with civilians. The Ministry of Defence says that society has changed since the rules were drawn up and it is recognising that. Affairs within the military are seen to: ".....damage trust between men and women who may have to fight alongside one another".

There is outrage in traditionalist circles, that this undermines the high standards of expected behaviour, and this is indeed a contentious issue. The forces <u>are</u> apart from society in many ways; perhaps rules should reflect that. The services <u>do</u> have to deal with a lot of time consuming administration work related to extra-marital affairs. A senior military spokesman is quoted in the above-mentioned Telegraph article, as saying: "Much of military life in peace time has to do with keeping in check the physical instincts of herds of young men".

An important point is made by Jolly (1997), that when a military marriage does end, it can be more traumatic than in civilian life, because a woman has given up her previous life in favour of his career, and is in effect dealt a double blow if the marriage fails. Jolly says "Divorce is always traumatic; it is a public acknowledgement of defeat and disappointment. For women who divorce Servicemen, the loss is two-fold, the man and the way of life" (1997:158). Writing about her time as an SAS wife, Jenny Simpson expresses a similar view. She says that men leaving the Regiment can use related pressures as an excuse to leave their wives and families and branch out on their own. She says that 'shattered' wives are then discarded "like nothing more than a cast-off item of clothing, after so many years of loyal devotion, while the men run off with younger women and spend the rest of their lives telling everyone how they used to be heroes in the SAS" (1996:293). Evidence in my study of this feeling of being abandoned by the military was provided by Linda (R16), an RAF wife at the time of my fieldwork at Blyton (who I've remained friends with) in the experience of being granted a period of 90 days as notice in which to vacate her married quarter (regardless of whether she and her baby son had anywhere else to go), following her husband's desertion of the marriage.

In terms of my data, there was wide acknowledgement of the potential for marital discord and failure within military marriages, if mainly in a joking or ironic way. In response to the question 'where do you see yourself in ten years' time', Paula (O6) said, laughing, "Divorced!"

In response to the question of whether the job affects the marriage, Vanda (A14) said "I think the only time it would affect a marriage is where you've got an unaccompanied posting, and you get people who are fooling around. It happens to a lot of people". When speaking about the difficulties of constant relocation, together with post-natal depression, Yvette (A4), spoke about marital problems she experienced whilst living in Germany. She said:

> ".... my husband nearly had an affair .... he met somebody who obviously felt good about themselves, at a time when I felt very bad about myself .... the Air Force got involved and sort of told him a few home truths. It wasn't made official, but he was told that if he carried it on it would be made official".

This comment fits with Vaughan's (1986) work on 'uncoupling'. She says that the process of breakdown of a relationship begins with a secret; one partner's unspoken but nurtured feeling of discomfort with the relationship (also see page 47 regarding Giddens' work). She found that the disaffected partner withdraws but the other partner often has no idea of sense of loss until the secret is dramatically announced. For Yvette, her husband was having difficulty dealing with his wife's post-natal depression, but she did not realise the extent of his unhappiness until he was on the brink of having an affair (with a single female colleague). The same situation could occur for a wife who has had enough of RAF life but 'soldiers on' until she can find a way out.

Given that I interviewed these women on only one occasion, and did not ask a direct question about marriage failure (their own or that of people they knew), I did not expect to hear a great deal about it. Some very useful comments were however recorded, revealing the acknowledgement of interviewees that marriage in the military is obstacle-ridden. Many other comments on this theme have been recorded throughout this chapter.

Conclusion

As demonstrated, modern marriage can be tough in any walk of life, and often involves struggling to reconcile the romantic dream portrayed in the media with the lived reality. Marriage is however the lifestyle which is structurally and culturally sustained and socially approved for women, and there is no comparable alternative pattern (Finch, 1983).

For RAF wives (and other occupational wives in a similar situation) there are additional unique challenges to be faced, and a conflict between conjugal and military values can be experienced. Some challenges are faced on a daily basis, such as coping with long working hours, unpredictable work patterns, and the fact that the public world of work can spill over into the private world of home. Other challenges are faced on a less frequent but cyclical basis, such as postings and detachments, which require wives to be very resourceful in adapting to new surroundings and coping single-handedly during husband absence.

Loss of career, as well as the advent of motherhood can serve to intensify responsibilities during periods of absence or detachment, and distance from old friends and family can place additional strains on wives, and resultantly on marriages and families.

Wives in my study reacted in different ways to the lifestyle imposed upon them by virtue of marriage to an RAF serviceman. Reactions ranged from adoption of a privatised way of life, as far removed from the influences of RAF life as possible, to full integration into life on the base and involvement in a husband's career.

Inherent in the data presented in this chapter and the literature consulted, and crucial in seeking to understand the intricacies of military marriage, is the utility of women to men's careers, in the RAF and in many other occupations (Halford 1997). Especially relevant is the way wives serve to free men from domestic responsibilities, enabling them to undertake work as and when the employer requires (Finch 1983).

There was much evidence of a love/hate relationship between RAF wives and the employing organisation; acknowledgement of positive aspects, while experiencing difficulty dealing with negative aspects of the job and the wide-ranging impact of the job on their lives. Images of military wives as victims are however misleading. As demonstrated thus far, there are choices to be made, and the data confirm this.

Wives are agents who are charged with making an important choice: whether to 'get on with it' or 'fight it;' in the knowledge of the futility of fighting the military establishment, and the realisation that sacrifices have to be made in order to stay married to a military man. It is important to note that many wives acknowledged the fact that the rigours of military life can sometimes serve to strengthen a marriage: by uniting a couple in the face of adversity.

Being uprooted (or living with the certainty that relocation will take place in the foreseeable future) on marriage, or on your husband joining the RAF, means that RAF wives find themselves in a situation where their partners will be expected to provide for their emotional as well as their practical needs. The serviceman can rely on the RAF 'machine' to provide him with work colleagues (many of whom he may have met before) and immediate and automatic membership of social groups on the RAF base. Wives on the other hand can feel 'cast adrift;' left to find their own way and to negotiate entry to social groups on vague and largely unspecified terms (Jolly 1992), and this will be explored further in chapters 4 and 5.

Rank does seem to be a significant factor in relation to military marriage. Less resentment was recorded amongst the wives of airmen than the wives of officers, although this may change as educational standards rise (and there is already some evidence of this happening). A more significant factor however emerged as age on marriage, with younger wives (with less qualifications and experience) appearing more accepting of the lifestyle. Previous experience of military life, particularly of growing up in the services was also found to be advantageous in relation to adjusting to military marriage. Marriage, as previously stated, is the entry point or basis of entry to RAF life, and will naturally feature (if in less detail) in the following two chapters on friendship and community.

Introduction

Alongside marriage, it can be argued that the building and maintenance of friendships is a vital ingredient in the process of surviving military life. Total reliance upon one person [your husband] to meet every emotional and practical need is untenable in most circumstances, particularly given the different (often underlying) gender expectations which exist within a marriage. This has been articulated by several authors. For example Mansfield and Collard talk about the difference between the idealised model marriage, as a relationship between intimate friends, versus the practicality. They say:

> "The model of marriage as the relationship of intimate friends is very appealing, but how realisable is it? It implies little notion of gender difference, but the portrait of marriage provided by our newly-weds poignantly revealed the wide gulf that still exists between men and women, not only in their past experience, but also in present expectations and assumptions about the future. The lives of husbands were invariably dominated by their jobs......Wives, in contrast, were primarily home-centred; although they too worked outside the home....." (1988:230).

Other writers echo this argument (Pahl, 1998, Oliker, 1989, Harrison, 1998, Duncombe and Marsden 1999). Harrison, in stressing the importance of women's friendships, states that in the current climate of high divorce rates friendships will in many cases last longer than marriage!

Taken together with the fact that servicemen are sometimes called away from home, that extended family members and old friends are rarely close enough to see regularly, and that military life involves moving around the country and sometimes the world, skills in befriending would appear to be of paramount importance to RAF wives. In the absence of any other form of continuity (such as geographical location or career), previous literature and the data collected during this study would strongly suggest that friendship becomes vitally important. Close interpersonal relationships within which confidences can be exchanged and expectations of mutual assistance met were found to be crucial to service wives in Nicholson's 1980 study.

In other words, previous research and the results of this study show that because of their situation, RAF wives cannot afford <u>not</u> to get on with each other, but that doesn't mean that the process of making and keeping friends is straightforward, as will be demonstrated in this chapter.

It should be noted here that it is friendships between RAF wives (and other females who do not live on the base) that I am concerned with in this chapter. Cross-gender friendships are not encouraged or indeed evident on RAF bases, in line with Jamieson's assertion that "A general cultural presumption that relationships between men and women are sexual makes cross-sex friendships more difficult to negotiate as non-sexual relationships" (1998:104). Instances where cross-gender friendships have led to marital breakups have been observed during the course of this study.

The importance of friendship is rarely discussed in service magazines, or at gatherings of service wives. The preferred stance seems to be akin to that of Macmillan (1984:96), who cites the comment of one service wife she spoke to, that the prevailing social pattern of service life is one of instant friendship where life is never lonely. I would argue that this is a sweeping generalisation, that RAF publications gloss over friendship issues, and that the situation is much more complicated.

Military life, as well as promoting the need for friendship, can also make the forging and continuation of such bonds problematic in the extreme. As mentioned in chapter 1, Ruth Jolly encapsulates the lack of continuity 'problem' when she says: "Genuine feelings of solidarity and comradeship seldom get a chance to deepen into real and lasting friendship.. ..." (1992:53). Living on a military base can be a minefield in friendship terms, with much potential for misunderstandings, loneliness, and fatigue with forging new friendships. In addition, whilst in civilian life "....the personal and the private are now privileged over the public and communal" (Allan 1996:12), this cannot be applied to life on a military base.

Living in close proximity to so many other service wives, who know where your husband works and what he earns, removes much of the scope for privacy, and as Jolly (1992) and Jessup (1996) point out, the military can seem to be moving against prevailing social forces, or not moving at all!

The Importance and Function of Friendship

To take a brief look at the importance and function of friendship in historic and contemporary terms, references to the importance and function of friendship can be located as far back in history as the times of the Old Testament. Proverbs 27:10 states: "Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you - better a neighbour nearby than a brother far away" (NIV 1998: 662-3). This scripture implies that friendship should not be seen as a secondary relationship to that of blood ties, and that friends are there to provide practical help as well as any emotional bond which may exist.

An appreciation of the nature and utility of friendship was thus evident in ancient times, and parts of the above quotation bear relevance to friendship in the 21st century, although, as mentioned above, the importance and function of friendship is not always widely recognised today, in the face of privatised lifestyles and a capitalist society.

An 18th century thinker with something very interesting to say in relation to this study is Adam Smith (1959). As cited by Jamieson (1998:77), Smith claimed that pre-modern friendship, pre-dating the development of impersonal markets of commercial society, was typically and necessarily bound up with self-interest. This type of friendship 'of necessity' was always precarious and liable to fluctuate when fortunes and interests shifted. According to Smith, it was only with the separation of commercial interests and personal life that friendship could become a matter of sympathy and affection.

To compare this situation to life on an RAF base, suffice to say that wives are not there by choice, there is a limited pool from which friends can be made, and they can sometimes be expected to 'get on with' the wives of their husbands' colleagues (from a similar rank and occupation), to enhance their husbands' career prospects (which can be compared to commercial interests). Several instances were recorded in this study of friendships being terminated, or friendly relations changing between wives when a husband was promoted (that is, fortunes and interests altered). See page 130 for the example of Mary (O1). Throughout this chapter many different illustrations of the causes and effects of "friendships imposed by the necessity of the situation" (Smith 1959 in Jamieson (1998:77)) and the intricacies of managing "the tension created by the necessity" (Jamieson 1998:89) will be included.

Writing more recently on the subject of friendship, Allan says: "Not only do our friends help to provide us with our sense of identity, but they also confirm our social worth" (1989:1). As well as featuring in general literature about friendship, this argument, which stresses the importance of friendship personally and culturally, has been raised by many writers on occupational wives (Nicholson 1980, Macmillan 1984, Lewis et al 1988, Finch 1983, Pahl and Pahl 1971), and given particular emphasis in such texts because of wives' lack of control over some other aspects of their lives. In the context of her study, Nicholson sees the distance of most respondents from their kin and the absence of many husbands at sea, as making acute the need for close interpersonal relationships in which confidences can be exchanged and expectations of mutual assistance met.

In his 1989 book, Allan talks about the current debates on community decline and privatisation, and argues that with modernity the character of people's social participation has altered, with the trend being towards a less public life. He stresses that generalisation of any kind is dangerous, because class, gender, geographical mobility and life course position all influence the pattern of social relationships people maintain with their kin, friends and other informal contacts.

Popular images of RAF life tend to be based on fictional television series' such as *'Soldier, Soldier'*, with the resultant expectation of instant friendship and support which Macmillan (1984) mentions. The reason for this misconception of military life can be attributed quite fairly to the fact that forty years after the last intake of National Servicemen the majority of the population have no experience or knowledge of military life.

In terms of sociological research generally, Allan (1996:3) describes friendship as a 'Cinderella' topic in sociology, and points out that many of the ideas and data come from America. Media attention to the subject is at best scant (in view of the importance of friendship to the fabric of society), and contradictory in nature.

Literature referring to occupational wives, although not taking friendship as a primary concern, does contain references to friendship, and the effect of service life/husbands' occupations generally thereon. The work of Callan and Ardener et al (1984), Chandler (1987,1991), Finch (1983) Jolly (1992/1996), Lewis et al (1988), Nicholson (1980), and Pahl and Pahl (1971), (as well as other related texts which have had a less profound impact on this study) will thus be used (alongside general friendship texts and media references) to illustrate the interview data in this chapter.

As with the other issues tackled in this project, the topic of the friendships of RAF wives could generate enough material for a discrete PhD project. In the space available however, my aim is to establish that within the bounds of RAF life, friendship takes on a form where it is difficult to apply 'normal,' or 'civilian' rules (with the proviso that some RAF wives have grown up in the military and have experienced friendship only within that context). It will be argued that a different approach to friendship is required within a military environment, but because this is not obvious on marriage to a serviceman, misunderstandings can result.

The fact that not all wives in equal measure (due to class and previous experience, as existing research shows) are able to adopt practices which can involve picking up and dropping friends as they move on, and maintaining contact with only a very few friends, will be advanced as a major reason why many wives find RAF life difficult whilst others thrive in that environment (and in this way emphasising the importance of friendship to RAF wives).

The remainder of the chapter is divided into four sections, which aim to systematically explore the friendship process within RAF life. The first section sets out some basic tools and concepts developed/drawn on to aid analysis of the data. The other three sections are entitled making friends, sustaining friendships and living on the base and managing current friendships. The discussion will lead towards the conclusion that different friendship practices suit different people at different times, and are appropriate in different environments; a military friendship career thus involves interpreting situations, customs and practices, and working within them (or choosing not to participate!).

It will be argued that those wives who can accept that the RAF 'way' of friendship is different, and situate themselves accordingly (opting in or out of the wives' scene on bases as they choose) fare better than those who try to apply 'civilian' rules to a military situation (in the short term, although 'rootlessness' can result in the long term). The latter approach can lead to dreading every move to another location, mourning friends left behind, and trying to keep in touch with every friend. Many similarities between civilian and military styles of friendship obviously exist (given that some non-military jobs involve frequent relocation), and will be highlighted where appropriate, but for the purposes of this study: of the experience of RAF wives, the emphasis will be mainly on differences. As in the wider thesis, and in agreement with data collected, wives will be seen as agents with the ability to choose whether or not to participate in friendships, and how to manage these friendships, rather than as passive victims of their circumstances.

Analytical Tools

The following ideas will be used throughout this chapter to help make sense of the data collected, and relate to friendship types, friendship strategies, friendship styles and the functions of friendship. Categories identified (as will be demonstrated) are not mutually exclusive; wives may have several different types of friend at any one time, and may adopt different strategies and styles in different circumstances, at different times or places, or in relation to discrete segments of their network (for example, on and off the RAF base, friends from their husbands' work as opposed to personal friends). Friends can also serve various functions at the same time. Strategies, styles and functions can essentially overlap, change over time, and vary in degree. Factors which will be identified as influencing decisions relating to styles, strategies and functions include mobility, life course and past experience.

<u>Friendship Types</u>

In establishing which friendships would stand the test of time for RAF wives, the following four categories of friendship were established from the data:

1. <u>Real Friends</u>, or true friends: seen as friends for life, as being there through thick and thin, with whom you have more in common than being an RAF wife, whom you will always keep in touch and meet up with, and who would welcome your presence regardless of whether their husbands (or other friends or family) were there. This type of friendship is associated with a high level of trust.

2. <u>Fair-weather Friends</u>: seen as friends who are around only when things are going well and who couldn't be called upon in an emergency or if a favour was required. There is no obligation or desire on either side to keep in touch on leaving the context in which you meet such friends. This type of friendship is associated with a low level of trust.

3. <u>Friends for the Time and Place</u> (Contextual Friends): seen as friends with whom you may have reasonably close bonds, and who might fall into the exclusive intimacy (Marks, 1998) category at times, but friendships which are not strong enough to continue when you move on from that base, although you would probably re-establish a friendship if you were both posted to the same place in the future. There is scope for a high level of trust with this type of friendship, but not in all cases.

4.   Acquaintances: seen as people with whom you pass the time of day at children's groups, the school gates and other chance meeting places, but whom you don't arrange to meet at any other time. The acquaintance might develop into a friendship if you were to meet again at another base. This type of friendship is associated with a low level of trust.

Friendship Strategies

Four strategies for developing friendships were identified:

1.   **Withdrawal:** staying away from all events on the base (sometimes by choice, and sometimes because of negative previous experiences). Maintaining contact and socialising exclusively with existing friends, whether or not they live nearby. (The most common life course stage found to be associated with this category was that of newly-married wives who worked and socialised away from the base.)

2.   **Aloofness:** keeping friendship on a very superficial level with other RAF wives, and sometimes retaining contact with a core group of friends from the past. (Wives who adopted this standpoint indicated that it was as protection against the possibility of rejection, against becoming 'saturated' with too many people, and against the pain of continually losing friends due to mobility. This standpoint was generally associated with negative friendship experiences in the past.)

3.   **Core Group/Contextual Friendship:** maintaining contact with a core group of friends from the past, which can be added to during each posting, whilst accepting that some friendships made during postings are rooted firmly within that context and will not outlive it. (This approach, in relation to the individuals identified with it, emerged as a reasonably realistic and healthy approach to friendship in the RAF context.)

4.   **Contextual Friendship:** investing highly in current friendships; moving to another base and starting from scratch. (This strategy was found to be more common for wives with a forces background, who generally viewed the RAF as one 'big happy family', and believed they would bump into people they had met before at another base. Fatigue was recorded in relation to this approach, in wives whose husbands had been serving in the RAF for a long time.)

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<u>Friendship Styles</u>

The work of Marks (1998) provides the basis for this section. He puts forward a theory which goes a long way towards explaining why temporariness affects friendships so dramatically, and why (apart from the volume argument discussed below) many wives appear to lose touch with most of the people they meet at a particular base as soon as they leave. Marks says that if people work together but don't see each other or talk to each other outside work, their intimate lives remain mysterious to each other (providing no real basis for lasting friendship).

This explains the problems wives can experience in making friends: when they might see the same people weekly at a children's activity, but not socialise with them outside that context. Marks goes on to explain that self disclosure is needed to bridge the gaps, and he claims that people are most eager to do this "....when their cultural context encourages them to see themselves as unique and private individuals, in possession of important, separate identities" (1998:45). He describes this set of circumstances as 'exclusive intimacy', a friendship style where disclosure often includes emotional aspects of one's inner experience.

However, if people do not see themselves as unique individuals, but as members of categories or groups (because others treat them as such), then he claims that 'inclusive intimacy' is the preferred friendship style. Disclosure in this situation may be limited to reporting 'outside' activities and storytelling about others. He says "Comfort will be drawn more from being surrounded by members of one's group or category than by seeking exclusive ties in which one can fully disclose the finely elaborated inner world of thoughts and feelings" (1998:45).

Much light is thus shed on the veil of superficiality which appears to cover many of the wives' activities on an RAF base. One respondent said "....it's the insincerity of it all" (Margaret, R18). Judging from my own experience, and that of many interviewees and respondents in this study, 'inclusive intimacy' certainly seems to be operating in such situations on the base (coffee mornings, pot luck suppers etc.), because conversation seems to be limited to 'safe' topics such as previous postings and children. I always puzzled at why no-one was behaving 'normally', and why no-one admitted to having difficulty with service life (which is undoubtedly difficult!). Marks' theory frames this problem quite succinctly.

In discussing Bauman's work, Jamieson (1998) provides another insight into superficiality within friendship. Bauman argues that modern nation states adopt strategies to eradicate strangers and force its remaining subjects to act like friends, and living on a military base within the married patch could be used to illustrate this argument. Those living on the married patch (regardless of background or other differences) are expected to get on well together, and as Jamieson states, "....The more strenuous the efforts to manufacture friendship, the more empty everyday friendships may become" (1998:78).

Wives do seem to see themselves as part of a group, (or 'clones' as one respondent [Doreen, R6] commented!) and as such they clearly do not 'risk' telling other members of the group how they really feel: for fear of being out-of-step with group solidarity or ways of thinking. There is a pretence that everyone is fine and that wives are 'all in it together'. As previously mentioned, such groupings do not provide an arena for being 'ourselves', or for confirmation of identity (Allan's 1996 model) which friendship can potentially provide; this can lead to loneliness and isolation, whilst on the surface people can appear 'fine'.

Inevitably, as will be shown below, wives generally have different types of friends, some of whom they will operate on an exclusive intimacy level with (usually real friends, with some scope for contextual friends falling into this category), and some of whom they will operate on an inclusive intimacy level with (generally acquaintances, fair weather friends, and some contextual friends, depending on the level of trust between them).

Shortly after moving to a military base myself, I was trying to work out why pot luck suppers and coffee mornings were so tedious and such hard work. My neighbour summed up the situation perfectly, from her own standpoint, saying:

> "They [pot luck suppers] leave me cold. People think I like them but I don't. Nobody is being normal. They're all so twee. They sit there, and everybody is so frightened to say anything about anybody, but in real life people do have opinions" (Janine, R1).

It is important to mention here that a different style and level of friendship has been found to operate on military bases in the form of Christian fellowship: which is totally at odds with the above analysis, where friendships are instantly formed (based on shared beliefs) and where self-disclosure and intimacy in friendship is the order of the day. Living off the base I had no knowledge of this part of RAF life, but living on the base at RAF Culswick, I was invited to many Christian events, and the difference observed in friendship terms was quite profound (and in itself could be the subject of an entire research project). Such circles, whilst clearly in the minority on RAF bases, display all the characteristics of Marks' 'exclusive intimacy'.

The Functions of Friendship

I set out below a resume provided in Allan's 1996 book *Kinship and Friendship in Modern Britain*, of the uses to which friendships are put. This is accomplished by identifying four types of activity which are common parts of any friendship (but need not all necessarily be equal parts of each friendship). These descriptions are crucial in relation to this study, as difficulties are inherent in each of them when continuity of friendship is not plausible. The first function discussed is sociability, the second is practical support, the third is emotional support and the fourth is confirmation of identity

This model helps to illustrate material in this chapter, for example that certain elements of friendship are valued/sought after more than others at a particular time in an RAF wife's friendship career. For example a wife's needs for friendship will be different as a newly-wed living on a military base, far from family and old friends, as opposed to as a wife with 10 years' experience of RAF life, living on a base near her family). The likelihood of having these needs fulfilled, alongside the pitfalls involved in seeking their fulfilment will be explored in the context of the data collected.

Sociability is seen as: "…..a distraction from more serious aspects of life, a sense of social involvement, and a means of expressing elements of one's individuality and character" (Allan 1996:108). The value of sociability is seen as being most apparent when it is restricted, for example in the event of unemployment.

In terms of my study, friendship can seem to be restricted or curtailed on many occasions during service life, and its value seems to be most apparent when moving to a new base, away from all that is known and having to start again; it also comes to the surface when wives find themselves at home all day with young children for the first time, or when their children are at school (and if this coincides with moving to a new base, a double sense of isolation can be experienced). Events advertised as 'social' events on the base can prove to be anything but, if nobody is friendly towards you.

Practical support is also a valuable resource. Like Chandler (1987) and Nicholson (1980), Allan points out that we limit what we ask for, to keep the balance of reciprocity in friendship right, but that we go to kin for most of our support. Again, this is often not possible for air force wives, due to physical distance. Friends or paid help are generally the only resources available, utilisation of which can be fraught with difficulties: issues of trust, reciprocity and general availability become prominent (given that other wives usually have the same kind of responsibilities themselves, and due to high demand, paid help can be scarce on or near to military bases).

Emotional support is the third function discussed. Several authors have mentioned this important function of friendship, including Harrison (1998), who talks about solidarity amongst women, and the way women are able to admit things to close friends which they couldn't tell their husbands. Emotional support is hard to sustain in RAF life. Women who invest their emotional resources in making close friends only have to keep on doing it over and over again. This, plus the fear of gossip amongst wives on the station, can lead to a reticence in 'opening up' to fellow wives. Most of the interviewees/respondents in my study preferred to confide in someone who did not live on the base.

Confirmation of identity is the last element discussed. Allan (and Harrison, 1998) say that friends often mould, reinforce and challenge each other's identities. It is claimed that friends are generally people whom we define as 'like us', and that friendships can alter as our social position or social status changes (and a new social identity emerges). Again, in the armed forces it is difficult to achieve the sort of continuity in many friendships which allow this kind of intimacy to develop.

Several wives in my study (who had been associated with the forces for many years) spoke of having few or no really close friends, and feeling reluctant to go out and make new friends. Also, the quest to find people 'like us' is extremely complicated in a life punctuated by continual relocation.

In emphasising the importance of friendship in society, Allan (1989) contends that friendship is not a social luxury, but a relationship which alongside other personal relationships provides people with practical and emotional support, and helps to construct their personal identities. To stress the importance of friendship, he quotes Dorothy Jerrome (1984:715), who says that friends hold together "the bricks of social structure".

Making Friends

As already established, the process of making friends in a military environment is complex. In terms of academic literature, Adams and Blieszner (1994) and Allan (1989) have recognised that despite claims to the contrary, friendships are not just voluntarily or freely chosen; some factors which influence friendship choices are genuinely social, and outside the individual's immediate control. In agreement with this point, in a military context, women who are married to servicemen are surrounded by people who are (in a superficial sense) 'in the same boat', with the shared interest of their husbands' employment, but sometimes these women can have little more in common, which in many cases leads to the adoption of a strategy of aloofness, sometimes progressing to contextual friendship over time. A point which is very relevant to this study is made by Jamieson when she says, in relation to existing British studies of friendship, that whether women had friends who were also confidantes depended on "....the depth of friendship her circumstances....had permitted" (1998:102). In my study ten interviewees made the statement "we're all in the same boat", five officers' wives and five airmen's wives. As Allan (1989) points out, sociological studies of friendship must stress the importance of placing friendships inside the broader social structures in which they are formed, in order to paint an accurate picture. For the purposes of this study, factors such as husbands' work patterns, geographical location and social mobility should therefore be considered.

The starting point in terms of my data, for asserting that problems do exist in relation to forging friendships as an RAF wife is the statistic of 56% of officers' wives and 50% of airmen's wives (taken from table 4.1 below) in my study expressing a negative view when asked about the ease of making friends on a new base.

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Table 4.1 Making friends on a new base

IS IT EASY TO MAKE FRIENDS ON A NEW BASE?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
No	6	8
Yes, if you make an effort	3	5
Easier with children	3	3
Easier than outside	1	1
Difficult if you work all day	1	-
Difficult when friends are posted	1	-
Bad experiences put you off	-	1
Difficult unless you know someone	1	-
TOTALS	16	18

In general terms, a sense was gained during this project that most participants in the study made a decision not to be passive, but to be active participants in the friendship process: at one extreme by going out and making friends and acquaintances at every base, and becoming heavily involved in RAF life (following the contextual friendship strategy), and at the other extreme by choosing not to become involved socially on the base at all, with various stages in between. Initial exposure to RAF life appears in most cases to necessitate a decision (whether conscious or not) on which strategy to adopt, to deal with the effect that the vagaries of the armed forces lifestyle has on friendship choice and friendship maintenance.

A practice which was observed at RAF Culswick (but not mentioned by interviewees) was the 'passing on of friends': some wives were seen to go to great lengths to introduce their friends to each other, especially if they were about to leave a base themselves (or had already moved); as a way of helping friends to settle, and to replace the 'gap' left by their departure. This type of practice is referred to by Haour-Knipe, and seen as the 'friends of friends' (people only known by association) providing practical and emotional support following relocation, and rendering the process of making new friends easier.

Some examples from the transcripts of wives who admit to finding making new friends difficult (interestingly all of these interviewees had the outward appearance of confidence) follow:

> "I mean you're bound to have people who are happy go lucky and they bounce into a new place and they cope with it......" (Mary, O1).

> ".....but some people don't find it easy, do they, to go out and knock on somebody's door, unless they have a problem, or they're really desperate" (Sally, O2).

> "I know it's very difficult to walk up to a group of people and say 'hello my name's Cindy, I'm married to Sean, blah dee blah dee blah'. And then again if people don't come up to you I think sometimes it's not because of who you are, but perhaps they're on the shy side and find it difficult, because I find it difficult to go and talk to people. So I can sort of see both sides of it really" (Cindy, O10).

> ".....once I've met someone a few times I'm fine, but I can be a bit shy with some people. I think in a place like this because it's so big, it can be a bit daunting really" (Sharon, O11).

A very important reason why it can be difficult to make friends on a new base was highlighted by one interviewee, when she said:

> ".....every time I've moved it's just wiped my confidence completely, because I feel intimidated. I don't know anybody, I don't know where I am" (Cassie, A11).

Another interviewee referred to moving to a new base as going back to the bottom rung of the ladder (Serena, A17), having built up a reputation at another base (which is the nature of contextual friendship, and a reason why a core group can be so important for some wives). The RAF Wives Association *Corridors* magazine published a letter in their Spring 2000 issue which expresses the sense of dislocation wives feel on moving around, (also noted by Jolly 1992:56) and the way husbands perhaps don't understand the burden which rests on wives. In the article a wife (Kit Prendergast) is quoted as saying:

> "The expatriate wife has a far tougher role than the husband. He just goes to an office every day and comes home again, much as he always has done. The wife has to do the settling in, find the supermarkets, schools, doctors and gas stations as well as organise a social life for everyone" (2000:21).

This section will continue by examining various factors which were found to influence the friendship process, these are: life course stage, potential venues (where), rank/skills in befriending, tour stage, and living arrangements.

<u>Life Course Stage</u>

Newly-wed/Pre-children: to start at the beginning of an RAF friendship career, the first logical stage to consider is the newly-wed phase, pre-children (although this need not be the case: women marry into the RAF at different points in their lives). During that phase the experience is obviously different if you work. Nine interviewees in my study said that they did not need to associate with other wives on the base (five officers' wives and four airmen's wives) when they were working full-time, fitting into friendship strategy 1 above.

Some instances of the opposing view were also recorded, from seven wives who said they did need contact (four officers' wives and three airmen's wives), especially when their husbands were away, but found it difficult/impossible to find friends on the base and found it very hard to break into 'cliques', (which are discussed further below) or circles of existing friends. This suggests a desire to embrace friendship strategy 4 above.

A selection of the comments made by those in the 'withdrawal' strategy category, who said they did not need RAF friends during this phase follow:

> "Like before I had kids and I worked all the time it made no difference to me because I had my own life anyway. It made no difference to me whatsoever because I was not part of it, and we never went to any functions and stuff.....I had my own friends and life outside of the RAF and it didn't make any difference to me" (Josie, A6).

> "Literally I didn't see anybody. At Bremen especially I didn't. I didn't go to any of the wives functions. I think I went to one evening supper, simply because I was off, but most of them I couldn't go to because of my shifts......For one thing I didn't need to meet anybody else, and I didn't particularly want to start getting to know them, because I had my own social life at the hospital, and we had the messes, and the medical centre had quite a lot on socially" (Cynthia, O13).

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"I grew up round here......so I have some friends here who I kept in contact with, so......we would see them at the weekends rather than mix with any of the RAF lot......I think we went home for the six months about every weekend, because we're both in the same area at home. We have a lot of good friends there, and we just went home and stayed with friends at weekends, so yes we did make a concerted effort I think, to make it separate. Not so much now I don't think. We mix with a lot more RAF people now, but when we were first married.....I think that was a good thing to do. It's overwhelming to begin with!" (Cindy, O10).

Several themes stand out from these comments, which lend support to the argument that individual circumstances play a part in determining how easy or difficult it is for RAF wives to form friendships. Firstly, with a full work and social life away from the military base, there is no time or space to forge friendships with other wives. Secondly, as Cynthia points out so clearly, there is no **need** to make new friends at this stage of life: the functions of friendship being met outside the wives' context. This sentiment (of withdrawal) was also expressed by another interviewee (Shirley, O3), from a different viewpoint: that of arriving at a new base, finding it unfriendly, and perceiving many other wives to have been at the station for a long time: thus free to stick with old friends and not needing new friends. A recent journal article in the women's magazine *Red*, by Fiona Gibson is on the subject of her impending move to a new area, and the prospect of making room for new friends. This article resonates with the fears most of the women consulted as part of this study hold in relation to making new friends, and illustrates why RAF wives have little continuity of friendship: because it's just not possible to continually make room for new friends without pushing out (or at least reducing contact with) some of the old friends, who no longer live near enough to visit. Gibson says "I'm not sure I want new friends anyway. Making new friends seems pointless, implying that your existing friends are somehow faulty and, like shampoo, should be switched occasionally for maximum effectiveness" (1999:6). This idea of making room for new friends is also discussed by Allan (1996). In addition, O'Connor (1992) found that many of the subjects of her study had friends with whom they could discuss anything but rarely talked to, who therefore took on a more symbolic significance and provided a sense of security.

Lastly, Cindy highlights an important point, that old friends (where they are available), can shield a new RAF wife from the initial impact of becoming part of the huge organisation which is the RAF (and allow initial adoption of the aloofness/core group strategies). This must of course be balanced with the reality of restricted freedom and limited choices following motherhood, which will be discussed below.

Having made these points, it is vital also to consider the position of other wives who, in the absence of other friendship resources, need the friendship of other RAF wives, and have difficulty seeking out these new friendships. Examples follow:

> "I must admit that I felt left out sometimes at Bampton because before I had Cameron I was working and no one ever saw me really. I mean I used to go out early in the morning and come back at night, and I think when I changed jobs and when I used to work from home, I think a lot of people were worried about disturbing me. I know there have been evenings out where loads of people have gone and we've perhaps not been asked because they didn't think we would go, or they hadn't seen us in time, or we haven't been able to go because John has been away and I didn't want to go on my own because I didn't know anybody well enough, and all these kind of things. And I used to think I was.....I mean I'm not paranoid and I'm not trying to say that I am, but I sometimes used to think that they maybe thought I was stuck up because I never went, or I wonder why they didn't ask me to go on this one, was it because I didn't go to the last one, or well I've been invited to quite a few coffee mornings when I first moved, and of course couldn't go because I was working and then I wonder why the invitations have dried up.....is it because I work .....you do feel like you want to be included. My next door neighbour the other side, Mary was newly-wed and he got posted for four months. They'd only just got married. She put on a stone in weight, she let herself go, you never saw her. She used to come home from work and stay in. It wasn't until we got talking once over the fence that we suddenly realised that we were both in the same situation. I was going home and drinking myself silly, having glasses of wine when I got in because I felt fed up and bored and she was sat next door doing exactly the same, only stuffing her face.....Maybe wives who have been involved for a long time and know the ropes and know the old times find it easy to become involved" (Penny, O5).

> "Before, when I was working and just came home in the evening, I didn't see anybody.....and in Lowenstein if you didn't have a pushchair then nobody spoke to you" (Cassie, A11).

These are examples of adopting a withdrawal strategy (sometimes veering towards aloofness) because of negative experiences on the base.

The following comments relate to periods in interviewees' lives when they did not work outside the home, did not have any children at home and sought friendships on the base which were not forthcoming (again falling into category 1):

> "....we moved to Maidenhead, when he was working in London, and I nearly went mad there. There were probably forty quarters, and we'd come from a very hectic social life in Germany to.....suburbia. And the people next door worked all day, and there wasn't anyone on the other side. The lady opposite was probably into her fifties and crippled, so she couldn't get out and about. And after we'd been there a couple of weeks I said to Calum right, I'm going to go round and invite all the ladies in for a coffee. I knocked on all the doors and there wasn't anyone in, they were all at work. So I didn't enjoy that tour at all, in fact in the end I went out and got myself a job, because it was the only thing to do" (Mary, O1).

(The above quotation contains similar sentiments to those expressed in Lyn Richards' study *Nobody's Home*, 1989, of an Australian suburb; the title reflecting a daytime situation where everyone was out at work.)

> "I find that the only problem I've got is that without having children you're not taken in as much. I mean we found it really hard when we first moved here. I did get taken in by a couple of wives who had children. But because they had children it was harder for them to go out at night, so we tended to go round to their house for a few drinks or whatever, but all they would talk about was their children....." (Amy, A18).

A selection of important points are raised by these quotations. Penny and Cassie's comments serve to illustrate the types of misunderstandings which can result from living on a military base, not feeling 'part of it', and seeing yourself as powerless to remedy the situation: lacking the time (when working full-time), the resources (in the form of a child), or the confidence/befriending skills to participate in events on the base.

Motherhood: moving on to the next life course stage, on becoming a mother, all respondents who had children acknowledged that their experience of living on an RAF base (where appropriate: some lived away from the base) changed significantly. From table 4.1 it can be gleaned that six interviewees actually stated it is easier to make friends on a new base when you have children.

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Whilst much evidence was gathered to support this proposition, some conflicting data was also collected (and the explanation could have a great deal to do with individual befriending skills and other related factors), from wives who said they found the atmosphere at children's activities to be hostile and unfriendly. A selection of comments follow, firstly from wives who found the experience easier with children:

> "Because I've got the children I find it a lot easier, but I wouldn't say I have any really close friends - the sort I had before I was married.....I don't feel I have any actual friends here, just acquaintances; people I see and pass the time of day with" (Yvette, A4).

> ".....I found that once I could get out to the mothers' group up here, that people talk to you far more when you've got a child than when you're out on your own .....mums with children: you've got something in common straight away, so you can start talking, and I think I wouldn't think anything of going.....and joining mothers and tots or whatever, and going on my own and taking him, and knowing that people talk to me because I've got a child. Whereas if you were going to a coffee morning on your own then it would be more difficult to speak to people" (Vanda, A14).

A very prominent point raised by these two comments is that both wives are acknowledging they are socialising with other wives because of the children, and indicating that they don't necessarily have anything else in common with them; the inclusive intimacy style of friendship is the order of the day. It is important to mention here the work of Bell and Ribbens (1994), which makes the same argument, and seeks to emphasise the way in which regular informal contacts between mothers of young children has not received appropriate attention from social researchers. They make the point that "social contacts may be frequent even between women who do not consider themselves as friends", and also that "not every woman wants to have close and frequent social contact with others" (1994:232).

Both of the previous quotations from interviewees contain echoes of a strategy of aloofness. In the same circumstances in civvy street there is perhaps more opportunity to opt out of such groups and stick with your old friends, but on an RAF base friendship choices are limited. Set out below are a selection of comments from wives who found it difficult to break into children's activity groups on the base.

"At one place in Germany, I'd just had my third baby, and I went into mothers and toddlers in there, and everyone just ignored me, and I sat there for about two and a half hours. I had a new baby, I'd just moved there. Then I got up and I said 'sod the lot of you', and they just looked at me. I said 'I've been sat here for two and a half hours, nobody's spoken to me, nobody's offered me a drink, no-one's asked if my baby needs a feed, or anything', and I just got up and walked out and said I wouldn't be back in there again. So they can [other wives], they can make your life hard when it's like that. It's usually easier to make conversation when you've got kids. I try, and if I don't get anywhere then that's it, they've had their first chance, they can get lost! I'm very much like that" (Serena, A17).

"Mums and tots, before the HIVE opened was very cliquey. Nobody would talk to you. Oh it was awful. I just didn't go in the end. I thought what's the point of just sitting here. I think that's really cruel. Hayley was too old to go to Under Ones, and I think that would have been the nicest one, but the Under Threes was awful. You sit there, and it feels like a really long time, because what can you do? You've got your cup of tea, and no one's talking to you. It's hard" (Cassie, A11).

"I take Jodie to under 3's......there are quite a few officers' wives who go to that, but I can imagine that if you went on your own it could be quite hard work because some people don't want to talk to you. They don't tell you what to do, but then they say that you don't do anything! You need to go with somebody else that you know definitely, unless you really don't care" (Betty, O8).

"I think it's difficult for anyone to walk in, unless they know somebody. You know it's a big step, and you sit there.....you can understand those mums not wanting to go, unless somebody's taking them, you know, and there isn't always somebody to go and pick them up and take them, is there? But I do think they have to go out and do a little bit themselves" (Sally, O2).

Again these comments contain evidence of strategies of aloofness and withdrawal. See also pages 147/8 regarding the existence of cliques.

Working Mother: a further possible category is that of working mother. All things considered, it is not easy for RAF wives to combine child rearing with full-time work. Out of my interview population one wife with pre-school children worked full-time, and a number of interviewees worked part-time. The comments recorded relating to friendships in this position were similar to that of the first category: of working full-time prior to having children.

Childless: another category which has not been explored in depth is that of wives who either don't want children or are infertile. With the prevailing trends on RAF bases veering towards child-rearing, such circumstances can lead to wives feeling left out. Very few examples were recorded in the context of this study, those which were include comments along the lines of Amy's statement (on page 123), that wives can feel they are not 'taken in' as much if they don't have children.

One other notable example from the data is that of a wife who was experiencing secondary infertility, and felt very isolated as a result. She said:

> "I would dearly love another child, but it's not happening. That's another aspect of RAF life is because you're a fairly close-knit...., especially here, and there are a lot of people pregnant all the time, and I'm finding that quite stressful at the minute, because when I was first pregnant with Alan we were all on our first, but now everybody's on their second, and you know people are starting to ask me, and I find that quite hurtful, they don't think.....Some people say to me they're pregnant and I say congratulations and then they say 'oh it only took me three weeks' or whatever" (Vanda, A14).

This interviewee was operating within a strategy of aloofness, and veering towards withdrawal due to past experience and because it was just too painful to be part of the wives 'scene' on the base; people she was interacting with were not 'real' friends she felt she could confide in, partly because she was tired of making close bonds only to move on, and partly due to her perception of the gossip problem on the base.

School-age Children: turning to mothers with school-age children, it was found that the experience could be quite difficult if they moved to a new base around the time the last child started school, especially if employment prospects in that area were not good. The following quotations are from wives living on a remote island base:

> "I found it hard when I came here because my youngest has been at school two years, but I childminded before I came here and I thought well there's nowhere for me to go with me on my own, and I really did feel lost without children.....I do think children help you in a way, to get out and mix with people, or even just the baby clinic or things like that, because you have something in common, and you have to actually physically go out to do these things" (Gwen, A15).

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"....my neighbour's just moved in and she's like 'what can I do?' And I'm saying 'not a lot!' I go to the gym every day, and that's what keeps me going. I couldn't stay in my house all day. You've got to get out and do something.....you don't go to the groups on the base, I'm past all that now. It's a good idea for those with young children, but it's harder here for those who don't have young children" (Serena, A17).

As demonstrated by these examples from the interviews transcripts, life course stage, alongside individual position, situation and past experience has much to do with the friendship careers and friendship strategies of RAF wives. Again, Allan's argument about the importance of placing friendships inside the broader social structures in which they are formed becomes significant, and this will be explored further in the following section on venues for meeting friends.

Where

Facilities on the base can dictate the opportunities for making friends. The existence of a community centre, housing a HIVE (Help Information Voluntary Exchange) can make a huge difference to the social functioning of a base. Information, a coffee shop and various other activities are situated in a HIVE.

The comments of a respondent who was posted to RAF Culswick before the HIVE was opened are contrasted below with the comments of a station commander's wife and a padre's wife, on a station where a HIVE had recently opened:

"....ten years ago there was just the thrift shop on a Thursday, and it smelled of mothballs and there was nowhere for the children to play; that was your lot. And my dear, I'm telling you, those were the Prozac days!" (Wendy, R15).

"....but it's so populated, I mean every time I go in I feel vindicated in having stuck my neck out. I mean the station commander, he was neither one way or the other about it, and I said I think we should have one, and he said 'ok, you're more in touch with the girls than I am, let's go for it', and every time I go over there and see how popular it is, I think well it was worth the effort, and it will remain popular as well. The coffee shop is a big draw, because you can always just go over and have a coffee and see what's on the walls and go and see.....they've got a big map with all the detachments on, so if your husband goes off on detachment and you're not really sure what part of the world he's in, you can go and have a look" (Mary, O1).

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"......here I think, we've got an advantage because this HIVE has opened now, and that is being used. Young mums are going in there, you know, into what they call the user area, where the children can go and play, and there's a cafe, and used rightly that place could be a Godsend to them, you know. It's nice to go in there and see all the young mums and, you know, with their children, and it's not expensive prices, and you know, and there's things going on for them more now" (Sally, O2).

There are also meet and greets, pot luck suppers, coffee mornings, and various clubs to take part in. Wives don't always find it easy to go along on their own. Efforts are sometimes made to take people along (by Road Reps, or CAMEO initiatives [come and meet everyone]). Working women can't obviously go to daytime events, but at RAF Blyton evening events were also laid on.

Children's activities provide the opportunity for routine interactions; opportunities to make acquaintances, fair weather friends and contextual friends, if not also close friends, as do work doos, church, wives clubs and voluntary welfare activities. Some friendships blossom out of chance meetings: at the supermarket or at the park. As Adams and Bliezner (1994) state: "Some friendships are based on routine, repeated, predictable interactions and others are formed after chance meetings". Some comments from interviewees on the venues for socialising with other wives follow:

"I joined the Homestart Organisation as a volunteer, and that really helped. I was a volunteer for other people, but I think in a roundabout way they were helping me as well, because whenever you were passing the office you could pop in for a coffee, even though they weren't counselling you, they were helping you to talk things through. I really enjoyed it, and then I started doing Tumbletots. We used to get the equipment out in the gym. The parents stayed as well. And then everywhere I went I knew people, even though I didn't have really close friends, I knew a lot of people, so in a way I helped myself" (Yvette, A4).

"When I took it over [the APS: ante and post-natal group].....and just by taking it over and actually having to do the newsletters I suddenly knew everybody because I was speaking to them, and they were phoning up saying I can do such and such a week. And we went out to a function at the mess, and I think I spoke to more people than Alan, and he was absolutely amazed. All of a sudden it was just like a big circle of friends I'd met" (Cynthia, O13).

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"I go to the mums and tots at the community centre and help out in the thrift shop, so that actually gets me out of the house and meeting the rest of the wives, which is good. But at the HIVE and the community centre, there's always something going on, so you can always go there, and go and see people, and we use the leisure centre quite a bit as well, for swimming and things.....From a church point of view.....People recognise you each week as you come in, you start to make friends in that circle" (Alison, O16).

".....I found when I first came here that I'd go to the groups in the afternoons or whatever it was I was going to, and you'd have your chat, but then you wouldn't see anyone again until the next week, you know there was no sort of 'we'll come round for coffee', or 'we'll do this' or 'we'll do that', you sort of have to push a lot to make friends really" (Karen, A7).

The most obvious thread emerging from these comments appears to be that it is relatively straightforward to meet acquaintances (as long as you are willing to make the effort), but it is more difficult to make true friendships; many instances of inclusive intimacy and sociability can be observed above. Two respondents expressed this sentiment to me at RAF Culswick, saying:

"A friend with many years experience in the military said to me 'you have to go out there and make acquaintances; you don't have time to make friends'" (Lydia, R5).

"I have plenty of people who I can pass the time of day with, but nobody I can call a real friend, no one I can really talk to" (Leanne, R14).

This is the essence of one of my main arguments in this chapter: that dislocation from real friends and family, and thus often being denied three out of the four functions of friendship (sociability potentially being fulfilled on the base) cause loneliness and distress at some time, for most military wives.

Rank/Skills in Befriending

Husbands' rank and occupation can affect the process of making friends. Much evidence was recorded of wives receiving different reactions before and after telling another wife their husband's occupation or rank. Examples of comments relating to rank follow, firstly in relation to a small, remote base:

"The Station Commander's wife is very friendly. I met her about the second day after we moved here. She was introduced as Carol, and I was laughing away and chatting to her, and then someone told me she was the Station Commander's wife and I said 'what!' You know, you can't afford to be that much of a stuck up officer's wife up here. I'm not saying everybody is, because there's just not enough of them here, so I think the rank structure here is a bit watered down and everybody just gets on with it" (Helen, A16).

Some evidence of Airmen's Wives being intimidated by Officer's Wives on the basis of rank (without just cause according to officers' wives!) was recorded. Some examples follow:

".....They're [airmen's wives] more.....almost a chip on the shoulder, you know 'they won't want to speak to us' attitude. It's sad that it's perpetuated right up into the 1990s......Barton Mews, which is where the wives club was, it was an officers' wives club, and there were a lot of retired officers' wives who were in their sixties and seventies, and looked down their noses very much at younger wives who dared to come along. I went twice, and I got really put off.....They were very much of the old school, and the first question they asked me was where my husband worked, and about the third one was what was his rank.....so I just played it down. Eventually I admitted begrudgingly that he worked for the Chief of Air Staff.....'what rank is he - Squadron Leader?' I said 'no no, Group Captain', 'Oh my dear, how nice to meet you!' Thank you very much! I don't think I'll be coming here again! It was unfortunate that there were a lot of people like that there of the old school. Thank goodness they're dying out! Literally dying off!" (Mary, O1).

"There is no reason for APS [ante and post-natal support group] being just for Officers' wives, other than that some wives don't fancy going to an Airman's wife's house" (Shirley, O3).

"I remember when I worked in Swanton, a girl who lived on Imperial Road, she worked at the same place, so I said to her you know, I'll give you a lift every day, you know, it's good company, and her husband was a corporal, and she said to him 'will it be alright, with her being an officer's wife?' And I just thought it was really funny, I mean it never even occurred to me, but it doesn't bother me.....I think they [airmen's wives] get a bit of a bee in their bonnets sometimes, don't they, about officers' wives. I've heard that" (Mandy, O12).

Several examples of husband's occupation affecting how a wife was 'received' were recorded. In particular, several instances of hostility (or perceived veiled jealousy) towards aircrew came to light. An example follows:

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"....when I first moved to Bampton there was a woman knocking on the door, just before our honeymoon, two weeks after we got married, and she invited me round for coffee and I went after I got back from honeymoon and one of the first questions she asked me was what does your husband do, and as soon as she found out he was a pilot, as her husband wasn't, she didn't want to know" (Penny, 05).

This type of prejudice can effectively be seen to lead to strategies of aloofness or ultimately withdrawal.

Skills in befriending vary tremendously between wives, as well as the ability to put on a 'mask' and appear confident when feeling anything but (which can be intimidating for wives who do not possess this skill). The position of others whom wives might be seeking to befriend (primarily whether they are actually amenable to making new friendships) is also important.

Allan (1989) discusses the difficulties involved in defining friends, and says sociology has not really addressed the meaning. He talks about working class as opposed to middle class sociability, and argues that the working class tend to limit their sociable relations to particular contexts and structures, such as work and the pub. He argues that working class sociability is not home-centred, and friends are not often invited into the home. In his study, kin was found to be very important in working class circles. The middle class were found to have more friends, to meet with people in a wider variety of social settings, and to interact with people they liked (kith and kin), regardless of the structured category of others to which they belonged. A number of writers have suggested that the middle class possess social skills lacking in working class circles, which are necessary for making friends (e.g. Chandler 1987).

Giving commissioned and uncommissioned personnel the status of middle and working class, Chandler argues that officers' wives are more able than ratings' wives to "....adopt middle class ways of making and keeping friends and are more likely to be involved in public, organised activities" (1991:28). It is argued that some of these skills (such as the ability to make friends quickly) are attributed to greater middle class mobility, and Klein (1965) points to some of the skills involved:

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"It takes rather a marked ability to discriminate, to perceive and use fine shades of meaning, to indicate and preserve delicate social distances if the chances of making friends are not to be impaired by a wrong move in the initial stages" (1965:352).

(These are similar arguments to those put forward by Chandler (1987), Nicholson (1980) and Jolly (1992), in relation to life on the patch.)

The divide between working and middle class sociability in relation to RAF wives has been noted (although not significantly) in my study and in relation to other categories of occupational wives, in the literature. The class divide and difficulties faced by wives having to continually make new friends was raised by Nicholson, Chandler and Pahl and Pahl, and discussed above, in relation to the friendships formed by occupational wives. Nicholson did however find that more befriending went on between working class women on the base than would be found on a council estate, indicating once again that other factors such as distance from family come into play and perhaps break the 'rules' of friendship in a military environment. The suggestion is that when wives are taken away from their familiar surroundings, they are forced to adapt and make new friends, regardless of class or rank (or face a lonely alternative).

Tour Stage

I found much acknowledgement that near the end of a tour wives are less amenable to new friendships, as they will soon be moving on; perhaps moving from a strategy of contextual friendship towards aloofness or even withdrawal, as the tour reaches its close. This is inevitable given the RAF lifestyle, but can nevertheless be quite hurtful for needy wives who are starting a tour and trying to make friends (I experienced this at first hand on moving to a military base). Comments which acknowledge this follow:

"I find it very difficult now to.....certainly here, to be extending [friendship] to new people who come in, because I'm thinking well I'm going soon anyway" (Vanda, A14).

".....if somebody was moving in here, and I know I've only got two months to go, then I might sort of think well I won't get too friendly with her because I'm going. But that's not meant in a nasty way" (Serena, A17).

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> "Things like there's someone just moved in across the road, and there's somebody going to be moving in next door, and even if we hit it off immediately and they're fantastic people, I know that come December we're leaving, and so yes, we'll be very friendly to them, but we're not going to make a big effort to get to know them, which is a shame, because that sort of reserve can be seen as someone not coming and welcoming somebody" (Cynthia, O13).

Interestingly, all the foregoing interviewees had previous experience of RAF life: 2 as RAF children and one as an ex-servicewoman. This could suggest that wives with inside knowledge of RAF 'ways' see friendships in the RAF context for what they are, that is, in a very practical and realistic light, rather than exerting themselves in welcoming people they will know only for a short time.

Living Arrangements

Living arrangements are also important. Evidence was recorded from interviewees who claim it is easier to make friends on a small base, a remote base or an overseas base, away from the mainstream of society. Writers on military wives and families have acknowledged this, e.g. Jolly quotes a serviceman in her study as saying "You have a circle of friends whom you work with, live near, go to parties with, and, one way or another, see every day. People join in more than they do in the UK.....I suppose because there's nothing else to do" (1992:72). There is a high probability of contextual friendship strategies operating here, and whilst some bonds might outlive the context, the probability is that back on mainland Britain they will not. The BBC's programme, Castaway 2000 is an interesting example of this theory in operation; participants were heard to speculate during the video footage, whether friendships and romances would flourish away from the setting in which they were formed.

A relatively new RAF wife in this study, living on a small, remote base also presented a very realistic approach to friendship, when she was speculating about the next stage or phase of friendship. She said:

> "I mean we've got a great friendship with our neighbours. We sometimes think what if we were both posted to Lyneham, how would our friendship be then, when our families are quite near?" (Amy, A18).

Another interviewee, who was a new mother put forward an equally practical scenario regarding friendships on the base where she lived. She went through her list of friends, predicting whom she would keep in touch with, saying:

> "People who I know and yes I go to their house for coffee, say the likes of Emily Tasker, whether we'll keep in contact, I don't think we would. I think it depends on what sort of, how strong your friendship is, as to whether you do or you don't. I mean yes you go to a party and you see people and you have conversations and you get on really well, but whether you would then become lifelong buddies and sort of let's go for a week on holiday together and things like that I don't know. But as I've said, with Betty and Mandy I will definitely keep in touch" (Cindy, O10).

Cindy's comments indicate that her friendship with Emily would probably fall into category 2 (fair-weather friend), as she didn't depend on her for support or favours of any kind; interactions were purely social. In contrast, Betty and Mandy were friends who provided practical support, Cindy supported them in return, and she anticipated keeping in touch with them for life; falling into category 1, real friends. Some more comments from interviewees on living at a small, remote base, and also at larger overseas bases confirm the importance of setting:

> ".... people are a lot friendlier overseas. It is very difficult when you're in the UK, because you tend to just maybe have contact with your neighbour, but you don't make so much effort to see anybody else. People are able to go away at weekends and more wives are working" (Vanda, A14).

> "The smaller ones [stations] are more friendly. You're miles and miles from home and you're stuck on this island, and you've all got to get on with each other, and people do tend to make much more of an effort, and they do come out of themselves and you know, start talking. I didn't think I was going to like it here, but I have enjoyed it here....." (Serena, A17).

> "Well I've found that since we've come here it's a completely different set up, because everything is so small and everybody is so friendly, you have to be.....on a small base you feel like you fit in more, because people are so friendly, and you know everybody if only just to see, and everybody speaks to you, and the locals as well" (Gwen, A15).

"I think in Germany people made more of an effort, simply because you'd arrived in a new country, and you needed some help the first time you went to the shops or whatever.....a big difference was that many of the wives didn't work, because there wasn't a lot of work for them......We used to get together, all of the wives, all of the ranks, and go out for curries, have pot luck suppers" (Cynthia, O13).

"On small stations I think you interact a lot more, because obviously you have to go to more of the functions, you can't hide! The big camps are a bit more impersonal, and I suppose not so together as you would find on a small unit, because they tend to go their separate ways on a big camp. I think people tend to go outside for their entertainment on a big base, especially with the mess changes and things like that......Everybody is friendly up here......I think generally everyone gets on very well up here" (Alison, O16).

In contrast, one interviewee emphasised the down side of living on a small base:

"On a bigger one [station] I think you've got more people and I don't think there would be as much bitchiness, because you have more variety of people. Yes it might be cliquey, but the bitchiness wouldn't be there. You wouldn't know everybody" (Amy, A18).

The experience of making friends is also quite different if you live away from the base. Civilian rules then apply, and you can be as involved in or distanced from events on the base as you want. Other scenarios which RAF wives face in the continual process of making friends will be discussed in the following section.

Sustaining Friendships

This section explores which friendship bonds are likely to endure and which are not, and looks at the inherent difficulties in maintaining friendships in the face of mobility. Towards this aim, this section is split into three parts: the development and maintenance of a 'core group' of friends, how wives cope with the challenge of maintaining friendships with old friends (who they no longer see very often), and the choices open to wives, in relation to sustaining friendships.

<u>The Core Group</u>

To ascertain who interviewees keep in touch with, the concept of a core group of friends, defined within category 1 above, of real friends, was developed. It was found that a sense of history was maintained by most interviewees by maintaining contact with a core group of friends, from some point in their lives, whether from their home town, school, university, work, early RAF days, or their previous posting. Some wives appear to derive comfort from not being totally reliant on the people they meet during a particular posting to provide close friendship, but others (mainly those with some RAF background) are happy with whoever they meet during a posting (contextual friends): perhaps viewing the RAF as a wider community to which they feel they belong (this idea will be discussed further below).

As Feld and Carter (1998) and also Allan (1998) contend, many friendships outlive the particular focus of activity in which they originate; explaining the emergence of core groups of friends in relation to this study. The following table shows the origin of each interviewee's core group.

Table 4.2 Core group

Category	Origin of Core Group (can be more than one source)							
	Home	School	Work	RAF	Civilians near base	Church	No Core	Totals
Officers' Wives	8	2	3	8	3	1	1	26
Airmen's Wives	9	-	3	8	2	-	1	23
Totals	17	2	6	16	5	1	2	49

As demonstrated, only 2 interviewees out of 34 had no identifiable core group, highlighting the importance of this 'anchoring' to a group of people, and a time and place, to most interviewees.

The reasons why a core group may be so important have been discussed above and include lack of continuity of friendship, resultant lack of true intimacy of friendship, lack of access to kin and husband absence; Harrison's work on women's friendships (1998), in discussing the importance and utility of women's friendships, highlights those aspects of friendship so often denied RAF wives. Urry, in his book *Sociology Beyond Societies* approaches this same issue from a different angle. He criticises sociology for being too focussed on social interactions between peoples and social groups and says "I emphasise that we should also analyse those peoples and social groupings with which we do not interact on a regular basis but with whom some sense of connection or belonging can be sensed and sustained" (2000:134). (See also page 121 regarding O'Connor, 1992.) This is what is being attempted in this study, in relation to RAF wives.

The two wives who said they had no core group expressed sadness about having no sense of shared history with anyone outside their families, and thus experienced a sense of pain associated with being denied the confirmation of identity function of friendship. An example follows:

> "There's one girl that I've stayed in contact with.....but the only reason really.....
> because we keep bumping into each other. But there's nobody else that I keep in
> contact with at all, going back. There just doesn't seem to be any point. I mean
> I usually find that we keep in contact for the next tour......I mean you sometimes
> get to hear about them on the grapevine......But I do find it very sad......The only
> person with whom I've really got any shared memories is my sister, because she's
> still in the same place, she's still living close to my mother, and when we go home
> she's still my roots if you like. But certainly there's no special friend, and there
> isn't anybody from here that I'll keep in contact with" (Vanda, A14).

This subject of rootlessness is touched on by several authors. For example, Allan, says that patterns of occupational and geographical mobility ".....fragment the solidarities that previously informed social life" (1998:697). Rosser and Harris (1983) add important strands to any discussion of mobility when they point out that mobility, whilst being disruptive, can also have the positive effect (as many wives in my study have pointed out) of challenging people to adjust and adapt to new circumstances; they see static communities as stagnant in comparison.

For wives in my study, the wider 'world' of the core group appears to give a sense of identity which transcends current status of 'new arrival', or 'Joe Bloggs' wife'. Table 4.2 shows that the most popular categories were that of home (the place where wives grew up) and the RAF. Taking into consideration all the other information gathered as part of this study, I believe this is because these two categories represent the largest chunks of the lives of most of the wives interviewed. These two settings would appear to provide the strongest bases for the development of enduring friendships over time, based on exclusive intimacy and fulfilling all the functions of friendship.

Old Friends

In relation to what wives actually said about the process of sustaining friendships from the past, a very interesting mixture of data was recorded. As already established, some wives in the study valued old friendships and the sense of history they provided very much, and as a result felt great sadness at the way RAF life inhibits the establishment of roots.

The same wives also made positive statements about the life, which is part of the ambiguous love/hate relationship I contend that RAF wives have with the institution. Others were keen to uphold and emphasise the positive aspects of RAF friendships, and saw continuity in terms of the possibility of meeting up with people again on other bases, or told of how they had known someone vaguely on one base and then become friends with them on another base. The following table and discussion provides a picture of interviewees' responses to the question of whether they kept in touch with old friends.

Table 4.3 Keeping in touch with old friends

DO YOU KEEP IN TOUCH WITH OLD FRIENDS?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Yes	7	9
Yes, but some have 'stood still'	1	2
Yes, but not as much as would like	-	3
No	1	2
Yes, civvy friends more permanent	2	-
Yes, even just a card	1	-
Yes, a couple from each move	1	-
Yes, but difficult as friends move too	1	-
Try to	1	-
Just a couple	-	1
Not from pre-RAF days	-	1
Some friendships have 'gone off'	1	-
TOTALS	16	18

Table 4.3 shows that just under half of all interviewees said yes to the question of whether they kept in touch with old friends, 7/16 Officers' Wives and 9/18 Airmen's Wives; another 9 Airmen's' Wives and 9 Officers' Wives gave mainly positive and more detailed answers to the question, with only 1 Officer's Wife and 2 Airmen's Wives answering no to this question. As predicted, the question of maintaining old friendships is thus important to RAF wives.

A definite difference between old and new friendships, and a sense of old friendships standing the test of time was recorded by Nicholson (1980) and Pahl and Pahl (1971). This is very interesting in the sense that old friendships were seen to provide continuity, and, as articulated by Pahl and Pahl, old friends, especially for the highly mobile, give them a sense "....almost of the reality of their own biography" (Pahl and Pahl 1971:147), and fulfil the friendship function of confirmation of identity.

Nicholson makes mention of the desire amongst her respondents to maintain contact with someone who knows their past and family: a sense of 'rootedness' and 'permanence', amongst the chaos and uncertainty of service life. Some of my interviewees felt they had 'old' friends and some did not. For some wives it was seen as a problem not to have old friends, as they had no continuity in their lives (for example, Vanda, page 137); for others it was not seen as a problem at all.

Nicholson also found that the quality of such 'real' friendships was considered to be unaffected by geographical proximity. Wives spoke of being able to "......just pick up where one left off....." (Nicholson 1980:42). In a similar vein, Gyles Brandreth in a recent article about his late friend Simon Cadell, says of very old friendships: "A friendship that begins in childhood is like a favourite cardigan: you don't need to keep it in good repair, you simply slip it on" (2000:R7). Several interviewees expressed similar sentiments, although one interviewee gave an example of a time when she thought this would happen and had been very disappointed when it didn't; she felt she had been naive for expecting she could pick up where she left off, saying:

> "When I was at Sandwick last year, that was where I went to college. I managed to get in touch with friends who I just send Christmas cards to.....it took a lot of getting used to because I just expected to fall back into these friendships as if nothing had ever happened, but obviously I'd been away for eight years and they'd got into circles of their own. I think it was a bit silly of me to have expected it to be the same. I expected to be going out once a month with them or something like that, and it wasn't like that at all" (Yvette, A4).

This introduces the concept of differential friendship expectations between friends. It seems that whilst Yvette saw these friendships as real friendships, her friends saw them as contextual friendships; she moved away from the context in which the friendships were formed, and they moved on without her.

On the question of meeting up again, or moving near to old friends, 5 Airmen's Wives and 2 Officers' Wives made mention of this positive aspect of friendship in relation to the RAF lifestyle. Interestingly, all seven interviewees had been associated with the forces for some time: either as RAF children, serving personnel, or through being married to a serviceman for a number of years, and had experienced many postings.

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Three interviewees mentioned the possibility of knowing someone vaguely on one base and then becoming friends on another base (I also observed this practice whilst living on a base). An example follows.

> "This time when I moved, because I knew Marion from where we lived before, I sort of got hold of Marion. We didn't know each other particularly well where we were before, but we both knew we were moving to the same place and made the effort, and you know I sort of tagged along with her to toddlers and that sort of thing....." (Yvette, A4).

This represents an example of acquaintances at one base upgrading to contextual friends, or maybe even real friends eventually at another base.

One of the most obvious inhibiting factors to maintaining friendships long-term, within the bounds of an RAF lifestyle, is the sheer number of people wives meet by living on RAF bases, and the resulting volume of correspondence, phone calls and visits (covering long distances) which would be required in order to maintain meaningful friendship with each of them. Jolly (1992) acknowledges this problem of volume. Writers on social networks have also discussed this issue. It has been argued that the benefits of social ties increase with expansion up to a certain point, but if that expansion continues beyond optimum size, they claim that "the demands associated with the maintenance of that network may become more prevalent than the rewards" (Larson and Bradney, 1988:404). As already mentioned, this is an important point in relation to military life, where the potential for oversized networks is immense due to mobility. This has indeed emerged as a major reason why so many friendships between RAF wives do not outlive the context in which they are formed: it is simply not practical to keep in touch with everybody.

The core group strategy often operates where real friends (with whom exclusive intimacy is shared) made during a posting will be added to the core group, whilst other types of friendships, particularly those in the inclusive intimacy category, will peter out.

On a more positive note, there was a high level of agreement amongst participants in this study that notwithstanding the transience of RAF life, if a friendship was strong enough to carry on (a real friendship) then it would. Table 4.4 below sets out wives' responses to the question of temporary residence affecting friendships.

Table 4.4 Temporary residence affecting friendships

DOES THE TEMPORARINESS OF YOUR RESIDENCE AFFECT FRIENDSHIPS?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Yes	10	12
No, all in it together	2	5
Yes and no	1	-
Depends on strength of friendship	1	-
Yes, if you're near the end of your tour	-	1
Live in own house, so don't feel it so much	1	-
No, haven't moved much	1	-
TOTALS	16	18

As demonstrated, a majority admitted that temporariness does affect the types of friendship which develop on a military base, 65% of all interviewees giving a simple yes answer.

Again, a sense was gained from the data that those wives who don't try to fight the RAF lifestyle seem to fare best, or be caused least distress. In this study, there was a definable link between interviewees who had been RAF children/serving personnel, and the tendency to go along with the lifestyle rather than try to apply civilian rules to RAF situations. One interviewee, who was an RAF child and also an ex-servicewoman, sums up this point with her very realistic approach, and clear grasp of the nature of contextual friendship. She says:

"I mean the people we knew in Germany, they were friends for the time and place, but they weren't close enough friends that now we've moved on, and our whole social situation has changed......You go through life keeping in touch with the important ones" (Cynthia, O13).

Another interviewee with many years' experience as an RAF wife is equally realistic. She says:

"I think we probably keep in touch with maybe one couple from each move, long term" (Mary, O1).

All interviewees admitted losing touch with some friends along the way, but there were also some vehement assurances that temporary tenure did not affect friendships if two people have a lot in common. Examples follow:

"I don't think they're [friendships] different.....It's quite difficult to get used to the fact that people you make friends with are going to move on, it's quite sad really, but it doesn't change a friendship. You're all in it together really. You don't think about it beforehand" (Jenny, O7).

"I don't think so. I think generally I just make the most of the two years, and whatever comes out of that two years. If the friendships are going to carry on they'll carry on. I think sometimes you do carry some friendships longer than others, some just drop off to Christmas cards and things" (Alison, O16).

Acknowledgement of the practicalities involved in keeping in touch with all the friends you meet in the service context was also generally acknowledged. Two interviewees encapsulated the 'problem', saying:

".... I think it's difficult, because you have to work at friendship, and a Christmas card once a year isn't enough really" (Mary, O1).

"I mean there's a couple that I keep in touch with, but a lot drop off, because you know you're not going to see them again, and you just can't fit everybody in" (Helen, A16).

Other interviewees/respondents said they now had nothing in common with old friends from home/school/university/work. Whilst they felt their own lives had moved on, they saw their friends' lives as remaining static (and almost seemed to hold that against them!). An example follows:

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"The problem is.....we have nothing in common now. My life has changed so drastically that I've got nothing in common with them, we've got nothing to talk about, and that's quite hard" (Jenny, O7).

This is an example of the operation of a purely contextual friendship strategy: where there is little reliance on friends from the past, and the RAF 'way' of friendship is embraced.

Choices

In essence, despite all the dilemmas and constraints faced by women in building meaningful friendship within the RAF environment, women do have choices open to them, and can decide to go to things on their own, rather than sit at home. Wives are not helpless victims (unless they choose to be); they can, and largely do, lead fulfilled social lives. As one interviewee commented, on the question of work affecting her social life:

> "I suppose it's difficult when you're trying to organise going away or seeing people.....But I tend to say 'right well I've organised this. Are you coming or aren't you coming? Well if you're not coming that's fine I shall just go on my own', because I'm so used to having to do things on my own, because I refuse to stay at home" (Cindy, O10).

Cindy sees the importance of maintaining friendships and honouring commitments, despite the erratic work schedule of her husband, which in a sense sums up the dilemma wives face in this area. Courage, commitment and perseverance appear to be major facilitators in the sustaining of friendships in the RAF context. Regular contact with friends old and new presents the possibility of going back to an area where you previously lived and picking up the same friendships: insurance against serial mobility. I have a wealth of experience of that concept in operation in my own life, having relocated 7 times within 15 years. The way in which wives manage day to day friendship issues will be explored in the next section.

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Living on the base and Managing Current Friendships

This section aims to highlight the dilemmas faced by RAF wives on a daily basis, in relation to managing friendships on the base. These include rushing into friendships and regretting it later, the existence of cliques, having to be friendly with people you wouldn't normally associate with, peer pressure, having little in common with your husband's friends' wives, deciding whether you should see friends if their husband is home and yours is away, deciding whether to go to family during husband absence, unpredictable work patterns, the pros and cons of civilian friendships, deciding whom you can trust to confide in, what to do when your friends move on, and fatigue at continually starting again.

Rushing in

Being needy when you arrive on a new base can lead to latching onto the first person who is friendly, and the reverse can also happen, with needy people latching onto you. This can lead to untenable friendships between people with little in common, who otherwise wouldn't become friends, and to misplaced trust and misunderstandings. Escaping from this situation without causing offence can be very difficult, as evidenced in my study, and in previous research. This type of negative experience can lead to wives adopting a strategy of aloofness or withdrawal on the base, and engaging only in inclusive intimacy with other wives.

On arriving at a new base, wives can feel an immediate need for company, help and advice, (the first two functions of friendship) which can lead to making the wrong kind of relationship with the wrong sort of person, prompting wives to be more careful in future interactions. Such relationships are based on incomplete information; the friendship is rooted firmly in the present, and there is no reference to a common past, and often no basis for a real friendship. "One party or the other being drafted away from the area would often put a timely end to a difficult relationship" (Nicholson, 1980:42).

The fear of making friends quickly in a new location is also noted by Pahl and Pahl. One respondent in their study stated "....if you push yourself too quickly you sometimes get saddled with people you don't like" (1971:151).

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My interviews produced little evidence of this difficulty. However, on moving to a military base myself, I experienced this problem at first hand and found it particularly distressing, as there is 'nowhere to run' on a military base and it is very difficult to evade people you do not want to see. Having had this experience, I then went on to meet several respondents who recounted similar stories to me, giving the impression that this problem is not at all uncommon (and showing that as a researcher you elicit more information from prolonged contact).

Some of the examples from my field notes follow:

> Janine told me that she came to Culswick as a new RAF wife, naive about the lifestyle, being friendly to everyone she met, and she felt she was 'plagued with people' to the extent that she 'didn't have a life'. She said she would be much more careful when she moved to the next station and advised me to keep my door shut and just have who I want in! She didn't want to tell her neighbour her forwarding address, because they were moving to the same part of the country, and she didn't want to see her again! She said of this particular neighbour 'She's not my type, and she makes me have her, and I don't want her!' (R1).

> Sophie told me that when she was a new wife, and was at home all day studying, a new neighbour moved in who used to arrive on her doorstep every day, asking to come in with her little girl. Sophie did not have any children at the time, and her neighbour would let the little girl go upstairs in Sophie's house, play with her makeup and other personal items, and generally run wild. The end result was that Sophie felt obliged to hide, pretend she wasn't in, when this neighbour arrived. (R2)

> Margaret's husband had been in the Air Force for over 30 years, and she was very cynical about the social side of RAF life. She said 'it's the inanity of it all. Sometimes you don't want to speak to people because you don't know them well enough to have a meaningful conversation'. She recounted an incident from her early days as an RAF wife, when another wife would come to her house daily, expecting to be taken in and to stay all day. In the end she would hide and pretend she wasn't in. (R18)

This sort of experience can taint a wife's view of life on a military base and lead to the adoption of a strategy of aloofness or even withdrawal.

<u>Cliques</u>

As originally forecast, a large majority of interviewees confirmed that difficulties in making friends can be exacerbated by the existence of or perceived existence of cliques. When feeling vulnerable and lacking in confidence, breaking into seemingly impenetrable cliques can seem too difficult to attempt, and can lead wives towards strategies of aloofness and withdrawal.

One interviewee encapsulated the essence of this problem, saying "It's difficult to mix in. I'm not one to speak out, push myself forward, so yeah, I'd rather just stay away than try it and feel awkward" (Ann, A13). Interviewee responses are set out below in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Cliques

Are wives on military bases cliquey?			
Category	Yes	No	Total
Officers	13	3	16
Airmen's Wives	13	5	18
Total	26	8	34

As demonstrated by the above figures, 76% of all interviewees said cliques were apparent on military bases, with only 24% (marginally more airmen's wives than officers' wives) disagreeing. The comments regarding cliques were many and varied, and generally served to reflect the sense of social isolation wives sometimes felt on being posted to a new station. Some examples follow:

> "I mean I'll sit and talk to anybody, and if there's a new person I'll try to really make the effort and speak to them, but I find people can be so cliquey, so into their group. I sometimes wonder how these people who are in on the clique manage when they are posted to a new unit, you know" (Yvette, A4).

> "I think there are [cliques]. Somebody up here was complaining to me about it, and I had to laugh because she used to be here and came back, and she used to be one on a little circle, and now they're all new faces and she's a newer face, and she wasn't included in it. But I think that happens anywhere, even big places, you get the little circles" (Anthea, O15).

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"Well I've always been a bit confused with this term 'cliquey,' because I mean in any walk of life you have a group......Of course there's groups, because you can't all sit in the same group, and I don't think groups are to the exclusion of other people. I think you have to be quite approachable yourself. If you walk in and you scowl a lot then there's nobody going to come up and say come and join us, whereas if you go in and try to be a little bit forward and say you know, do you mind if I sit here, I'm new......But no I don't think......and I think here people are a lot friendlier because they are aware of your situation" (Vanda, A14).

It would thus appear that *inter alia* differing opinions, past experience, and current confidence levels can colour wives' perceptions and experience of cliques.

Lack of Common Ground/Untenable Friendships

Apart from being 'in the same boat', many wives indicated that they had little else in common with most of the wives they met. Wives who put forward this opinion were generally respondents whom I met on more than one occasion, rather than interviewees, most of whom I met only once, and again I would argue that interviewees were too polite to tell me their 'horror stories' during a single meeting!

Cornwell found evidence of this pattern in her work *Hard-Earned Lives*, where public accounts of community life tended to be quite rosy, whereas private accounts (gained by re-interviewing) emphasised the over-riding importance (above community) of looking after oneself and one's own. (1984:48) Some comments which support this argument follow:

"I always think it's dangerous to stick a whole lot of women together who have nothing in common but their husbands' jobs" (Catherine, R3).

"When my husband first joined the RAF I phoned my sister and said 'I'm having to make friends with people I have nothing in common with and wouldn't normally have anything to do with'" (Janice, R4).

One interviewee spoke about 'forcing friendship', which amounts to the same thing. She said:

"I've found that I've had to sort of force a lot of friendships that perhaps I wouldn't have, how can I put it.....because you're on your own and you need all the friends you can get, you tend to perhaps put up with people and become more friendly with them than you perhaps would have done.....better than no friends!" (Karen, A7).

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I also found, from the interviewees/respondents and from personal experience, that wives do eventually fall into their 'natural' groups in time (with like-minded individuals), developing real friendships or highly rewarding contextual friendships where exclusive intimacy operates and all the functions of friendship are fulfilled. However, unlike living in 'civvy street', in a settled environment, as an RAF wife, lack of time can hamper this process.

Peer Pressure

The fear of being persuaded into roles and activities which do not suit them inhibits many wives from developing close friendships on the base. In Nicholson's study many wives complained of the imposition of other people's standards and behaviour upon themselves and their children, and the close scrutiny of their own ways and standards by others (1980:38). Some evidence of this sort of resentment was recorded in my study. For example, one respondent said she was made to feel 'different' because she didn't want to put her children to boarding school (Wendy, R15). Such examples are reminiscent of some of Foucault's work on surveillance.

Pressure of this kind can greatly inhibit the building of friendships on a military base, and effectively determine that some wives will not move beyond the aloofness strategy of friendship, for fear of being scrutinised, criticised, or expected to behave in a certain way.

Lack of Rapport with Husbands' Friends' Wives

Three interviewees mentioned the problems which can arise when they have nothing in common with the wives of their husbands' friends and vice versa:

> "....I think a lot of wives are thrown together because of the men.....I find as well, if I make civilian friends, say at the mother and toddler group, and the husband is a dustman or something, Tim's then out of his depth....." (Paula, O6).

> "You don't often meet a couple where the men and women are both friends..... it's only really half the couple you are friends with and the other one is usually a pain in the arse!" (Penny, O5).

"......with Syd's best friend......he expected me to have an instant rapport with his wife, but we didn't, you know......I think the men just think the women will just fall into a friendship like they have, but they forget that the men have probably known each other all through flying training and everything you know" (Amelia, O14).

Many wives effectively resented being expected to 'get on' with people they wouldn't have chosen for themselves as friends, and essentially kept these people at a distance, as acquaintances and within a strategy of aloofness.

Husband Absence during 'Family Time' (Weekends)

Several interviewees spoke of the difficulty they faced when (in the absence of family) they were on their own at the weekends and all their (RAF) friends had their husbands at home: how lonely it felt, as they were essentially being denied all the functions of friendship, which old friends and family can provide if they are accessible:

"At times when other families are together, you're on your own......" (Jenny, O7).

"I hardly ever see anybody at a weekend when he's always on 12 hour shifts, and that's when I'm like fedup, because he's working from 7 'til 7 or whatever, and I don't like to see people then because I know that their husbands are normally off or whatever......" (Betty, O8).

For wives whose husbands are regularly absent, friends and social life can take on a cyclical character, and are 'dropped' on a husband's return. This is seen by Chandler (1991:171) as a 'tacit rule of married quarters'. Whilst I did find evidence of this (as mentioned above), I also found that some wives felt their 'real' friends would be there for them whether their husbands were there or not (see also table 5.14, page 213).

'Running Home to Mum'

Given the above dilemmas which wives face during husband absence, there was found to be a great temptation to rush off to stay with parents or other relatives as soon as their husbands went away (where practical: which it is not when you live on a remote base or if you live across the water from your relatives).

This can however undermine commitment to RAF life, and leave wives in the position of having to re-establish routines and friendships on their return, which can be difficult, especially when friends have become accustomed to them not being there and have developed other friendships and interests.

One interviewee in this study encapsulates the problem, and for her the importance of resisting the temptation to go home at every opportunity, in order to become settled within the RAF community and the friendships and routines established, saying:

> "The trouble is a lot of people seem to like, if their husband goes away they get in the car and go to their mum's every time. But I've made a commitment that we live here, you know, your life's here, you've really got to keep the commitments going, especially with kids. I take Henry to mothers and toddlers and we go swimming and things like that, and it's important to keep the routine going" (Monique, A10).

Nicholson (1980:49) notes this tendency for wives to go 'home' whenever they can. (See also page 78, chapter 3.) This can undermine wives' commitment to the base as 'home', and hamper the development of friendships beyond the contextual stage, if there is no basis for the friendship other than say, the RAF or children the same age. This concept contains parallels to Kenyon's (1998) study of students and their understanding of 'home'.

Unpredictable Working Patterns

The unpredictability of the job can inhibit the building up of friendships, in that it can be difficult to plan social events around an erratic work schedule. One interviewee said:

> ".....Our friends are on different squadrons, and someone is always away..... We make plans and then someone changes timetables and we have to cancel things. I invited people round for dinner, then had a phone call at the last minute saying my husband was still in Italy" (Shirley, O3).

The vagaries of the job can thus effectively inhibit the development of meaningful friendships with other couples on the base.

<u>Managing Friendships with Civilians</u>

In agreement with my original projections, the data confirmed that it can be difficult to find any friends off the base, especially for wives at home with small children. The following table illustrates this finding.

Table 4.6 Friends away from the base

DO YOU HAVE ANY FRIENDS WHO LIVE OFF THE BASE?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
No, not in locality	3	8
Yes, from work	4	3
Just old friends who happen to live nearby	1	3
Yes, from mother and toddler/ante-natal	1	1
Yes, from church	2	-
Yes, non-RAF people working on the base	1	-
Yes, from going to community functions	1	2
Only RAF friends who live off base	3	-
Yes, because lived off base here before	-	1
TOTALS	16	18

Wives who worked off the base generally found it easier to make new friends who did not live on the base than those who did not. One interviewee had consciously made friends at an ante-natal group, whom she kept in touch with. There were several acknowledgements that it is good to have civilian friends (from the past or new friends) to get the balance right. An example follows:

> "I think you would get very blinkered if you just kept your air force friends..... I couldn't bear to not be able to have a conversation with somebody who's not in the air force, because when you've got friends who are in the air force you just talk about the same things all the time, and it's refreshing to chat to somebody else, put a different sort of view on life you know" (Sharon, O11).

A similar view is expressed by Jenny Simpson, who says "....we began to form a small but close circle of friends outside the SAS who meant more and more to us as the years rolled by.....my mates from years back......still kept me sane and took me out drinking when Ian was away......good, decent, ordinary people whose normality kept me in touch with reality" (1996:117). Reality in both of these cases seems to be related to exclusive intimacy, and telling people how 'it really is'.

There was also some acknowledgement in the data of the opposite side of this argument: that friends who are not involved with the RAF often don't understand the job (and this is an argument for operation of the core group/contextual friendship strategy, as a way of ensuring all functions of friendship are fulfilled, if by different friends). This lack of understanding by friends not familiar with your husband's occupation is mentioned in literature about occupational wives, for example, Solheim's work (1988) mentions the local community's lack of understanding of the work of Norwegian offshore oil workers. Being different from their civilian friends was also found by Macmillan (1984), Young (1993) and Nicholson (1980) to lead to wives associating more with people on the married patch/estate, who were in the same position as themselves. Friends on the 'outside', like kin, were not seen as being able to comprehend the unique situation incorporated wives are placed in. Civilian friends can also be too far away to see on a regular basis. Some comments on this subject from the data follow:

> "....if you tell civilians that you have to completely clean your house out.....I don't think a lot of people actually believe it.....and the fact that you're posted every two years as well" (Alison, O16).

> "....we tend to talk about different things and just things like I'll say that Simon's down route [abroad] and they'll say 'what?' Or like he's gone US [unserviceable], and you like lost them on the way sort of thing" (Monique, A10).

> "Most young mothers do not get left on their own to cope soon after the baby is born. Civilian friends would probably be horrified at the idea....." (Shirley, O3).

The following table shows the number of interviewees who said they relied mostly on RAF friends compared to those who said they relied on civilian friends, and those who managed to strike a balance between the two.

Table 4.7 Categories of friends

Category	RAF Friends	Civilian Friends	Balance	Totals
Officers' Wives	2	3	11	16
Airmen's Wives	6	7	5	18
Totals	8	10	16	34

There is evidence from this table to support previous research (for example Chandler 1987) that 'middle class' wives find it easier to manage friendships, with more than twice as many officers' wives than airmen's wives saying they had managed to strike a balance between RAF and civilian friends; 39% of airmen's wives relied on civilian friends, many of whom lived quite a distance away (see also pages 129-32 regarding befriending skills).

Whom to Trust

Another huge dilemma in living on a military base is whom to trust. Can you make the sort of friends you can confide in (in order to fulfil the third function of friendship: emotional support)? This research showed that there can be a trade off between proximity and trust. The fear of gossip seemed to put wives off confiding in people on the base, as also noted by Nicholson (1980). Some comments from my data follow:

> "I think.....well I don't say a lot of things to certain people because I think you know, well it's going to filter back to the people that Brian works with. But I can't say then, like to Monique, I can't say to her if I'm not feeling happy in a way, because well I think what if she tells Simon and he tells Brian.....That's what I feel here, that I don't have anybody that I can really talk to, because it's not.....it's not private" (Cassie, A11).

> "I don't have anybody that I can talk to. There isn't anybody on this base that I could really talk to....." (Sally, O2).

Writing about her experiences as a vicar's wife, Jane Grayshon (1996) mentioned a dilemma she faced (which was also mentioned by the Padre's wife (Sally) interviewed in this study), that vicar's wives are assumed not to 'need' friends, and accused of favouritism if they befriend parishioners; rather they are seen as dealing with the problems of others, and as a result can experience loneliness and lack a confidante. This dilemma was echoed by a senior officer's wife interviewed in this study (Mary, O1).

She said she was no longer invited round to people's houses for coffee on a rainy day because she was the station commander's wife.

One interviewee in my study (Jane, O4) said she would "phone her Mum" no matter what the problem was. Nicholson's study (1980) produced much evidence of the preference of wives to talk to family, regardless of distance (see also page 213, chapter 5).

Friends Moving on

Another unanticipated observation from my field diary was that some wives on a base have a circle of friends whereas some have one main friend, and then the question arises of what happens if that friend is posted away. One respondent expressed the opinion that tempting as it might be to have one 'best (or real) friend', "You can't afford to" (Sophie, R2), for that very reason. Even with a small circle of friends, a few can move away at the same time.

One respondent found herself on her own after her friend of one year moved away. She said "I guess we just hung around together.....and I don't find it easy getting to know people" (Patricia, R15). She struggled to motivate herself to start going out to meet new people after her friend left. Another respondent (Marge, R13) expressed her outrage that another wife who didn't normally give her the time day was constantly on her doorstep when all her 'best' friends were about to leave; she felt she was being used. Nicholson (1980) found evidence in her study of a naval base of 'using' friends being cited as a cause of friendships breaking down. Another interviewee (Paula, O6) commented from the opposite side of the argument, saying:

> "Lots of my friends were posted out within two months. One minute I had a busy social life, lots of people over for coffees and lunch, and the next they're all gone. And people don't think, oh she's lost all her friends.....they don't think to make an effort".

This seems like quite an ambitious expectation: that other wives will rally round when your friends are posted and you are feeling lonely and lacking all the functions of friendship. Paula's grievance therefore appears to have an underlying tone of annoyance with the air force, and the posting system.

Fatigue with the Friendship Process

Amongst wives who had extensive experience of RAF life, and the continual process of making new friends, there was a strong sense of feeling 'jaded'. This can lead to adopting a strategy of withdrawal or aloofness. One interviewee said:

> "I have kept in touch with most of the friends that I was close with at Selbray, and I haven't made any really close friends like that here. Not in the same way. I know a lot of people but I don't know anybody that well" (Lucy, A9).

One interviewee (Amy, A18) made the point that as long as you make one true friend in each posting you can get by. But, as mentioned above, if that friend moves on within your posting, you have to start again. Fatigue, sheer weariness with re-telling their life stories and starting again only to have to say goodbye, was seen by most of the interviewees and respondents involved in my study as one of the hardest parts of friendship within a military environment. Examples follow:

> "I really have to push myself to make friends now. I feel like why bother, because I'm just going to go off and leave them again. I find I'm much more family oriented now, sort of happier within my own state" (Vanda, A14).

> "Sometimes when you move to a new place you think 'oh I don't think I can be bothered to start all this again'. You know, you think oh, all that effort again .....You get so upset when you make good friends and you have to part again. And then you sit on your own for a while and then you think 'I can't stand this any longer', and have to go out and make friends" (Anthea, O15).

In sum, the unavoidable reality of making friends, only to lose them again (the nature of contextual friendship), coupled with the basic need for sociability and the other functions of friendship, appears to pose the greatest dilemma in terms of how to manage RAF friendship careers. One practice, observed amongst RAF wives, which might be seen as a coping mechanism in the face of continually losing friends, is that wives who are close friends generally say on parting that they will keep in touch and visit regularly, whilst in practice this does not always happen (as discussed above).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the demands of RAF life ensure that friendship is vitally important to RAF wives. In the military, as has been shown, the whole friendship process is however short-circuited in the interests of available time, and misunderstandings about the unwritten rules of friendship arise, due to cultural differences and different ideas about various matters.

Whether wives 'sink or swim' has much to do with their ability to manage friendships, and as demonstrated not all wives possess these skills in equal measure, and some evidence of the patterns discerned in previous friendship studies, of working class/middle class disparities were noted in this study, in the form of differences between the friendship skills of wives of non-commissioned and commissioned personnel (although these were not observed in every case and were not significant in any case). Personality, personal circumstances and life course stage were also found to play a part in determining befriending skills and friendship strategies adopted. Friendship as an RAF wife emerged from this study as a balancing act, in which wives derive support from wherever they can get it, at any particular point in their lives.

The 'new' rules or approach emerging from this study, which would make life easier for RAF wives (if they could work them out in advance!) are:

1. Having realistic expectations and fostering a pragmatic rather than nostalgic approach to friendship. Rooting friendships firmly in the present and within the context in which they are formed (Allan 1989) and accepting that because friends are not as freely chosen as in civilian life there will be a natural process of fall-out (when there is nothing to bind people together, and the relationship is purely contextual) as people move on.

2. Making do with acquaintances until the right (contextual or real) friends come along, to avoid the difficulties associated with untenable friendships, and misunderstandings and misplaced trust associated with fair weather friends; wives will fall into natural groupings (for example extroverts, intellectuals, sporty types) given time (some wives do however seem to get no further than making acquaintances, and stick with strategies of aloofness or withdrawal).

3. Retaining a core group of friends from some stage in the past (which could feasibly be added to), providing for the confirmation of identity function of friendship.

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Applying such rules obviously would not be straightforward. As shown in this chapter, wives with some previous experience of RAF life seem to fare better at deciphering the 'rules' of RAF friendship.

Following the 'rules' does however come at the expense of roots and lasting friendships (which tends to really become an issue when preparing to leave the RAF, and trying to decide where to settle: which will be discussed further in chapter 5). Rooting friendships in the present is not easy for another reason: that it seems to be at odds with the tendency for identities to be more stable where they have fixed and given points of reference in a rapidly changing world. For RAF wives, the alternative to applying such 'rules', as shown above, is overloaded networks, having a foot in too many camps, fatigue, withdrawal and sadness.

Another barrier to applying such rules is that participating in acquaintance circles can be very unfulfilling, with no background information on which to base a friendship (where inclusive intimacy prevails). Loneliness caused by such superficiality can lead wives to 'latch on' to the wrong people, or to the wrong people 'latching on' to them. Superficiality rarely seems to bring satisfaction, and as mentioned above, provides no opportunity to 'be yourself'.

Throughout this study I have felt a deep sense of the hollowness and unreality of most RAF friendships, and the lack of real friendships on RAF bases. Especially interesting is the fact that many interviewees and respondents' initial impressions of RAF bases had been of friendliness and sociability, but, after the first rush of enthusiasm (such as the Road Representative calling with a pack, or the meet and greet meeting) there might be no follow up, and what may have seemed like offers of friendship might not materialise.

A friend is a friend only to the extent that he/she considers you one, and this argument comes into play when people that wives thought would keep in touch with them actually don't, because of differential expectations, and the friendship remains rooted within the context where it was formed.

Another point (which supports a rigid application of the above rules to avoid pain) is that when wives do meet a 'kindred spirit' or real friend, they generally have to move on and leave her behind, and as demonstrated throughout this chapter, wives become tired with going through this process and sometimes try to insulate themselves from the pain of partings by trying not to become involved (although loneliness at a new station can lead to breaking this resolve). It is also difficult to keep in touch with a core group as often as most wives would like to, although technology like e-mail has made day to day contact easier than in the past.

A final but crucial point, which relates to Marks' inclusive intimacy theory, is that much evidence points to the conclusion that the majority of wives do not admit that RAF life is tough, and the wearing of such a 'mask' (or adherence to the inclusive intimacy style of friendship) inhibits the development of deep friendships between wives. To support this point, most of the RAF magazines which relate to wives focus much more on community in a very positive way, and give the impression of a united front. Any negative letters or articles tend to be related to conditions of the job (such as husband absence or moving house). There is no reference to friendship, perhaps because it easier and more comfortable to project an image of solidarity and comradeship.

The level of access I have had to RAF life during this study has however revealed quite a different picture. Friendship, as an RAF wife living on a military base, whilst having the potential to be rich and diverse, is not easy, but this is not readily admitted, especially to other RAF wives. One interviewee in this study made a very significant point when she said:

"......if only people would admit how they really feel" (Cassie, A11).

This comment, I believe, encompasses most of the difficulties faced in developing and maintaining friendships as an RAF wife.

Introduction

Community has always been an area of concern in human societies. As stated by Wellman and Wortley (1990:558) "The conditions under which members of a community help each other has worried humanity ever since Cain first raised the matter" ["...Am I my brother's keeper?" Genesis 4:9 NIV].

The main arguments put forward in this chapter, and indeed the main findings from my research on RAF community are firstly that all wives experience community in the RAF setting (and particularly in married quarters), but in different ways and at different levels; as observed in Williamson's (1982) study of a mining village, the community experienced and understood by RAF wives is wider than the infrastructure (which is nonetheless important in providing a community framework) provided by the institution. Secondly, wives have a great deal of choice about how they experience and indeed how involved they become in that community; far from popular images of military wives as 'appendages' to their husbands, this study found women making real decisions about their lives on an everyday basis. In the context of my research I observed almost universal recognition on the part of wives that they do face dilemmas in finding their 'niche' on the RAF base, and also frustration that as soon as they have become nicely settled on one base they generally have to start again on another. Some wives really seem to need a high level of involvement, *inter alia* to compensate for the lack of other sources of support and sociability in their lives (old friends, family, and permanent residence), especially when living on isolated bases; they invite vast numbers of people into their homes and go along to everything they can. Others use the RAF community as a 'safety net', to be relied upon as and when required, and can feel invaded if that privacy is threatened by what could be viewed as superficial intimacy, and some actively avoid involvement with activities run by or relating to the RAF. This could be described as a continuum of 'community' involvement or integration, and this concept is explored further in chapter 6.

Thirdly, the cohesiveness of RAF communities (which hinges very much on wives' willingness to participate and is undermined today by increased emphasis on career and private house ownership) appears to be associated with giving people what they want or need. This ties in with Bauman's (1990) theme that attempts to 'create' community are likely to fail unless they match with people's aspirations and images of how they want to live their lives; responding to ground level requests, wives pulling together and making the most of what is available to them (what could be described as 'playing the game': discussed further below), and the institution treading a fine line between community provision and intrusion into privacy. As in the previous two chapters, a strong sense of the difference between the experience of RAF wives and that of their husbands was observed. Obviously their needs are very different, and the community experienced on an everyday level by RAF wives comes across as a very different place to the community inhabited by their husbands (as perceived by wives; husbands were not included in this study). This will be explored in detail below.

Fourthly, and very important in the process of understanding how wives deal with being part of quite unusual community arrangements, it was found that those wives who were most content with the lifestyle appeared to have learned to 'play the game', and champion instant membership of a community, and relatively quick formation of supportive (if relatively superficial) friendships, above deeper relationships based on shared histories. 'Game playing' is explained succinctly in relation to this study by Manning's interpretation of Goffman's work, when he refers to "the practical knowledge of how to carry on in social situations" (Manning 1992:79). Also, and particularly interesting here, are Tannen's views as articulated by Layder, that women are geared more towards forms of involvement and seeking rapport with others than men, and that it is possible that seeking to manipulate others by promoting solidarity and trust (involvement with others) is no less manipulation because of it (Layder 1997:56).

Many people do find military life exciting, and perpetual moving to be almost addictive (Jolly, 1992). Previous experience of military life, as a child or a servicewoman, appeared to greatly assist this process. As Jolly (1997:8) said "....you know heaps of people, and you have to know heaps of people, so your energy is into breadth....".

Also observed was a certain sense of resigned acceptance that in order to have these supportive relationships on a base, a degree of privacy must be sacrificed. Added to this was a belief in a community larger than any particular base, (that is, location was not a crucial factor) to which they felt they belonged, as well as some acknowledgement of the way people on RAF bases react to adversity (such as war), by bonding more closely together than they otherwise would. Acceptance of the nature of RAF life was nonetheless tinged with sadness in most cases: sadness at a sense of rootlessness, and also fear of leaving the RAF; that having become accustomed to social expectations on a military base they would struggle to develop an identity outside the RAF environment.

It is important to mention here that unlike the more personal topics of marriage and friendship (on which research participants are expected to be cagey), on the more wide-ranging subject of community, wives in my study were much more eager to 'have their say' (especially when that involved voicing opinions about the RAF!).

In examining the evidence, following a brief resume of previous research and definitional problems regarding community, the basic elements required to promote the existence of community (as well as the futility of trying to manufacture community) will be explored, and an estimation attempted of the extent to which RAF bases 'measure up'. It should be emphasised that whilst existing literature has provided invaluable reference material for this study, none of the texts actually captures the particular community I am concerned with.

An investigation of the issue of community, as experienced and vocalised by interviewees and other respondents in this study will then be undertaken. Essentially, in line with the arguments outlined above, this chapter will seek to ascertain why community is important to RAF wives, to what extent it affects, enhances or detracts from their overall quality of life, whether in fact they think it exists in the military context at all, and what form it takes, in the minds and experience of individuals, and of the sample collectively. Quantitative analysis will be included where possible, to augment the qualitative data. The central section of this chapter will comprise six sections on the subjects of privacy/participation; homogeneity; community time; his and her community; channels of support, and the RAF community: wives' perceptions. Within these sections, facilitators of community (such as trust, support and organised activities) and inhibitors of community (such as malicious gossip, rank segregation and unwelcome invasion of privacy), as well as the ways in which activities such as gossip can act (as surveillance: Foucault, 1977) to produce community by policing what is acceptable and what is not, will be considered, as well as the extent to which the RAF community is a reality: either in terms of an individual base or as an overall entity encompassing the whole institution. In presenting the data every effort will be made to convey the diversity which RAF wives experience: individually and collectively, and the tensions, contradictions and ambiguities inherent in that experience. There will inevitably be some overlap and cross-referencing between this chapter and the previous two chapters on friendship and marriage.

Defining Community

Amongst others, Cohen says that community is a term which is bandied about in everyday usage, apparently understandable to speaker and listener, but causing difficulty when imported to social science (1985:12). In the introduction to Cohen's 1985 book *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Hamilton provides a useful overview of the idea of community. He says community is one of the 'key ideas' of the social sciences and that as a concept it gives us a way of encompassing a variety of social processes and an idea which has more than technical meaning because it refers to symbols, values and ideologies which have popular relevance.

He goes on to assert that because people <u>believe</u> in the notion of community: as an ideal or as a reality (and sometimes both at once), it is real in its consequences for them.

Definitional debates about community have evolved and changed over the past two centuries. Briefly, German theorist Tonnies introduced two terms in the 19th century to denote community and the lack of community. Gemeinshaft was associated with rural living and relationships were seen as intimate, enduring and based on a clear idea of each person's position in society. Kinship and the church were a fundamental part of gemeinshaft societies.

Gesellshaft was seen as the opposite of community: as industrialised, impersonal, calculative and contractual. Louis Wirth (1938) continued this debate, and like Simmel (1903), he put forward the argument that where we live deeply affects how we live; that rural areas differ significantly from cities, not just in relation to environment, but also because patterns of behaviour are different.

By the 1950s this rural/urban dichotomy was being questioned. Urban studies were starting to show similar patterns to rural studies. The most famous and celebrated study is that of Young and Willmott (1957) in Bethnal Green, which was found to be a stable environment, albeit in the heart of London. In addition, as early as 1960 Young and Willmott reported that close-knit social networks could be maintained over long distances by phone and regular visits. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, community implies the existence of formal and informal structures and arrangements, which can feasibly be 'dipped into' without forming any meaningful attachments. Social network on the other hand is associated with the idea of personal community and deep friendship attachments (and is discussed further on page 174).

The 1970s saw a decline in community studies, following the demise of the urban/rural dichotomy. Newby (1994) says something has been lost as a result: that sociology lost its position at the cutting edge of social change. Today, with the revival in community studies (which started in the 1980s), definitional problems still abound.

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Crow and Allan (1994) conducted in-depth analyses of existing community studies. They acknowledge that community has many meanings, not all of which can be explored here. One definition involves looking at Cohen's (1987) work, which contends that the word 'community' suggests members of a group having something in common with each other, distinguishing them in a significant way from members of other groups. As also observed in this study, communities appear to be defined not only by relations between relatively homogeneous members, but also by relations between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', who are distinguished by their difference and exclusion from the community in question and the psycho-dynamics of community. Gossip and disapproval can actively construct the boundaries (or police norms) between those included and those excluded from the community.

Community is essentially seen as a way of describing and accounting for our lives and experiences which is not neutral, but is selective and partial by necessity (limited by time and opportunity). Blau and Schwartz (1984:198) support this claim, saying that "People's associates depend in part on their own preferences and in part on the kinds of persons they have an opportunity to meet in the place where they live and work". This point has significant relevance to living on a military base, where practically the only people wives come into contact with are other wives and military personnel.

Looking for Community

Moving on to the conditions and actions required to foster community, the issues of time, location, symbolic boundaries, homogeneity/heterogeneity, policing of norms, values and behaviour, the privatisation issue, and social behaviour in times of adversity, should be considered.

Community time is a subject which has been studied in depth by Crow and Allan (1995) and relates both to time of day (when it is and is not appropriate to make noise or call on a neighbour) and to the passage of time (allowing time to pass before calling on a new neighbour, or before complaining about an act committed by a neighbour).

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Time is an issue which is quite salient in military communities: both in terms of time of day, as social norms observed on military bases tend to reinforce such rules, and also the passage of time, because sociability tends to be 'speeded up' on military bases due to short tenure and the resultant need to establish contacts more quickly than in 'civvy street'.

With regard to location, community is not always associated entirely with place and not all communities are territorial communities (Crow and Allan 1994). This assertion is echoed by Wellman (1994) and Urry (2000), who claim (like Young and Willmott 1957) that networks have extended beyond living and working environments. Jamieson (1998) makes an important point in asserting that the term social network in itself recognises that important personal relationships may not be gathered together in one place under the umbrella of community. Interestingly, it has been argued that people moving on does not seem to diminish locality (Crow and Allan 1994, Bulmer 1986). Cohen (1982:7) agrees when he says "The strength of local culture....does not necessarily diminish as the locality becomes increasingly precarious". In the longer term however, out-migration is likely to make it difficult to sustain community traditions (Crow and Allan, 1994).

This argument is particularly relevant in a military environment, where part of the tradition is moving out and moving in: the result is that the same 'type' of people (seasoned nomads) are moving in all the time, and 'community traditions' are wider than a particular base, so some sense of continuity is sustained. Change is continuous, communities like these are essentially rootless and a kind of tenuous continuity is preserved (Jolly 1992:69).

Symbolic boundaries are important in the definition of community, as these boundaries show that geographical presence is only part of the overall picture (Crow and Allan 1994). As Cohen (1982) has also demonstrated, what it takes to be 'one of us' varies immensely from place to place and between social groups. This will become clear in terms of the military community as I move on to discuss issues such as rank, below. Cohen contends that the reality of community lies in its members' perception of the vitality of its culture (whether or not the structural boundaries remain intact).

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In terms of this study, it has been found that individually and collectively, enthusiastic wives, as well as HIVE organisers and wives associations, serve to promote the vitality of the culture associated with RAF communities.

The institution itself provides certain enabling structures such as housing, buildings (such as community centres, churches, thrift shops and nurseries), salaried staff and newsletters, but the people: and notably the wives, in building the substance of their daily lives around these basic provisions, provide 'meat on the bones' of community life. Consequently, as will become clear below, it becomes reasonably difficult to distinguish which features of the community observed and described result from the action of the employing organisation (hereafter described as formal community relations) and which are attributable to the input of wives themselves (hereafter described as informal community relations), as in Williamson's 1982 study of Throckley, where he found it impossible 'to disentangle cleanly that which reflected the action of the coal company and that which evolved from the men' (1982:62).

The importance of viewing studies of community as encompassing and being representative of the whole spectrum of social life is a feature of many community studies; this is however something which is never achieved on a military base. Also seen as important in the study of community is the fact that communities are not natural, but dependent on the presence of factors such as co-operation between members, and policing of norms, values and behaviour: much of which is seen as undertaken by women. This is not necessarily seen as an empowering activity, and could in fact be argued to be a burden. As demonstrated in this thesis, women living on a married 'patch' have a burden for the maintenance of community which is more complex than any text consulted has suggested. Wellman (1994:82) argues that with the "privatisation and domestication of community", women take on the role of 'community keeping' alongside 'kin keeping', with the result that men's ties have become subsumed with women's ties.

Wellman argues that privatisation, and the resulting emphasis on the home rather than activities outside the home, such as the pub, means there are fewer opportunities for casual encounters with friends and therefore fewer opportunities for the sort of male solidarity featured in earlier community studies. Wellman's view provides valuable insights into civilian home life, but this study, which focuses on living in married quarters, contradicts Wellman's view. Married quarters are situated near the workplace and maintained by the employer and there are ample opportunities for male solidarity.

Wives' experience is very different to that of their husbands in most areas of RAF life. In the RAF, the imperative for total job commitment, coupled with encouragement of a bachelor ethos in the workplace (especially on detachments) seems to lead to RAF servicemen having a foot in two camps. In other words, wives are busy building and maintaining social networks, into which husbands can be included when they are at home, but equally importantly, husbands build their own 'mono-sex networks' (Marshall, 1990) which come into play when they are away from home.

The nature of the military working environment promotes a bachelor ethos, and laddish culture, which is evident at official dinners (for example in the form of silly games and food fights) and detachments, where all participants are bound by 'detachment rules', not to report anything untoward which happens while they are away. Naturally, wives can feel excluded from this very male world, and the scope of the military community and how they experience it was found to be very different to that of their husbands: in common with previous studies of occupational wives and also of mining and other communities dominated by male occupations. For example, this situation was found to apply to Warwick and Littlejohn's (1992) study of West Yorkshire mining villages, where they found "a domestic division of labour which carries memories of the old male dominance ...." and that ".....male dominance still exists, even if it is not accompanied by the necessity for women to be completely imprisoned in the household" (1992:130-131).

All these arguments raise interesting questions in relation to the RAF married patch, where in order to belong, community co-operation is certainly required with other members, and women can be observed to police norms, values and behaviour. This can become a burden both for those doing the policing and those who are being policed. Privatisation, in terms of the military community, does not operate in quite the same way, because of the level of visibility members face in living on a base (others know where they work, what they earn, where they live). Male solidarity is enabled to flourish in the military community in a way it might not outside. This will be explored further by drawing on interviewees'/respondents' experience and perceptions of living off the military base.

Finally, it is a finding of virtually all community studies that community spirit is heightened in times of adversity: when there is an outside threat to members of the community or to the way of life generally (for example war, or mass unemployment, as in mining villages). Military communities are no exception to this rule. Interviewees and respondents reported times when the community had pulled together to face a tragedy or the possible loss of loved ones, only to revert back to 'normal' when the threat had passed.

How does the RAF Measure up?

To summarise what has been outlined above, RAF bases, as observed and talked about during my study, do contain most of the elements exhibited by the majority of civilian communities, but important differences are observable, and serve to illustrate the complicated (and arguably obstacle-laden) nature of membership of such communities.

Firstly, community time plays a major role on RAF bases, most saliently in the way that there is not sufficient time available to observe the usual social niceties of waiting for people to speak to you. In the words of many of my respondents and interviewees, 'you just have to get on with it, or you'd sit in the house all day and go mad'.

Secondly, location plays only a small part in the fostering of community on RAF bases. Wives in this study did express preferences about particular bases, and said some bases (notably small and isolated bases) were better 'communities' than others, but overall there seemed to be acknowledgement that the RAF community stretched beyond the confines of any base or locality. This largely ties in with Willmott's (1986) 'community of attachment', and Lee and Newby's (1983) 'communion', which are described *inter alia* in terms of people's community sentiments, and shared identity. In the RAF world, this wider sense of community appears for some wives to serve to cushion the effects of constant relocation. In addition, reputations appear to be built up and passed on within this wider community, of friendly bases and roads, which successive residents take a pride in preserving. By the same token, the reputations of individuals and families can follow them around from base to base, if they come into contact with people who knew them before. Two illustrations follow. My neighbour at RAF Culswick was reluctant to talk to me at first because she had heard that I was friendly with her neighbour on the other side: who she didn't like because she was 'bone idle!' (Janine, R1). On moving to RAF Culswick I became friendly with a lady about whom I had heard much negative gossip at RAF Blyton. I decided to give her the benefit of the doubt, only to find out that all the gossip was true and that I was in the uncomfortable situation of having to try to extricate myself from the friendship!

The culture on RAF bases is maintained by those wives who invest time and effort in their community. This fits with Warwick and Littlejohn's work on mining communities, where the term 'local cultural capital' (1992:130) is used to describe the informal culture into which people are socialised and trained to think about appropriate behaviour and informal obligations, such as to be supportive to others.

Thirdly, RAF communities cannot claim to be representative of the full spectrum of social life, and this could be seen as a weakness in such living arrangements, and a way in which military bases are 'cosseted' and protected from the ravages of the outside world.

Fourthly, policing of norms, values and behaviour is evident on military bases (particularly on the part of wives), and can be viewed by some wives both as a burden and as an invasion of their privacy. Privatisation does not appear as evident as it is reported to be outside military life, and male solidarity appears to be alive and well in the military in a way it might not be observed to be in civilian life!

Finally, in times of adversity the RAF community reacts in a similar way to any civilian community. These arguments will be developed further below, in presenting the evidence.

Participation: at the Expense of Privacy?

A theme will be developed here, and expanded in the next section (and in chapter 6), regarding the way RAF wives are encouraged to participate in RAF-organised activities and events and how they strike a balance (or not as the case may be) between participation in the RAF community, (both formal and informal community relations) and maintenance of a degree of privacy, or, as expressed by several interviewees and respondents: 'a life of their own'. This section will expand this theme by looking at social control and the concept of public and private domains.

To start at the point when a wife arrives at a military base, popular images would encourage her to believe that she will experience instant membership of the 'military community', although, as discussed in chapter 4 (see page 105), the terms and conditions of membership are at best obscure, and at worst very difficult to interpret. The Spring 2000 issue of the RAF wives' magazine *Corridors* mentions the dilemma wives face regarding involvement. The chairwoman, Amanda Batin says:

> "Whilst the concept of community responsibility may be considered outmoded in
> civilian life, anyone who has married a serving member of the Armed Forces will
> have found that they have instantly become part of the military community. It can
> sometimes be claustrophobic and some people choose to maintain lives as separate
> as possible from the service environment" (No. 9:2).

She goes on to say that for families, community is most visible in the married patch. Examples of homes on the married patch at RAF Blyton follow.

Plate 1 Examples of married quarters at RAF Blyton

AN OFFICER'S QUARTER

AN AIRMAN'S QUARTER

The fact that many wives feel they cannot or will not fit into the categories they perceive as relating to RAF wives (the most salient being that of mother at home with young children) brings attention to the sociological debate on insiders and outsiders, and the ways in which community can be exclusive as well as inclusive. My research provided evidence that just not knowing the RAF 'ways' or not knowing the 'right people' can seem crippling to a newly arrived wife on a base, and that fear of making the wrong moves can inhibit action. As Cohen (1987) explains, most of what is symbolically significant to an insider can be invisible to an outsider.

Progress in becoming an insider (where this is the desired outcome) can be made through inroads into social networks, which, on a military base, would tend to conform to Bott's (1957) category of 'close-knit' social networks (where most of an individual's associates know each other, and where increased social pressure, social control and role segregation in marriage are seen as by-products), as opposed to the other category of 'loose-knit' social networks (where most of the constituent members do not know each other). The networks of RAF wives are arguably more complicated than most civilians, because on arriving at a new RAF base they take with them an active social network or 'personal community', the participants within which are not all readily accessible in geographical terms, but are nevertheless important. They rely on their strong ties (which are essentially related to the past) until they establish some new ones.

Establishing new links usually involves taking part in activities on the military base and thus starting the process of learning the 'rules' and being accepted. In the RAF, length of residence can be fairly short in civilian terms (on average 2 ½ to 4 years), but several interviewees spoke of length of residence giving them increased status on certain bases, and of the insecurity they felt on leaving that base and going back to the 'bottom rung of the ladder'.

The data collected contains a strong sense that involvement in organised activities on an RAF base is very much tied up with the location and size of the base (and resultant outside opportunities for social activities), previous experience (some wives do adopt a 'once bitten, twice shy' approach if they feel they have been badly treated in the past), life course stage and personal disposition.

Wives painted an interesting picture regarding participation on an RAF base. Probably one of the most revealing statements recorded was made by a respondent (Janine, R1), who said "....it's all there [the social infrastructure] but it won't come to you". In a similar vein, Maclean, in her PhD thesis shows how belonging in the Highland parish she studied was intrinsically linked to commitment to the area and "taking part" (1997:262). In addition, insider status is open to negotiation, and may be based on other grounds than length of residence, such as participation (Crow, Allan and Summers 2001). The aforementioned studies make mention of initial suspicion of newcomers for fear that more than taking part, they will 'take over'. I would argue that because of the issue of relocation, which affects all wives on a military base, 'taking over' is not normally a crucial issue on a military base.

Since nothing is 'permanent', the sense gained within my research is that if wives do not like the way something is run they withdraw from it without making waves, with the attitude that they can try again on the next base. Another interesting observation was made by an interviewee who said that it is left to wives to get involved: that husbands don't help (Melissa, A5), largely because they are heavily involved in their work and leave wives to 'get on with it'. Those two viewpoints lead directly towards the conclusion that wives have responsibility for seeking out and organising their own social lives on (or off) the base.

Settling in

To gain a general overview of how wives felt about becoming involved on a new base, the following table sets out wives' responses to that question.

Table 5.1 Ease of participation on RAF bases

How easy is it to start participating socially on an RAF base?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Difficult, no-one comes. One-sided. You have to make all the effort *	1	3
You have to go out and find things for yourself	2	2
Easier within the church	2	1
Thought it would be easier. *	-	3
Easier than it would be in civvy street	-	2
Easier to join clubs and groups than outside: no long waiting lists	-	2
Difficult without children *	-	2
Husbands don't help *	2	-
Difficult to begin with *	1	1
Ready made social life	1	1
What you make it yourself	1	1
Easier when you know someone	1	-
Easier with children	1	-
'Old hands' don't welcome you *	1	-
Takes 6 months	1	-
People only come round if they want something *	1	-
Some bases are very welcoming, some are not	1	-
Difficult with older children *	-	1
TOTALS	16	18

* negative answer

A wide range of responses were recorded, reiterating the point made above, that individual circumstances and experience dictate what will happen at a new base. Wives generally appeared to take a pragmatic approach to settling in at a new base, with 16/34 wives (47%) giving a negative answer.

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The general finding from this question was that, as expressed in table 5.1 (in the form of 6 wives saying either that it is what you make it yourself or that you have to go out and find things for yourself) the individual responses of wives to RAF life in large part shapes their experience of it, and whether in fact they see the base as a community. These sentiments are expressed in the following quotes from interviewees:

> "......I don't think that people are particularly pushy or like nosey here, whereas you know, if you want to be part of it you can be, but it's up to you to get involved" (Betty, O8).

> "......I think it's difficult for anyone to walk in, unless they know somebody.....But I do think they have to go out and do a little bit themselves" (Sally, O2).

> "I'm the type of person that I just really get on with anybody. Like some people come with the attitude that they're absolutely going to hate it, and don't want to mix, but that seems a bit silly if you want to live life where you are; so I just get on and mix as best I can" (Gwen, A15).

Organised Activities/Dissemination of Information

Moving on to the actual activities and information available to wives on an RAF base, the following table illustrates wives' opinions, involvement and utilisation of what is available to them. More than one response was recorded in many instances.

Table 5.2 Opinion of/involvement in social activities on the base

What do you think of social provision/do you get involved in many social activities on the base?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Everything is laid on for you - if you want it	9	13
Welcome pack is useful in telling you where everything is and what's on	8	10
The HIVE is a good facility	4	5
You have to go along to things or you'd sit at home and go mad	3	8
Go to more because it's a small/isolated base	2	5
Husbands are useless at passing on newsletters and other information	3	2
Don't go to wives doos - don't want to go out without husband	1	2
Difficult to do much if you work/study full-time	2	-
You're not a part of the community unless you take part in it	2	-
A lot of effort is made to provide what people want - to fit around school etc.	2	-
Deliberate decision to move onto the base to meet people	1	-
People don't read newsletters	1	-
Monthly bulletin is useful	-	1
TOTALS	38	46

The most salient point from this table is that nearly two thirds of wives (63%) recognise that there is a significant amount of social provision on an RAF base, and also that effort is made on the part of the institution to help families settle in, by providing welcome information on arrival (51%). In line with one of my main arguments in this chapter, many (but not all) wives acknowledged that effort was required on their part to go along to things in order to be part of the community, even if many activities were not strictly speaking their 'scene'. The following extracts from transcripts illustrate this point:

"Last night when we were trying to organise things for the wives thing, we were like going 'we could have a cheese and wine evening', and things like that, which I quite enjoy, although at first I thought it wouldn't really be my scene, it's like mother and toddler groups aren't, but you've got to sort of make do with what you've got and make it work for you, and I must admit I've had quite a good laugh at some of the things you know" (Monique, A10).

".....because they're not a part of the community unless they take part in it. But that to me is their privilege. You know, I think it works better if you do take part in things, because you miss out on an awful lot....." (Sally, O2).

Reinforcing this point, Jolly (1992) says that the wives' network on a military base is an effective social system, but that you have to *want* to belong. She goes on to say that nowadays fewer women want to be organisers, with many pursuing their own careers and living away from the military base, in line her argument that 'civilianisation' of the military family is taking place, and started in earnest with home-buying (1987:111). She says many women in their 20s and 30s go through an active phase on the base during child-rearing, and then they go back to work. Evidence of such a pattern was observed in some instances during this study.

Jolly made a comment about the 'wrong' sort of people being put in positions of authority on a military base (in effect running the risk of a bad reputation for that activity/committee developing), which lines up with a finding from this study that activities, groups and clubs on bases can build up reputations, which successive wives can feel obligated to preserve or improve; in effect building up the bricks of social structure (Jerrome 1984). Jolly said:

"I think you often get women volunteering who are attention seekers if you know what I mean, who want a bit of limelight, and who are not necessarily the best person, which is quite dangerous sometimes. I think you actually do occasionally get people, particularly in welfare positions who are quite unsuited, and that's worrying.....you actually have somebody you know running a HIVE or doing something, and the net result is that it just loses credibility" (1997:11).

A parallel argument was raised by an interviewee in my study, who emphasised the benefits of the 'right' person being put in a position of authority:

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"......if they're a person that's outward going, and that would get involved in things, I think they miss out then [by not living on the base]. They miss out, and I think the people on the base miss out, from their point of view as well, because somebody that's outward going, that's willing to do things, can contribute an awful lot, you know, to others, I feel. But if you just want your privacy.....but it depends on the person, doesn't it?" (Sally, O2).

Another significant point is that a great deal of information is produced and distributed to wives: there is usually a monthly bulletin from the HIVE or from the 'boss's wife', outlining what is going on on the base that month, there is generally a more glossy monthly or sometimes quarterly station magazine relating to station activities, but more to do with the RAF itself and what's going on in particular sections and squadrons. In addition, various other magazines are available, usually at the HIVE, giving information about RAF wives and families (in particular *Corridors*, the official magazine of the Association of RAF Wives) and military families generally. There is also an RAF wives' survey, carried out by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, which is sent out randomly to 2000 women twice a year, and on which a yearly report is produced. Interestingly, in the 1996 report, the principal areas of dissatisfaction according to the wives' survey were lack of information and support, and social facilities.

Most wives in this study acknowledged the existence of a welcome pack when they moved into a quarter, although they generally valued a visit by a road representative or neighbour to actually tell them about the base. With regard to other information, looking at table 5.2, there are some interesting comments about dissemination of information. The point that husbands do not always pass on information appears to be a valid one. Sometimes newsletters and information about functions are routed via husbands, and some comments were recorded regarding husbands not passing information on, or about wives finding out about a function the day after it had taken place. To the question of whether husbands are poor at passing on information, one interviewee replied:

"They are, and if you don't keep asking, is there a letter from the Wing Commander's wife this month, because she usually sends one, you know, I haven't had it, and if you keep on nagging, and eventually oh yes, it will turn up at the bottom of the briefcase" (Mary, O1).

Another point from table 5.2 is the complaint that wives do not read information passed to them. An instance was recorded of a wife complaining that there was nothing on for working wives when in fact two evening functions a month were scheduled, to cater for working wives. The following comment illustrates this point:

> "I think this is one of our biggest grumbles actually, the executive wives if you like, that you advertise whatever it is you're doing, but you don't get people to read what is there when it comes through their doors, and they just throw it in the bin, and then they'll complain, 'oh I didn't know so and so was happening' " (Mary, O1).

Privacy

The following tables set out reactions to the question of whether living in quarters does in fact infringe on your privacy.

Table 5.3 Do quarters affect privacy

Does living in quarters affect your privacy?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Yes	11	11
No	5	7
TOTALS	16	18

Table 5.4 How is privacy affected

In what ways does living in quarters affect your privacy?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Can't get away from husband's work	1	2
Worse on small camps	-	3
No confidentiality, everybody knows what you earn etc.	1	1
People make assumptions about you/think you're fair game to be gossiped about	-	2
Keep themselves to themselves (form of protection)	-	2
There is no privacy, but it's not a worry	-	1
Double-edged sword. Nice to be recognised in the street. Can't let your hair down on the base	1	-
Difficult to maintain confidentiality as a Padre	1	-
Your house is not your own	1	-
What you lose in privacy you gain in support	1	-
It would be the same in any small community	1	-
What you lose in privacy you gain in security	1	-
Thin walls. If you did gossip.....	1	-
A shock, but people do care	1	-
Worse than anonymity outside. People know all about you even if you're not friends	1	-
TOTALS	11	11

A wide range of responses were recorded, revealing interesting tensions at the heart of this sense of community on RAF bases, ranging from acknowledgement of the benefits gained at the expense of privacy, and that any small community would involve similar surrender of the right to remain anonymous, through to total resentment of infringement of privacy.

Existing studies of community and of occupational wives help to expand on this dilemma; Young and Willmott stressed the importance of privacy and of 'your home being your own' (1957:82), to people surrounded at very close quarters by many others. Cornwell (1984) makes the additional point that long residence does something to create a sense of community, and from these two points it seems obvious to deduce that in the absence of long residence and the associated benefits (which might make the crossover between public and private domains more acceptable), for wives who do not find living on a base easy, the feeling that your house is not your own is particularly difficult to cope with. A respondent expressed this point very clearly:

> "People don't seem to have any idea of boundaries or privacy in quarters. They just arrive on your doorstep and expect you to want to see them, and you feel like saying f--- off!" (Doreen, R6).

For this respondent, a friend was seen to have continually overstepped the limits of privacy and hospitality, but was blissfully unaware of this fact (and the respondent was too polite to tell her). She spoke of how nice RAF life was and how you could meet up with old friends and "fill in the gaps", like she'd done with the respondent. The respondent did not feel the same way at all, which illustrates that one person's perception of community living is not always shared by another. The respondent said living on the base seemed to be seen almost as a licence for other people to invade your privacy. This is a point made by Chandler (1991) and Young (1993), who argue that whilst conventional families (civilians) appear to possess the right to have a 'private' domestic sphere, others, such as the military and the police are scrutinised. Chandler argues that the privacy of the family is the privilege of the conventionally married (1991:6) (see also page 183, chapter 5). It is important to qualify this point by saying that in this instance I am referring to neighbours and other wives who live on the base. A separate issue relates to the institution, and has to do with living in quarters, in that the RAF owns the houses and can decide to do inspections or repairs at any time they wish, and also to the overspill of work into free time (for example husbands being called out or expected to attend more social functions by virtue of living in quarters).

Another part of the RAF community paradox is that initial feelings of isolation can lead to involvement in friendships and activities which are soon revealed as the wrong choices: but can be very difficult to escape from. (See also pages 145/6, chapter 4.) As illustrated in table 5.4, some wives cut themselves off from all RAF activities as a way of insulating themselves from potential hurt and misunderstandings.

Two interviewees made the point that living on the base means people feel they can make assumptions about you and gossip about you, and this also brings in the question of who you can trust (see also pages 154/5, chapter 4). Their comments follow:

> "I think the worst aspect of being an RAF wife would have to be intrusion into your privacy, and that people tend to think you're fair game: that you don't mind being asked personal questions, and that because you're part of the community you're fair game to be gossiped about" (Vanda, A14).

> "If you're not smiling or whatever, everybody thinks you've had an argument with your husband. If your curtains are closed a bit longer than normal, they think you're ill or sleeping. If you've got an upset stomach you're pregnant, you know, I mean it's things like that.....That's why we keep ourselves to ourselves" (Amy, A18).

The question of public and private domains is discussed by other writers on occupational wives, in a way which is relevant to this study. For example, Macmillan (1984), Finch (1983), Young (1993) and Nicholson (1980) note that wives are more visible on the patch or on the estate, and that there is less scope for privacy. Nicholson notes that some wives in her study felt they had little privacy, disliked the imposition of other people's standards and behaviour upon themselves and their children, and also the close scrutiny of their behaviour and standards, which they felt others subjected them to (containing echoes of Foucault's (1977) work on surveillance). Finch also notes that in institutional settings a wife is much more visible and vulnerable to having her suitability measured against a notional ideal. This discussion of public and private spheres, together with the information from table 5.4 will continue in the next section on social control, which includes discussion regarding small and large bases.

Social Control

Social control can be experienced in a number of ways as an RAF wife, for example simply by living in married quarters, by joining different groups and activities, or attending mess functions where particular dress codes must be followed. It is difficult to find many examples in the data (although there are a few) of explicit social control, but it is nevertheless clear from the responses collected that social control is experienced in subtle and implicit ways by most RAF wives, whether or not recognised as such. It is also cited as a reason for not living on the base, by some interviewees and respondents in my study who live away from the base.

As a wife with much experience of living off the base and two and a half years' experience of living on the base, I strongly believe that a sense of obligation (whether real or perceived), to support events on the base, and even to behave in certain ways, is part and parcel of the experience of living in married quarters. I did however discover one way in which social control is undoubtedly 'real'. On my husband's annual report is a section for comments on his wife. His boss, (source unknown) wrote "Karen enjoys RAF life and solidly supports mess functions"!

To explore this point further, tables have been compiled to show the responses of interviewees to questions which relate to social control: whether they enjoyed living in quarters, whether they felt they had to attend any function on the base, what they would miss if their husbands left the air force and whether they felt wives would miss out by not living on the base. Perhaps one of the most revealing questions is 'would wives miss out by not living on the base?' Answers to this question give a strong indication of which wives feel they have experienced unwelcome social pressure and which wives accept or even thrive on it. Each table or group of tables is followed by explanatory narrative.

Table 5.5 Experience of married quarters

Do you enjoy living in married quarters?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Yes	12	12
No	2	6
No experience	2	-
TOTALS	16	18

As illustrated, a high number of interviewees reported that they did enjoy living in married quarters. Interestingly 75% of officers' wives compared to 67% of airmen's wives responded positively; some of the reasons for this disparity will become clear in the following table, which sets out the reasons provided by interviewees to support their answers.

Table 5.6 Merits of married quarters

What do you like about living in married quarters?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Cheap	3	5
Convenient	2	2
Size and standard	1	3
Idea of being with people in the same position	2	-
Warm	-	2
Close to work	1	1
Safe and Secure	1	1
Idea of support	1	-
Good social life	1	-
Don't have to decorate	1	-
Easier when you have to move - nothing to sell	1	-
Moved in after 14 yrs in RAF - confident by then	1	-
Friendly	-	1
Good lifestyle compared to civvies around them	-	1
No experience of living in quarters	1	-
Best part of RAF life	-	1
Good neighbours	-	1
TOTALS	16	18

Table 5.7 Disadvantages of married quarters

What do you dislike about living in married quarters?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Doesn't feel like your own home	2	5
Insulated/cosseted from the outside world	1	4
Size and standard	-	3
Marching out	1	1
Allocated small quarter due to having no children - no recognition of pets	-	2
Husband would always be in the bar!	1	-
Husband gets called in more - near at hand	1	-
Difference in standard according to rank	-	1
Can't decorate	-	1
Bad neighbours	-	1
TOTALS	6	18

The most obvious comment about these two tables is that whilst every interviewee found something positive to say about married quarters, only 37.5% of officers' wives compared to 100% of airmen's wives found something negative to say about them! In discussing this point it is helpful to return to Jolly's 1992 book, where she found the main reasons given by her respondents for living in quarters as cost, convenience, husband's career and community spirit (1992:45). With several additional categories, table 5.6 echoes Jolly's findings. However, Jolly, as well as Finch (1983), Nicholson (1980), Chandler (1991) and Young (1993) all note an increasing desire to be in the property market, and that wives can feel their lives are more their own away from the institutional setting. Jolly found criticisms of the patch to surround the issue of identity, and an undermining of the individuality of inhabitants. She said: "A gentle but steady pressure on hearts and minds is therefore exerted by the married patch community over its members" (1992:45). In line with this argument, a respondent in my study spoke of being a 'clone' (Doreen, R6).

A great deal of attention is given to 'marching out' in previous studies, and in the media; however only two interviewees in this study cited this as a negative factor in relation to living in married quarters. An article in the Telegraph on married quarters by Victoria Combe, dated 23.3.98 also gives much attention to the vagaries of march outs. She does end on a high note however, remarking that rents are low and that in high-rent areas similar sized properties would be out of the price range of most military families. She also says there are ways of making living on the patch an enjoyable experience. One couple interviewed by Combe are happy with their spacious quarter and she says of them that:

> "Far from being enthusiastic grumblers about army taste they throw down a vast multi-coloured rug, which matches everything and makes it 'home' " (1998:15).

The size and standard of housing was a significant concern for airmen's wives in this study, with allocation of housing/fixtures and fittings according to rank being seen as grossly unfair. Jolly mentions this point, and says:

> "The junior soldier, sailor or airman.....will qualify only for the most basic of available housing.....Officers' and other-ranks' accommodation is strictly separate .....Housing, like everything else in the military, is linked to rank and seniority. Need comes second to this" (1992:51).

An airman's wife in my study expresses her disdain at the size and standard of property allocated to her family:

> "I was quite shocked when we moved in this house. I was like 'you're joking', ...the carpets in the stairs were like twenty years old and looked.....unbelievable. And I walked in the kitchen and I was like 'this is worse than my student house'! You know, it was like oh my God! But yes it's a bit frustrating when you.....like I think 'oh no, I hate this house, I hate my house'. You know, it's just so badly designed and everything about it's just done on the cheap.....having visitors is a nightmare because there's nowhere to put them.....This is three bed-roomed, and of course they're all taken up with the children, and then this is it [living room], you have one room and the kitchen, which I hate! That's my biggest gripe with RAF life: housing! You really definitely need a spare room, or a separate dining room, so that at least you can use that as a temporary guest room. Yes it's a bit of a nightmare when people come to stay" (Monique, A10).

Nicholson (1980) found that in some cases dislike of military life generally could spill over to dislike of the estate, and thus to a distorted view of life on the estate being conveyed. In addition, with regard to life on the patch Jolly contends that a growing number of wives "absolutely and unequivocally detest it". (1992:63) I believe that these types of sentiment are conveyed in table 5.7, where interviewees assert that married quarters don't feel like their own homes. Some examples of comments from interviewees (who say they would rather live out), follow:

> "I know when we were moving. The RAF wouldn't give us a date, and there we were all packed up with boxes, and one minute we were moving, then we were going to have to wait for a quarter, and then we were moving, and it was the uncertainty......When we were moving it was John and the RAF, they were collaborating against me and my life.......When we were moving, everybody we spoke to were too scared to make the decision [to let them have the house]..... And then they expect us to attend all these functions and wonder why the wives clubs aren't supported and wonder why we are like we are" (Penny, O5).

> ".....when I went down to get my ID card on camp, and the woman didn't speak to me, she spoke to Brian, she asked Brian what my initials were and everything. She just like totally ignored me and I thought 'oh, it's like that is it?'.....We've actually just had to move quarter because of some really horrible neighbours..... but they [the RAF] wouldn't move them, we had to go. It was really difficult. The RAF wouldn't let us move even though there were empty quarters, they said it wasn't a big enough reason.....I had to actually go to SSAFA and go to my doctor and say it was affecting my health before they let me move, and I thought that was absolutely ridiculous......when I walked into the one [quarter] down there, and saw those kitchens, and you know, there was no shower and whatever, and I thought 'what's going on here?' You know, it's like the dark ages" (Cassie, A11).

Another response which clearly reveals general dislike of military life and the way it exerts social control over servicemen and their wives, is dislike of being insulated/cosseted from the outside world (although some wives appear to thrive on this). In general terms, previous researchers have found that whilst some women like living in institutional settings, some strongly dislike it and some tolerate it. This was certainly the finding of my study. Jolly (1992) claims that wives who dislike the patch are in the minority, but are often articulate and intelligent.

She found criticisms to surround the issue of identity, and how the patch is perceived to undermine the individuality of the inhabitants (which is explored further in the section on homogeneity, below). An example of an interviewee's view on being insulated from the outside world follows:

"....I think the actual worst, worst thing is being cosseted from the outside world. There is no concept of what is going on outside: house prices and the cost of living. People end up thinking the world owes them a living. It is hard out there, no-one will give you a house to live in" (Suzanne, A12).

This cosseting of individuals and families from the outside has parallels in civilian life, in the form of the growth of exclusive neighbourhoods or walled communities, designed to be separate and shielded from their surroundings (with their roots in 19th century America).

In his book *Privatopia*, McKenzie comments on such developments and notes that the initial vision behind such neighbourhoods was a statement of utopian faith, the route to community being seen as "through joint ownership of private property by an exclusive group living according to its own rules" (1994:24). Initial thoughts on this statement might be that RAF communities, in contrast, have rules imposed upon them from above, but in reality in privatised neighbourhoods in McKenzie's study, rules were devised and imposed by a governing body, and resented by many residents (like life on RAF bases).

The subject of cushioning from the outside world comes up again, together with the contrary view, in table 5.10 in relation to what wives miss by not living on the base. The following table shows how many wives feel obliged to attend functions/activities on the military base.

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Table 5.8 Obligation to attend events on the base

Do you feel obliged to attend anything on the base?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Yes	7	2
No	9	16
TOTALS	16	18

There is a notable difference between the number of officers' as opposed to airmen's wives who feel obliged to attend functions/activities on the base: 44% as opposed to 11%.

This could have a significant link to rank, and the expectations placed on officers. A comment from an interviewee who immediately noticed the difference whilst her husband was completing initial officer training follows:

> ".... I have done in the past, felt obliged to go to things, like cheese and wine evenings at Cranwell, when Ron was on a course, by pushy Flight Lieutenants' wives" (Betty, O8).

The reasons for interviewees' feelings of obligation to attend follow:

Table 5.9 Reasons for obligation to attend events

Why do you feel obliged to attend?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
To support my husband	5	1
To support the organisers	2	1
Pressure from other wives	3	-
Small base - not so many people who can go	1	-
TOTALS	11	2

An obvious dichotomy can be observed between officers' and airmen's wives here, in the perceived need to support their husbands in their careers; albeit a relatively small percentage felt any obligation in this regard (31% and 5% respectively).

Two obvious reasons for this dichotomy have emerged (as observed during research): firstly, fewer official functions for airmen and their families appear to take place, for example at RAF Culswick a huge, extravagent summer ball in one of the mess buildings was arranged for the officers, whereas the airmen were invited to a barbecue-type affair, where the public were also invited to purchase tickets. The second observable reason was that many airmen's wives either felt intimidated by officers' wives (with or without reason) and did not therefore attend station wives' functions, or did not realise such functions or clubs (perhaps through not reading newsletters, or not receiving the same information as officers' wives) were for them. Several airmen's wives did intimate that they did not receive the same information as officers' wives; an example follows:

> "Something I noticed when I was cleaning quarters was that officers receive different information to us. Officers receive booklets giving them useful information: phone numbers and things which we don't receive" (Rosie, A1).

Only 3 officers' wives (19%) said they responded to pressure from other wives to attend functions; this does not mean other wives did not feel pressurised. Many wives expressed their reluctance to be controlled in this way, and even some of those who did respond voiced their displeasure at doing so. Some examples follow, firstly of wives who felt reasonably amenable to supporting their husbands in this way, even though they felt obliged to attend events on the base, and their actual obligation could seem unclear:

> "Well this is the first time ever that we've been part of a squadron, so I wasn't sure you know, if you're supposed to go to these things, and like the families days, we showed our faces, because I thought you know, should we? People say no you don't have to, but I don't know. You know.....I was always led to believe that you know, that there are certain things you do have to show your face towards. Brian reckons not, he says you don't have to do anything.....When you listen to some of the wives who have been here a long time......It seemed to be more stricter, you had to show up. I think now it has changed" (Cassie, A11).

> "When you get to this level, there are certain things that you have to go to: certain dinners when you're invited. Various people have functions to which you are invited, and certain of those, you feel obliged to go to; others you might like to go to....." (Mary, O1).

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The comment from Cassie expresses a sentiment which was voiced by several interviewees and respondents, that in the past the obligation to attend was very much a real one, whereas today it is hazy; no-one really seems to know what is expected of them although a perceived sense of obligation hangs over them. A respondent I met by chance on a train, a widow of an RAF officer, provided an interesting insight into past obligation to the RAF institution, saying:

> "You put in your card when you arrived at a station and after several days the Wing Commander's wife would call on you. After that you had to have people round. You were expected to have a certain number of coffee mornings. You had to go to church on a Sunday and you had to wear a hat and gloves. It was very strict, but I liked that; you knew where you were" (Maisie, R16).

Another respondent, a wife of a retired officer put forward a contrasting view:

> "We had to go to all these doos early in the evening, and I lost count of the number of times I had to leave my babies crying with a babysitter, and I felt so resentful - that we had to go" (Molly, R17).

Examples follow from interviewees, one who like Maisie liked the feeling of being controlled, one who responded to perceived pressure but resented it, and one who refused to respond at all:

> ".... the wife is controlled in a way, but it is discipline, I think it is nice, it is secure" (Rosie, A1).

> "You also feel like you ought to go to these things, not as a case of you want to go. I mean I went to a barbecue just after I'd had Emily and I was absolutely shattered and I made this fresh fruit salad and I took it round and I didn't want to go, and the boss's wife had come and said 'please come' and then I even met her in the Co-op on the morning when I was buying the fresh fruit salad and she was shouting over the aisles and the shelves 'are you coming, are you coming?' And I took it round and I could have cried, because I really didn't want to go, but I felt like I ought to go. Trevor had just started on this squadron and I ought to make the effort to go, and you sometimes do feel like that, that you ought to go. You feel guilty if you don't go, whereas in civvy street you wouldn't have that pressure" (Paula, O6).

> "We go to any functions that we choose to go to, because we choose to go. I wouldn't go because I was told to go" (Lucy, A9).

The next table sets out the answers to the question of whether wives miss out by not living on the base.

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Table 5.10 Missing out by living off the base?

Do wives miss out by living off the base?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Yes	10	7
No	6	11
TOTALS	16	18

A very obvious split can be observed here, with 61% of airmen's wives as opposed to 37.5% of officers' wives saying that wives would not miss out by living away from the military base. The most obvious reason for this response, as noted in table 5.7 above, (although not actually verbalised by airmen's wives in relation to this particular question) is the lower standard of accommodation to which airmen and their families are entitled.

Many officers' wives in this study said that they could not afford to buy a house of similar size and standard to their quarter; this was not a sentiment expressed by airmen's wives, although as expressed in table 5.6 above, 3 airmen's wives did say they were content with the size and standard of their houses.

The following tables show what particular features interviewees felt wives would miss, or why they would not miss anything, by not living on the base.

Table 5.11 What would wives miss by not living on the base?

What would they miss from the base?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Mixing with people in the same boat as you	3	2
More difficult to mix and make friends outside	1	3
Walking to and from mess functions	2	-
Ready made community	1	1
Social Life	2	-
Facilities	-	2
Easier to find a creche, nursery, brownie place etc.	-	2
Welcome you receive on a base	1	-
Getting involved	1	-
Being in the 'hub' of it	1	-
Closeness	1	-
Being close to work	1	-
Receiving information as soon as it comes out	1	-
TOTALS	15	10

Table 5.12 Reasons wives would not miss out by living off the base

Any reason why you feel they wouldn't miss out by living off the base?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Miss out on the real world by living on the base	2	1
Encourages a social life/time away from work	3	-
More community spirit outside	-	1
Not so much relocation outside	-	1
Easy to come onto base if you want to	-	1
Same sort of facilities outside as inside	-	1
TOTALS	5	5

A very salient feature of the responses contained in tables 5.11 and 5.12 is that wives who had grown up in the RAF generally felt they had most to lose by not living on the military base. Those who had been servicewomen themselves, interestingly, seemed to put forward a balanced view of living on a base, and could see the merits of living off. Generally, wives with experience of living off the camp were more inclined to expound the merits of living in 'civvy street'. Wives who had always lived in quarters (RAF children and wives whose only married life had involved living in quarters) seemed to be most reluctant to consider the alternative. See table 2.1, page 32 for the actual numbers of wives in this study who had lived on and off the RAF base.

The most frequently expressed answer was that wives would miss mixing with people in 'the same boat'. Many other answers follow this same line of argument, such as the difficulties making friends outside (as in civvy street people are seen as settled, with their own long-term friends) and the advantages inherent in a ready-made community and social life.

Some examples of individual answers follow, firstly from those who value living on the base:

"I don't think you'd really feel part of the community, my sister said that, because they lived off the base. She lived in amongst all the Germans. I think people outside wouldn't really understand: when your husband's away, they wouldn't understand. On the base you go round to other people whose husbands are away. I think I'd find that much harder to get used to, because on the base all the husbands are the same. I think it would be lonelier as well, because they're not in the same boat" (Serena, A17, a service child).

"I mean the good thing that I like, living here, is that everybody's in the same situation you know. Especially next door, her husband's in the Falklands at the moment for six weeks, and I'm on my own as well now. So yes well I mean people understand you know, the ins and outs of it all: how annoyed you get when they get called out. I don't know whether civilian neighbours would be quite so understanding, I don't know, because I've never done it. I know my Mum, in the time she's been married, my Dad has never been away, it's strange!" (Mandy, O12, no previous experience of RAF).

The following examples are of wives who do not think there's much to be lost by living off the base:

"I don't particularly think they miss out, not really.....because if you needed someone to look after your son you could drop him off next door where you are. No I don't think they do miss out. I think it's probably more of an advantage to live off the base. I think it also probably encourages the husband to have a life outside the air force, because you know, I think they can get so wrapped up in it: living in it, working in it, if you know what I mean" (Vanda, A14, ex-servicewoman).

"For myself, no, but......I do go to things on base here, but otherwise I would tend to socialise more outside than in RAF circles" (Alison, O16, no previous experience of RAF).

The foregoing, I would argue, shows that various shades of acceptance/rejection exists in relation to social control (relative to level of integration, see chapter 6) which was reported as being felt more strongly on small and overseas bases. To illustrate this point further, the following quotes show that, for these interviewees, a high degree of social control was accepted or tolerated as part and parcel of living on a small/overseas base:

"When I was in Weisberg, every dining-in was a 'you will attend', because there weren't enough of you to have the choice of whether you wanted to go or not. I used to find that quite difficult because there were certain things I had to go to: things like the remembrance parade, Battle of Britain night, they were things that you should want to go to, so obviously that's fine. Being on a smaller station there were more things we had to go to, but here I don't think so. If there's a guest night and he wants to go, it's a case of 'do you want to go or not?' So we don't have to go" (Cynthia, A13, ex-servicewoman).

"When we were living in Germany we had particularly nosey neighbours. You would go out shopping and come back with the bags and they would say 'Oh I see you've been to such and such a shop today', or 'what have you bought from Marks and Spencers?' Here they don't do that. But again I think it was the fact that it was such a close-knit community in Germany" (Yvette, A4, no previous experience of RAF life).

Thoughts on Parting Company with the Institution

Despite feelings of ambivalence about the RAF, and the demands the military made on their husbands and their own lives, many wives felt reluctant to contemplate a life outside. The following table looks at what wives said they would miss when their husbands left the RAF.

Table 5.13 What wives will miss on parting company with the RAF

What will you miss when your husband leaves the RAF?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Nothing	8	6
Nothing, but husband would find it hard	1	3
House	1	3
'Doos' in the mess	2	1
No roots. Wouldn't know where to settle	1	2
Knowing the people around you	2	-
Social life	2	-
Way of life	1	1
Friends	1	1
Being part of a community on the base/community spirit	-	2
Moving around to different places	-	2
It's like an umbilical cord	1	-
Closeness of neighbours	1	-
It would be the end of an era	-	1
Proud that he's in the RAF	-	1
No-one to hold your hand	-	1
Financial benefits	-	1
TOTALS	21	25

Table 5.13 reinforces answers given in the previous 3 tables above, as well as adding further interesting facets to the discussion. That 4 interviewees perceived their husbands as more institutionalised than themselves is an interesting finding in itself. Jolly (1996) supports this finding, in looking at the process of disengagement from the military. She looks at the large extent to which servicemen become institutionalised, are encouraged to think of themselves as apart and different from society, and how incredibly difficult they find adjusting to life in civvy street, where they have no rank or status.

A respondent in this study who is a psychiatric nurse told of nursing several serviceman who could not cope with life outside the military (Sheila, R21). Jolly has also put forward the opinion that wives can potentially become more institutionalised than their husbands. Commenting on service wives, she says:

> "....those who have actually had to sacrifice their own freedom.....and followed the flag, who if they've lived in remote places have not had much of a life outside it themselves, often I would contend are more institutionalised than their husbands. I think even people who think they are not, even me, are! And I think you have to be in order to survive an institution, you have to to a certain extent, and you have to subordinate some of your own wishes to the overall goals of the institution, because otherwise you would just be so unhappy, you couldn't cope" (1997:6).

Institutionalisation can thus be seen as a form of social pressure or control. In its most extreme form, it has been described by Jolly (1992:178) as outright blackmail, when a man is offered an appointment on condition that his wife will accompany him. She contends that "This kind of manoeuvre is not calculated to win the support of modern wives, quite the reverse" (1992:179). Two such instances were recorded in this study, where a husband was offered promotion, only on condition that his wife would accompany him:

> "If I hadn't come up he wouldn't have got his promotion, and he wouldn't have got that offer again. So I found that quite hard. That obviously affected the way I felt when I came up here, so obviously I didn't like it very much. But you just have to make the best of it" (Alison, O16).

> "When he got this job, the first question you are asked, you're not told what you're being considered for.....my husband gets a phone call and is asked 'are you prepared to serve accompanied in the UK?' From that you deduce that you're going to get a command tour. Now if he'd said 'no, I'm sorry, my wife is working and she can't move', he may not have got the job. So I think this is going to be a problem in the future, and the air force are going to have to address it" (Mary, O1).

This is a very important issue, given the increased importance of a career for many wives. Jolly (1992) deals with this point, and wives' careers are discussed in detail in chapter 3.

To emphasise the paradox at the heart of this study: of the love/hate relationship wives have with the RAF, it is useful to mention the work of Cohen on community.

Cohen argues that members become conscious of their culture when they reach its boundaries and says that "....in that consciousness they become aware of its values" (1978:141). This goes a long way towards explaining why, despite the frustrations wives experience within the RAF, they cannot deny it has been good to them, and do not like the thought of leaving it. An example of a wife's comment on this issue follows:

> "I mean half of me says I hate the air force and I'm fed up with it, but the other half says yes but it's been fairly good to us really.....We haven't had lots of moves, and he's had a very steady career, and I've had my little job, you know, on and off for years at the hospital.....It becomes part of you after a while. Because it's the only way of life I know, I think it will be very strange to move out and have my own job and Tom to be in a totally different job. Yes, I think I will feel quite uncomfortable really. You think you hate it, and then you think well it's given me this, that and the other" (Sharon, O11).

Gossip and the existence of cliques are also effective forms of social control and ways of protecting community boundaries by reinforcing rules and keeping people out, which were mentioned by interviewees and respondents in this study. Especially on small bases (although also prevalent on large bases), gossip can greatly affect wives' experience of RAF life, and can be helpful (in the exchange of supportive information which can build up community) or indeed harmful if malicious. These subjects were also discussed in chapter 4.

Homogeneity: Something in Common

Living on a military base in large measure involves living amongst people of similar rank, age and life course stage, and also living in similar accommodation, of uniform decor. It can be argued that this helps to promote a sense of community, also that what is fostered is social control, resultant social sanctions for stepping out of line, and general claustrophobia caused by a lack of social variety. Summarising criticisms by sociologists and other writers of 'homogeneous living' McKenzie says of homogeneous communities that they:

> "....deprive people of social resources and thus stultify their lives; promote isolation and conflict between residents of the community and the rest of society; stunt children's ability to relate to people unlike themselves; and leave residents frozen in their present way of life" (1994:189).

Jolly (1992) also states that a narrowness of outlook can prevail, where there is a limited age range, many sons of military men, no old people, no extended families, no desperately poor people, no ethnic minorities, no single parents and no unemployed people. She goes on to say that the feeling of being different and apart from the rest of society can be more apparent than the sentiment of community in an emotive sense, and that a feeling of community of situation can prevail. Callan and Ardener endorse this argument (in a more positive vein), in relation to wives living on the married patch, saying "Community of situation can certainly modify the structural isolation of the housewife" (1984:24). Macmillan (1984) makes the additional point that having no 'official territory' but being at home anywhere means that people on the patch bond together. In terms of the employing organisation, it is obviously easier to exert degrees of control by placing similar age groups and ranking together, and this control was felt and sometimes resented (especially in relation to rank segregation) by many wives in this study. In this way homogeneity can be seen to be capable of inhibiting community relations.

The general sociological literature on community has much to say about this issue. Some writers argue for and some against homogeneity. That a "mixture of classes in a neighbourhood tends to work against the development of community ties and sentiments, which flourish more in a homogeneous setting" is the conclusion of Willmott (1986:93); Karn (1977) put forward a similar view, and Pahl (1975:50) said that "the idea that it is good for people to be mixed-up socially has received well-deserved criticism over the years". However, as Crow and Allan (1994) point out, socially homogeneous groupings cannot be guaranteed to present themselves as sustainable 'communities', because high levels of social control and conformity do not always have positive results. As Durkheim's classic work showed, where the parts fail to mesh together or where common values (collective consciousness) are not strong enough to override divisions, society breaks down (Worsley 1992:6).

As an answer to this dilemma, Gans argues for "selective homogeneity at the block level and heterogeneity at the community level" (1967:172), to allow for similarity between close neighbours, but social diversity in the community as a whole. Such arguments have significant relevance to the data collected in this study, as will be demonstrated below.

Turning to the data itself, lack of social variety was mentioned several times during interviews and other conversations, in positive and negative ways. It should be pointed out however that beneath a surface of homogeneity can lie a wide variety of social life, given that RAF personnel and their wives generally do hail from diverse backgrounds (although it is often observed that a large number come from the 'home counties' and have RAF lineage).

From a viewpoint of homogeneity being seen as beneficial, five officers' wives and 5 airmen's wives mentioned the term 'we're all in the same boat' (31% of officers' and 28% of airmen's wives). This was expressed positively, and generally used to illustrate their community of situation with other wives.

From this point of being 'in the same boat', other positive factors were seen to flow, such as understanding of husbands' work commitments, and support during husband absence (discussed in more detail below): which was not seen as a probable outcome of living off the military base. Relatedly, 4 interviewees (3 airmen's wives and 1 officer's wife) said it was better to live on the base. Examples of the statements made by interviewees follow:

> "....I've found it's nice that there's a lot laid on for you.....it's all on your doorstep. And perhaps if you were outside you'd have to go off and look for these groups and whatever.....I mean I found it quite easy to go to Under 1s when I came, because you know everybody's going to be in a similar situation to yourself. And it's nice.....I've found that quite easy, because you've all got something in common, and you've got grounds for conversation, you know, you get there and it's all 'whereabouts is your husband, where do you come from?' Whereas perhaps if you were outside it would be a little bit more difficult to go into a town and find a group and join. So I think that's quite a positive side of it" (Karen, A7).

> "It's nice to get a quarter. It's good for wives; quite geared to young families; lots to do.....A lot of people are in a similar situation. It is nice to know you are not the only one facing certain problems, for example, the way men think! ....we are thinking of entering the housing market soon though" (Shirley, O3).

Interestingly, Karen and Shirley had no previous experience of the services. This comes through in the above narrative, in that Karen seems to fear moving to a new area and starting again, more than not being among fellow RAF wives, and Shirley appears to appreciate RAF life without feeling bereft at the thought of leaving it.

From the negative viewpoint, three airmen's wives and 1 officer's wife expressed the opinion that it was better to live away from the base. In addition, 5 interviewees (4 airmen's wives and 1 officers' wife) said it was beneficial to have outside contacts. Amongst the reasons given were that life on the base was claustrophobic, boring and one-dimensional, that non-conformity effectively resulted in social exclusion (especially in the case of childless women or working mothers: whether or not out of choice; and this was cited by 4 interviewees, 3 airmen's wives and 1 officer's wife), and that lack of social variety detracted from the richness of social life. A 1995 paper on insiders and outsiders by Crow and Allan reinforces the above findings by exploring ways in which community can be exclusive as well as inclusive. Some examples from my study follow, firstly of reasons for not living on the base:

> "....if you could move the house I'm living in here off the base, then that would be perfect. I would have a nice warm house, a lovely house, and I would be amongst.....I do like being amongst the people. When I was in Germany we lived amongst Germans, when we were in Cyprus we lived amongst Cypriots. It was more interesting. But I mean the cost of property means living on the base" (Vanda, A14).

The following example relates to the perceived merits of having friends and other contacts outside the base:

> "I work in Swanton. You get to know people at work, and they know the area. You can have the best of both worlds by working. It's nice to work away from the camp. If you didn't go off the base to work, it would be difficult to get to know anyone in the local area" (Marion, A3).

An example of the effects of non-conformity, in relation to having children follows:

> "I have had arguments with people about, like, housing: we shouldn't have one of the new houses because we haven't got children.....And I'm, like, well hang on a minute, we've got pets, why shouldn't we, they're my children.....And I mean they've taken us in [the neighbours]. They didn't have children, they were getting snubbed by people who had children, and they just gave up in the end like we did" (Amy, A18).

Finally, two interviewees, one officer's wife and one airman's wife mentioned the downside of homogeneity, in relation to lack of social variety on the base. Significantly, one wife mentioned the problems which could be faced on leaving the air force, because of lack of exposure to social variety. An extract from her narrative follows:

> "I was speaking to a friend who knows nothing about the military.....she said a lot of army people had retired to the village there, and she said they just were absolutely lost. They didn't know how to cope with civvy life.....And also she said they were not comfortable socially, in a sort of cross section of the community, because they were so used to major rank, I think, most of them, so they were so used to mixing at that rank, that they all found it quite difficult.....and quite a few of them said they found it very difficult to settle down" (Mary, O1).

As in the sociological debate on homogeneity, convincing evidence has been found to support both sides of the argument regarding the merits of homogeneity on military bases. The last point and quotation above, relating to adapting to outside life is the most salient one for me, and sums up my argument in this section. In essence I found that homogeneity appears to serve quite useful purposes while living on the military base, although some wives find it boring and one-dimensional, and do choose to broaden their horizons (which in most cases is an option open to them). On stepping out of this environment however, lack of experience in dealing with a cross section of society can pose adjustment difficulties and a sense of dislocation (as discussed above). Perhaps Gans' proposition (page 204 above) is one which could work for the military: placing clusters of personnel and their families within civilian communities (as some interviewees, for example Vanda, above, said happens abroad) rather than on military bases.

Community Time

Crow, Allan and Summers 1998 (and also Crow and Allan 1995) say "As with all social relationships which hinge around trust and reciprocity, the time dimensions of becoming a 'good' neighbour need to be borne in mind" (1998:16). They also recognise (as other writers have) the problems inherent in mobile communities, saying "The instability of relations between neighbours is heightened where geographic mobility is a prominent feature of local populations" (1998:17). Joan Chandler expands on this point, in relation to Navy wives in her study. She says "....there are no cumulative attachments of long residence or family ties and life there demands great skill in befriending and managing personal relationships" (1991:87). Befriending skills received significant attention in chapter 4, see pages 129/32.

Instant Community Membership/Acceleration of Social Niceties

In a service environment, time is not always an abundant resource. That good neighbouring relations are set up reasonably quickly says much for the trust associated with being part of the institution, and accountability to the RAF as an employer. This issue manifest itself in the answers to the question asked about the possibility of civilians coming to live on military bases. Discomfort with this idea, due to issues of trust, is clear from the following quotation:

> "I'm not very happy about that really. I feel that it's going to be changing it into a Council estate. You could have good neighbours one side and really bad neighbours the other side. You know, sort of living next door to a junk yard almost.....it's quite worrying. Also, from a security point of view you don't know whether you're going to be living next door to an Irish terrorist you know" (Yvette, A4).

In relation to time, a family may be living on a particular base only for a matter of months, and can thus be faced with dilemmas regarding how involved to become. From the data collected, I have summarised the options available to wives as follows (obviously these are not discrete categories; most of the participants in this study adopted different approaches depending on their experience at previous bases and some adopted hybrid approaches).

1.	'Dive in' and try to fit in, taking all the associated risks: rejection, making mistakes which can be difficult to rectify later, and becoming 'overloaded' with too many people, with little time left for yourself.

2.	Go out and warily make acquaintances. Become involved but retain a distance which prevents intense involvement. Put up subtle barriers. Maintain a degree of superficiality in encounters on the base.

3.	Sit back and wait for the right opportunities to become involved. Become involved only when it feels right, not for the sake of it. Resolve to be associated only with 'real' people. (The time dimension makes this option difficult.)

4.	Stay away from social gatherings on the base. Assert that there is no point in becoming involved, only to move on again.

Many interviewees and respondents expressed views along the lines that 'getting on with it' was the order of the day on a military base; there being little time to sit around and wait for people to come to you. Others expressed regret that although facilities and social events were plentiful, courage was required (and might be in short supply having left previous friends and support structures behind) in order to go along for the first time. This seemed to put some wives off going at all. Several interviewees acknowledged that fitting in on a military base could be very difficult for someone who was shy. One interviewee said she would rather stay away than feel awkward (Ann, A13).

Another observation from the data was that some wives seemed to have almost unreal expectations of social relations on military bases (usually wives with no previous experience of the military), and based their assumptions on programmes like *'Soldier, Soldier'* where social relations appeared very close and all-inclusive. One interviewee expressed this sentiment, saying:

> "I mean I wouldn't want to be living inside somebody's pocket all the time, but you know probably a bit more people knocking on your door, you know, 'how are you?', that doesn't happen at all" (Yvette, A4).

Some very realistic responses to the question of fitting in on new bases were also recorded.

An interviewee who had been an RAF child and also a servicewoman expressed the view that a certain length of time was required in order to feel settled, and that whilst some people will welcome new wives, some people will not (for a variety of reasons); this response came across as very pragmatic (probably because of her lifetime of experience in the RAF) and harbouring no idealistic or romantic notions, unlike many new wives with no RAF experience. She said:

> "On the base there's always somebody who will come up and say 'hi, welcome', not everybody, but then it's not everybody that's got that sort of personality. I always think, even from as a child moving around, it always takes me, it always takes a good six months before I feel settled, and feel I know enough people to feel happy somewhere, and to feel I'm settled and not the new person" (Cynthia, O13).

Some of the more experienced wives told of easy and difficult starts on new bases, and of cases when people would appear to be welcoming, but where no follow-up was forthcoming. One respondent said "They say they'll help you and then they bugger off" (Janine, R1). Differences experienced often tended to relate to big and small bases, operational and non-operational bases, and also to isolation (geographical and in the form of language barriers). Instant membership, when experienced, seemed to relate to conformity, and the ability to 'bounce in' to a new environment displaying a willingness to become involved in whatever was going on.

Where deeper, more meaningful attachments were the desired outcome, there was evidence that the normal social processes had to be observed: there being no shortcuts, even in the RAF world, towards 'real' friendships, but plenty of available inroads into superficial 'here and now' attachments. The data collected in this study suggests that most wives carve out a role for themselves on the military base which suits them: in line with their interests and available time. In essence, intimacy and community imply different principles; you can't be close to all members of a community (Crow and Allan 1995, Cheal 1988), even if RAF philosophy would appear to promote such an idea.

In discussing the difficulties inherent in trying to distinguish between insiders and outsiders, Crow and Allan (1995a) cite an argument which proposes that the insiders/outsider dichotomy be replaced by a continuum, to allow for a number of intermediate statuses between the two extremes, saying, "....a stark distinction between insiders and outsiders can be seen to be insufficiently sensitive to the many nuances which characterise the complex relations in this area" (1995a:1).

This viewpoint fits well in any discussion of RAF wives and community, because *inter alia* of the complexities caused by lack of sufficient time to build meaningful relationships on military bases. Whilst a naturally evolving social system allows for and is tolerant of individual differences (Crow and Allan found in their 1998 study of the Isle of Wight that allowances were made for 'local characters' and personal circumstances), military life inhibits such allowances. Wives initially have little or no knowledge of other wives' personal circumstances and (wrong) assumptions can lead to harsh judgements, misunderstandings and general malaise with service life. An instance was recorded in my study of a neighbour being labelled 'unfriendly', only for the wives in question to manage to break down the boundaries and get to know each other just before one of them moved, and thus to regret not confronting the situation before. In sum, there is often insufficient time available to discover why another wife is not friendly or to correct wrong impressions; many wives in my study found that they were only finding their social niche as they were ready to leave a base.

The next section deals with the very interesting subject of wives' experience of community as opposed to that of their husbands. Differential experience on the part of husbands and wives is also discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

Her Community v His Community

> "It's alright for the men, they go off to work and come home saying 'oh I bumped into old so and so'. Wives are just left at home to get on with it, to carve out a role for themselves" (Mary, O1).

That RAF wives inhabit a different personal community to their husbands and as a result face various dilemmas which are not part of their husbands' remit at all, permeates this study. Wives must decide who to turn to for support in the absence of close friends and family, how to manage 'neighbouring', which some interviewees and respondents described as a balancing act between fostering congeniality and having your life taken over, which activities and groups to take part in (and how to deal with the consequences of not taking part: and effectively being seen as an outsider), and how to make inroads into life on the base if you do not conform, for example if you are a working wife, a wife without children or a wife with grown-up children.

Wives also have to accept that whilst their husbands have many opportunities for socialising while technically 'at work', their role is to stay at home (and look after the children in many cases); this can be very difficult to cope with, as will be demonstrated below. Wives have to deal with trying to penetrate cliques (see pages 147/8, chapter 4), how to respond to gossip (see page 154, chapter 4), and how to cope when supportive friends move on, leaving a huge gap in their support system; as will be shown below, such issues do not affect their husbands in the same way at all. As Wellman and Wortley assert: "Men fix things; women fix relationships and keep households and networks going" (1990:583). It is an obvious statement that some wives are better equipped to deal with such issues than others. Many wives in this study resented the burden they felt was placed upon them, whilst others thrived. In this section it is important to stress that wives face challenges for example in securing school places for their children and registration with dentists and doctors as they move around; husbands' medical and dental needs are catered for by the RAF.

Within the marriage chapter, the fact that husbands are not always seen as understanding or appreciative of the dilemmas faced by their wives was discussed in relation to resultant marital discord (see pages 100/101). A useful illustration of wives' perception of husbands' lack of understanding of their situation is provided by Jenny Simpson, who says:

"He spent so much time on the move in his job, with only what he could carry on his back, that it never seemed to matter much to him whether we had a south-facing garden or a nice bedroom or a pine kitchen.....For me it was different..... My home was a beacon, the thing that guided me to safety, away from the rest of the world and the demands of my work or his Regiment. I made the house as homely as we could afford it to be and made a real effort with the garden and the neighbours" (1996:125).

Different types of support can be provided by different members of networks, and not all community ties are supportive. Networks are composed of various 'segments', one of which is immediate kin and is tight-knit, and others which are friends, neighbours and work colleagues and can be more loosely-knit (Wellman and Wortley, 1990). Wellman and Wortley state that:

"Strong friendships as well as immediate kin provide much emotional aid and services, while siblings are often good companions.......The combination of kith and kin supplies both stable support from ascribed ties with immediate kin and adaptive support from achieved ties with friends, neighbours, co-workers and other organisational ties" (1990:580).

RAF wives are clearly not often in a position to utilise the network 'segment' composed of immediate kin, due to geographical limitations, and as a result other ties tend to become more important. As Jamieson has pointed out (referring to the findings of researchers in the 1960s and 1970s), kin relationships are the most able to survive departures from direct reciprocity, because there are cultural expectations that kin should help each other throughout their lives. With relationships between RAF wives, other problems can creep in, as divergent cultures merge and misunderstandings about reciprocity and other issues result. In the light of such dilemmas it is not surprising that a protective 'veneer' has been observed in some RAF wives in this study and by several other writers.

Channels of Support

The first issue to be dealt with here is who wives turn to for support in the absence of their husbands. The following table sets out the responses of interviewees to this question.

Table 5.14 Channels of support in husbands' absence

Who would you turn to for support in your husband's absence?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Neighbours	11	11
Friends and Neighbours	1	2
Family	2	1
Work	-	2
Family and Friends	1	-
SSAFA	-	1
Church	1	-
Work and Neighbours	-	1
TOTALS	16	18

A high percentage of officers' and airmen's wives (69% and 61% respectively) said they would go to their neighbours for support. It is however important to add the proviso that not all wives were happy about doing this, and many saw it as a last resort because of the physical distance of their family. One wife expressed this sentiment strongly when she said "And there is no way that the RAF community can help, really, to replace your family" (Mary, O1).

Interestingly, 4 airmen's wives said they would go to the RAF or SSAFA for help rather than to another wife, and this was generally related to issues of trust and potential gossip. Additional (implicit) explanations could relate to differential befriending skills between the wives of commissioned and non-commissioned personnel (Chandler 1987) (see also pages 129/32, chapter 4), or to the nature of the airmen's married patch at RAF Blyton: large and very spread out, which several interviewees saw as undermining cohesion, whereas the officers' patch was seen (by airmen and officers' wives) as more cohesive.

<u>Neighbouring</u>

To look at the way interviewees perceive neighbouring on an RAF base, the following table shows the responses interviewees provided when asked if they see their neighbours much, and the proceeding excerpts from interview schedules provide a flavour of how interviewees felt about neighbouring on the RAF base, whilst also emphasising that this world of neighbouring is one which husbands are rarely exposed to. Interestingly, those wives who express a positive view also note the limitations.

Table 5.15 Contact with neighbours

Do you see much of your neighbours?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Yes, I see them a lot	11	9
I see them occasionally	3	4
I don't see them much but know they would help	1	2
It depends on the base; see them more on remote/overseas bases	1	1
I don't see them as much as I'd like to	-	1
I just see them to say hello to	-	1
TOTALS	16	18

Individual comments from interviewees follow:

"It's difficult sometimes because neighbours come and go.....I feel that if I was in a desperate emergency I would have people I could run to for help....." (Sharon, O11).

"When Alan went away when Don was about three months old, there were enough people around.....A couple of neighbours.....because the baby was small enough, I just went round there for supper in the evening, took him with me in the carrycot" (Cynthia, O13).

"I don't know, if the roof caved in, you know, I'd probably have to go next door ....maybe I would go next door, to find out who I should contact.....In some ways .....we don't really see anybody anyway. People are not forever knocking on our door, although some people do, but only when they want something, if you see what I mean, which upsets me a bit, because I think why can't you be a friend, and just pop in for a coffee or something? Why do you only ever come here if you want a chair or something.....But at the same time, like for example, the other day, we were in the garden and we could hear the couple next door arguing.....if we were the sort of person who would tell the whole street, then everybody, that is if you listened to what they were rowing about, would probably know your business" (Amelia, O14).

Of these interviewees, Cynthia speaks most favourably about the experience of neighbouring on an RAF base; this interviewee grew up in the RAF and was a servicewoman, whereas the other two interviewees had no previous experience of the military. This fits with my argument that previous experience, particularly growing up in the services means that wives are more familiar with the 'rules' of military life and therefore better equipped for marriage to a serviceman.

The following comments acknowledge that whilst a large number of wives in this study see 'a lot' of their neighbours (69% of officers' wives and 50% of airmen's wives), this does not mean they are on friendly terms with all their neighbours; they may only know or speak to one neighbour in the street where they live (and may feel quite insecure about that neighbour being posted away), and they may have only become friendly with that neighbour (or neighbours) since becoming a mother and staying at home all day:

"I did see my neighbour to start with because she had a baby, but she went back to work in September and her baby goes to private nursery, so there are actually six houses here together, and only me that's home during the day with a baby..... The only person I do see is Karen, who lives just across there, and they're being posted in four weeks, which is a bit depressing! You know like when you just want to pop in for a cup of coffee, I've actually got to phone people and take a walk to get there, and if somebody's not in you've then got to walk all the way back.....A few of the girls I know live right the other side.....Mandy is at Slater Road which isn't far, it's just 10 minutes/quarter of an hour, but it's not like, with Karen across the road if she was fed up or I was fed up we just used to pop across, and you didn't have to get the pushchair out, there isn't many people here you could do that with" (Josie, A6).

"......I mean I obviously see Betty because she's two doors down and we've got a common interest in the children, and we get on quite well. Len and Helen, we didn't really see them very much. When they first moved in Len used to say hello, but I think Helen was very quiet and we never really saw them that much.....But I see Betty, and there's quite a few people down this side of the street who are actually on 90 squadron, that we've got to know. I see quite a few people round here, but I don't know anybody going that way" (Cindy, O10).

"You're either friendly with your neighbours, or forget it. And I must admit, I only really used to see Paula. They bothered more once I'd had Cameron. But I used to think that if I dropped dead nobody would know, if John was away. Once Paula moved in it felt a bit different because we did see one another. But even then, I suppose I was working and sometimes we wouldn't see each other for a fortnight" (Penny, O5).

Whilst most interviewees situated their experience (when asked about neighbouring) firmly in the present, some wives provided a long-term view, speaking about past experiences and saying that the experience very much depended on which base they were living on. Small, remote bases and overseas bases were seen as promoting an experience of close neighbouring (although this was not always seen as welcome or positive). Some examples of wives' comments follow:

"My first experience of living in quarters was abroad.....Everyone makes a big effort to welcome new families and there's a good social life. If it's a nice evening the next door neighbours are quite likely to come round with a bottle of wine, or ring you up, you know, if you've got your barbecue on.....Then we moved back to Maidenhead.....and I nearly went mad there.....the people next door worked all day, and there wasn't anyone on the other side.....And then when he came down here, he came down to take the quarter over, and he came back the next day with a big smile on his face, and he said 'you're going to like Blyton',.....'because people talk to you'. Some of them we knew, some of them we didn't, and people brought bunches of flowers out of the garden, and new home cards or a bottle of wine or whatever" (Mary, O1).

"I think people tend to look after one another, especially up here..... People would look out for each other, see what was going on, take notice of a strange face..... people care.....They keep an eye on you and will come in and help or do what they can, or offer to babysit. But then everybody knows what everybody else is doing, everybody else's business, but I think that's because it's a small place. I doubt if it would happen on a bigger camp, although people do notice things and know what's going on" (Anthea, O15).

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"......people are a lot friendlier overseas. It is very difficult when you're in the UK, because you tend to just maybe have contact with your neighbour, but you don't make so much effort to see anybody else. People are able to go away at weekends and more wives are working. I see my neighbour because she's got three children as well. But before, no, because I was always working" (Vanda, A14).

As can be gleaned from the foregoing, husbands are not really involved in the day-to-day process of community life on a military base. Women, and particularly mothers, can be seen as 'social agents' on behalf of their spouses and children, linking them to the world beyond the home (O'Donnell 1985, cited in Bell and Ribbens 1994:234). It is interesting to note from the above quotation by Mary however, that her husband did sympathise with her predicament in being at home with no neighbours around her. None of the other interviewees indicated that their husbands showed such an appreciation of their situation.

Laddish Culture v Wives' Role

Moving on to the extension of work into social life, many functions take place on a military base to which wives are not invited or indeed welcome. Such events include 'happy hour' on a Friday evening, 'dining-in nights', and of course socialising which takes place during detachments. Wives can feel very excluded from this world, and resentful at being left at home to 'hold the fort' while their husbands are out enjoying themselves; they can also feel jealous of the close relationship their husbands have with colleagues, as well as their loyalty to the RAF. This argument draws attention to Jolly's (1992) assertion that the forces are out of step with the rest of society because of the imperative for total job commitment coupled with encouragement of a bachelor ethos in the workplace: which can be argued to inhibit the development of a healthy home/work balance. Jolly also argues that loyalty to the Service and to the group to which they belong is a vital part of being considered able to do the job because "......in the last resort, they must be loyal to the point of death.....Corporate loyalty is the very essence of military life and undermining it can be dangerous: for each and every separate individual. That is why military men are sometimes loyal to the point of absurdity" (1992:126). Finch supports this view, saying:

"The ethos of being always available opens up the opportunity for work to trespass, and this is a characteristic feature of a number of occupations" (1983:30). Some examples of interviewees' views on laddish culture follow:

"......I thought the social life would be better.....just in going to other people's houses you know.....I don't think Simon misses it as much because when they go down route they go out to restaurants and bars. He comes back and says 'yes, we were on actuals so I ordered this, and this', and I'm like 'mm, yes and I had hot dogs and spaghetti or whatever with Henry'" (Monique, A10).

"There's always going to be a barrel [most celebrations involve barrels of beer in the squadron] or something he wants to go to.....I'm jealous of the close relationship he has with the people he works with. And I do feel very much excluded from that when we go out sometimes. And they do, they really do, pilots just talk about flying the whole time, so you end up standing there like a spare wotsit" (Jenny, O7).

"It is frustrating when they debrief in the bar. Some men do not come straight home from a trip, which I wouldn't like. My husband doesn't drink, so that doesn't tend to happen, but there is a certain amount of pressure put on the men to stay in the bar and have a drink. Plus there are always barrels on the squadron and pressure to stay behind and socialise" (Shirley, O3).

"I think he's quite glad to get away sometimes! It must be nice, I wish I could go. A couple of days away from Hayley [their daughter]. I mean I love her.....but it must be nice to get away and have a break. Also, they're socialising with their job as well, aren't they? They go out for a meal and a drink and whatever. We're at home, and you thank God when they go to bed, and you end up in bed about 9 o'clock, don't you? I think a lot of people are the same. They've [men] not got a clue really, not a clue. I don't think he'd survive! I'd love to be able to do that though, you know, say there you go, you take her. My friend went to Corfu, her husband's in the RAF, and left her husband with a one year old and a three year old, only for a week, and he said he just didn't know how she did it" (Cassie, A11).

Much evidence has been found which supports the contention that military communities retain many of the features of occupational communities of yesteryear: such as mining communities, where male sociability revolved around the pub and a wife's place was in the home. As discussed in chapter 3 (see pages 51/2), much resentment can result, due to popular images of the 'new man' and privatisation of the family. But, as discussed in chapter 3, many of these images of life outside cannot be proved to be rooted in reality.

This section, as well as the section on participation, demonstrates that there are many ways in which wives can feel 'inside' or 'outside' what's happening on the military base. Salaman's book on *Community and Occupation* (1974) provides insights into why wives can never be 'insiders' in terms of their husbands' work roles. Salaman quotes Becker and Carper (1956), talking about jazz musicians, who say "....when people see themselves in terms of their occupational roles they see themselves as certain sorts of people with particular qualities and capacities, for whom some behaviour is appropriate while some is not. In fact, it means that the people concerned internalise a value system" (1974:23). He also quotes Janowitz (1960), who says "The military profession is more than an occupation: it is a complete style of life. The officer is a member of a community whose claims over his daily existence extend well beyond his official duties"(1974:33). Factors cited by Salaman as promoting this sort of involvement are danger, skilled work, work which takes place under extreme conditions or is defined as unusual, and work considered important in some sense (that is, which is concerned with core societal values and events). In essence, the nature of military work ensures that husbands' communities revolve around work and wives' communities revolve around the home and the RAF base, and as discussed above, wives are 'left to get on with it', and employ various coping strategies, as discussed in this chapter. As Jolly (1992) points out, "Moving to a new base is a stressful experience.....The military husband does at least have the continuity of his work, but his wife and children have to find their own way into the new community" (1992:56).

Community: as Perceived by Wives

This final section provides an overview of wives' views about the existence of community spirit on RAF bases. Two tables follow, one which simply looks at whether, in the present tense, interviewees feel there is as a sense of community spirit on the base where they live (or where their husband works). The second table takes account of individual comments, referring to past as well as present experiences, and gives some insight into individual perceptions of what community means.

Table 5.16 Perception of community spirit on bases

Is there as a sense of community spirit on the base?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Yes	13	10
No	3	8
TOTALS	16	18

Table 5.17 Experience of community spirit on bases

Have you experienced community spirit on RAF bases?	Officers' Wives	Airmen's Wives
Yes, it's there if you want to take part	4	3
Yes, people keep a close eye on each other on a small base	1	4
No, not very much	-	5
Yes, felt it more on overseas bases	-	4
No, the base is too large for that	-	4
Not as close-knit as expected	-	3
No, never come across it	2	-
Yes, and you don't get that off the base	2	-
More to do with work - men gel more easily at work, and it can spill over to families	1	1
More evident in times of adversity	1	1
Yes, lots of barbecues and pre-ball drinks	2	-
Yes, in husband's trade keep meeting the same people; great sense of community	1	-
Yes, but it's only as good as the people who are there at the time	-	1
Yes, especially when the men are away	1	-
Yes, but negative one at the moment because of gossip problem	1	-
No, everyone's from different backgrounds and there's no common meeting place	-	1
No, but then don't tap into it, living off the base	1	-
TOTALS	17	27

Many interesting perspectives on community life within the RAF were provided above, uniting many of the themes already dealt with in this chapter, that there is a community (in whatever way it might be defined) if you want to take part, that supportiveness is not a thing of the past and is to be found on all married patches (Jolly, 1992:48), that community is associated more with small and overseas bases than large bases (due to distance from family and friends) by many wives, and that gossip can undermine community, as well as having the potential to protect its boundaries. Several themes emerging from table 5.17 which have not yet been discussed, but which are crucial in terms of developing an understanding of the world which RAF wives inhabit (and noting the similarities and differences to civilian communities) will be explored below. These themes are, the significance of the wider 'community' of RAF wives, the importance of building up and maintaining reputations (for base activities and facilities, even roads: which are sometimes viewed as sociable or unsociable), and the flourishing of community spirit during times of adversity.

As mentioned briefly in chapter 4 (page 114), on one RAF base it was observed that the Christian community exists alongside the main RAF community, and its operation turns most of the evidence presented here on its head! The rules are simple and easy to understand (based on biblical principles) and there is instant membership, which has little to do with the passage of time. It is supportive, community spirit is abundant, and there is no room for superficiality or rank consciousness. As previously mentioned, this subject could generate sufficient material for a separate thesis.

The Wider Community of RAF Wives

As discussed above, RAF servicemen will inevitably meet up with the same people time and time again within their particular trade. For wives, the scenario is not quite as simple; even if they were friendly with wives of their husbands' colleagues on a previous base, at a new base people they knew before might live away from the base, may have gone back to work, or in any other way may not be available to provide the same level of support or friendship as before.

Choice again features here: whereas some wives may be prepared to make great efforts to keep in touch and go and see people who don't actually live on the base, some will not. A respondent in my study provided a good illustration of this point, referring to a friend of hers who had been posted to an RAF base which was 20 minutes' drive away:

> "I spoke to Jane and she said 'of course Val is gone now', and I thought well she's not gone at all, she's only at Wellingbridge, she can come over, we can go and see her. It's a strange attitude" (Patricia, R19).

Individual choice obviously governs the way RAF wives see and experience community, and as illustrated at many junctures throughout this thesis, one wife's meat is another's poison. Several positive as well as negative comments about the existence or otherwise of the wider community of RAF wives were recorded.

Whilst some wives could become very excited at the prospect of meeting up with wives they had known before, could envisage acquaintances on one base developing into friendships on another base (see page 141, chapter 4), and were generally positive about the community experience of being an RAF wife, others (generally those with a great deal of experience of moving around) saw the cycle of RAF life as one peppered with loss, rootlessness and superficiality.

The RAF appears to make significant efforts to encourage wives to see the community in terms of the whole of the RAF: by supporting such initiatives as the HIVE movement, the Association of RAF Wives and publication of related magazines, as well as publication of other literature such as RAF-wide and individual station magazines, which feature many pictures and commentaries relating to wives' activities, and give the general impression of solidarity amongst wives. As discussed above, living the reality can be much more complicated.

Cohen (1985) contends that the issue facing community studies is not whether its structural limits have withstood social change, but whether its members are able to infuse its culture with vitality, and construct a symbolic community which provides meaning and identity. He goes on to say that community exists in the minds of its members, and should not be confused with geographic or sociographic 'fact'.

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Like Durkheim, he argues that the distinctiveness of communities and the reality of their boundaries lies in the minds of members, in the meanings people attach to them, and not in their structural forms. In terms of this discussion, it seems obvious that in the RAF, in order to foster a sense of community on a base, and also a sense of wider community, there must be a core of wives who are interested in maintaining this community. As demonstrated by this chapter, this seems to be the case on each of the bases studied.

Reputations: 'it's only as good as who is there at the time'

The importance of reputation, as in any walk of life, was in evidence within this study. RAF Rockall was viewed by most interviewees as friendly, close-knit and well integrated with the local community. The officers' patch at RAF Blyton was generally seen as displaying all the features of community, for those who wanted to take part. Negative reputation seemed to be associated with the airmen's patch at RAF Blyton, as can be gleaned from table 5.16. Many wives expressed the opinion that there was no sense of community spirit there at all, and reasons given included the sheer size of the base, lack of information to airmen's wives, wives not joining in because of being intimidated by officers' wives (with no evidence of justification for this). One airman's wife at RAF Blyton illustrates these points, saying:

> "......particularly in the wives club, when there's been like 'oh it's becoming an officers' wives club on 60', and I'm like 'well that's because sergeants' wives don't go', and that's their fault. Officers wives aren't saying 'don't come, we don't like you', it's just because they aren't going, and that's their fault. That's their problem. You know I've never encountered any prejudice". She goes on to say:

> "......I know in the officers' quarters they've had the roads coned off and had kids parties and that sort of thing, and you think 'oh that's really nice', but I think the officers quarters are a lot more.....you know there's only the one patch, that it's a closer knit community, whereas here like we're over here and there's some over there, and it's so big, it's just too big to be able to develop a community spirit like that, unfortunately" (Monique, A10).

An officer's wife also puts across this point, showing that reputation in the form of rank, which has its basis in history, can still have a big impact on community relations today:

"They're more.....almost a chip on the shoulder, you know 'they won't want to speak to us' attitude. It's sad that it's perpetuated right up into the 1990s. It's .....really it's the class distinction, or it was, and now, it can be a teacher who happens to have married an SAC, so the class divide doesn't really work any more, and yet it's still fiercely perpetuated, and it is, as I say, quite often by the airmen's wives" (Mary, O1).

At RAF Culswick, one road in particular had the reputation of being the most sociable on the officers' patch, and successive road representatives appeared to make an effort to keep this up, and leave it as a legacy for the next road representative, by arranging regular pot luck suppers and coffee mornings. In contrast, Nicholson reported in her 1980 study of a naval base, blocks of flats which had gained the reputation of being 'unfriendly'.

In essence, and in accordance with Cohen's arguments, as long as a core element believe that the community exists and feel they have a vested interest in perpetuating the meanings associated with that community (such as all being in the same boat, all pulling together in the face of relocation and loss of career) then it exists, and people outside that core can opt in and out of community life as they wish. That the vitality of community is more apparent in times of adversity is discussed below.

United in the Face of Adversity

According to M. Scott Peck, in his book *Further Along the Road Less Travelled*:

"......community develops naturally only in response to crisis. So it is that strangers in the waiting room of an intensive care unit will rapidly come to share with each other their deepest fears and joys, because their relatives lie across the hall on the critical list. Or within a few hours of an earthquake, like the one in 1985 in Mexico City, where over 4,000 people were killed, normally self-centred, wealthy adolescents will be working hand in hand with poor labourers in around-the-clock sacrificial love. The only problem is that as soon as the crisis passes, so does the community. As a result, there are millions of people who are mourning their lost crises" (1993:145).

This viewpoint has relevance to my study. For example many wives think fondly of their time in Germany, Cyprus or a remote Scottish island, when everybody was 'pulling together', in the absence of old friends, family, career, or outside activities to take them away from the base.

At a more extreme level, mention was also made by interviewees of increased feelings of community spirit during periods of war, which (as Peck articulates) dissipated as soon as the threat was over. One interviewee puts this argument across very clearly, saying:

> "When the Gulf War was on, I used to send out a newsletter each month, telling the girls where and when we were meeting, the latest: what was happening, and how much longer we thought the guys would be away, or whatever.....I think when we had the Gulf War, that community spirit gelled, very quickly, because everybody was worried by the same things, they all wanted the latest information. They wanted to know what was going on, didn't trust the news reports, because the BBC would be saying something different to ITV and there was as a <u>real</u> community spirit then. You know unfortunately that doesn't last once the crisis is over. A lot of the wives' clubs, which were not being supported, suddenly were inundated with people, coming along because they wanted to know and hear what was going on, and because the men were away, and they were at a loose end more than usual. And that went on for a few months afterwards, and we left in the November, and already it was trailing off, and it hasn't revived since, I don't think. I mean I think it's ironic that when we have say an officers' wives doo, and we get thirty people there, and we think it's good, and yet there are hundreds of officers' wives! Women just aren't using the facilities" (Mary, O1).

These sentiments have been echoed by Jolly (1992) and Chandler (1987). Like Jolly, and interviewees in my study, Chandler stressed that all the closeness experienced during a crisis 'vanished' when the danger had passed. A comparison can be made here to the BBC social experiment on the Island of Taransay, where a group of strangers were required to create a community. Participants reported that the community was strongest when they had something to unite them: common tasks such as building work. Like wives pulling together during a crisis, completion of the building work on the island was something which would benefit each member of the community, and was thus seen as a goal worth working towards.

Conclusion

That community does exist on an RAF base has been demonstrated above. The level and depth of community experienced by wives has been found to depend on their choice of how involved they want to become, which may be affected by previous experience of military life, life course stage, personal disposition, and the characteristics of the particular base they are living on.

Some wives need the RAF community more than others, but not all 'needy' wives achieve the level of involvement they seek, due to lack of confidence or negative past experiences.

Formal social arrangements put in place by the RAF, such as HIVEs, mother and toddler groups, meet and greet sessions and mess functions undoubtedly help draw wives into RAF life. Most wives recognised the availability of facilities and activities on RAF bases and also the benefits of joining in, although many of them didn't find it easy to go along. Just as important in providing the 'glue' which holds RAF communities together are the informal social arrangements developed by wives, which knit together with the formal arrangements in such a way as to often become indistinguishable. Such arrangements include supportive neighbouring relationships, street parties and other informal social gatherings (such as coffee mornings, pot luck suppers and parties where various products are sold). As in Bell and Ribbens' study, women in my study were found to "....become 'friendly' in quite an instrumental way, to help one another through various exchanges, but in the process they may build a very real sense of community (whether positively or negatively experienced)" (1994:235).

One interviewee, Mary (O1) said that the secret of successful formal social provision on an RAF base was in finding out what wives wanted or needed and going on to provide it. Given that time is of the essence in military life, provision was also found to be essentially rooted in the present (requiring an ongoing appraisal of wants and needs; there being no room for complacency!). This contention fits well with my overall findings, especially that more provision is required on small or overseas bases because other resources (such as old friends, family and many outside activities) are denied. Several interviewees pointed towards the main facilitator of successful informal social arrangements: the attitudes of wives. If wives believe in 'pulling together' and not in dwelling on what they can't have (old friendship and kinship networks and even a career; quite a tall order!) then they appear to learn to champion instant friendship and support based on community of situation above deeper attachments (although they often feel sad at a lack of roots or permanency). A prominent finding in this regard was that on small/overseas bases and in times of adversity wives make much more effort to 'pull together', out of necessity.

On larger mainland bases however, in peace time, there was less evidence of that high level of bonding.

A prominent observation was a general desire to belong to the RAF community in some capacity, because husbands appear to inhabit a separate community and mobility inhibits the desire to belong to the civilian community around the base. Homogeneity means that fellow residents are generally 'in the same boat' and at the same life course stage. Because other resources were not available, the RAF community was seen as important, even if it was tapped into only once in a while.

Another finding was that a core of wives who are dedicated to building up the community, who believe in the overall community of RAF wives, and who take on positions of responsibility with pride, is vital to the fostering of community spirit on any particular station. This core was observed on the bases studied. Gossip was generally viewed by participants in this study as an inhibitor rather than a facilitator of community; I would argue that this finding is congruent with the composition of the population on an RAF base: the absence of shared history and detailed knowledge of each other can be seen to inhibit the sort of 'concerned' gossip which can operate in settled communities.

Greater evidence of perceived community amongst officers' wives than airmen's wives was observed on the two large mainland bases studied, (where airmen's quarters were very spread out) although not on the small remote base (where the airmen's patch was contained within a single area). Apart from the size and layout of bases, another reason for this difference revealed during this research was the differential (inferior) level of information and facilities provided for airmen's wives on some RAF bases, which often led to non-participation or alienation on the basis of rank.

The value of the community of RAF wives becomes clear when you consider the finding that regardless of actual involvement in RAF life, 50% of interviewees in my study acknowledged that they would feel a sense of loss on leaving the RAF, echoing the findings of Cohen's (1982) work on belonging: that you become conscious of your culture at its boundary. To quote Jolly, on leaving the RAF with her husband, ".....suddenly you become aware of what you did belong to, or what you're about to lose. And all the things that irritated you, suddenly don't any more" (1997:7). The paradoxical love/hate relationship of wives with the RAF institution has been demonstrated throughout this chapter.

Introduction

In this chapter, by presenting the results from the integration questionnaire handed to each interviewee at the end of the interview (appendix III), important threads from each of the three previous chapters will be drawn together and emphasised. The questionnaire set out to gauge the extent to which wives perceive themselves to be integrated into RAF life, as well as into the wider civilian community. It is important to mention here that wives are not by any means seen as 'integrated' or 'alienated' from service life per se; what I will be discussing is how integration and alienation can be observed to operate at different levels within the context of a variety of different situations and relationships which wives have exposure to on an RAF base. The starting point for designing the questionnaire was to construct a working definition of RAF life, which then formed the basis of the questionnaire. As the results were analysed a picture started to emerge of the extent to which the RAF base is (or is not) the 'whole world' for RAF wives during their stay there.

This chapter is based around the sociological concept of insiders and outsiders, and how this operates in practice within a military environment. In their paper *Changing perspectives on the insider/outsider distinction in community sociology* (2001), Crow, Allan and Summers contend that insider status is based on more than length of residence, citing the additional factors of participation in community organisations, social class, household type, age, gender and spatial position (all these factors are relevant to this study, with the exception of household type; there being only one household type on an RAF married patch: the nuclear family, with or without dependent children). They were studying a very different, civilian population, but some interesting parallels and distinctions can be observed in relation to this study, as will be demonstrated below as the results are presented and discussed.

Rather than systematically working through the questionnaire, I will present a list of headings for discussion, each of which will encompass one or more topics from the questionnaire.

The first heading will be length of residence (and its limited value within a mobile community), participation will be the next heading, followed by supportive relationships, a community of wives, and lastly the question of rank.

The general conclusions this discussion will lead towards are that wives _need_ to be reasonably well integrated into RAF life because of their general distance from other supportive networks, and the possibility that their husbands might be away when they need support. Evidence will be presented in the form of the types of support that wives said they sought and provided, generally and in terms of friendship and company. The results also show that those who sought and provided less support felt less integrated and more isolated.

Secondly, that many wives were heavily involved with events on the RAF base, but did not necessarily see themselves as highly integrated into the life, suggests that, as in civilian life, there are varying status levels in relation to the concepts of insider and outsider. Some wives 'do what they have to do' on the base, of necessity, but value their long-term ties more highly: simply because they are permanent; others do see the RAF as their 'whole world' but express sadness that they have very few long-term ties. Thirdly, throughout this study life course stage has been found to be crucial in relation to insider and outsider status on an RAF base: because the majority of organised activities are for mothers with young children. Wives in this study who were childless or had a grown-up family, have found it more difficult than those with young children to become involved, and find inroads into the 'community' of wives. Fourthly, the community inhabited by RAF wives has been shown to be quite separate from that of their husbands, and fifthly, differential provision, whether perceived or real, appears to lead to lower levels of integration for airmen's as opposed to officers' wives.

Length of Residence

In a study about the military, length of residence is essentially tied to the question of mobility. Wives become established at a particular base only to be uprooted from friends and contacts they have made at that base and required to start again. It naturally follows that length of residence is not the only factor determining integration levels in such circumstances.

It does however feature in the integration process, and some wives in this study acknowledged the attainment of higher 'insider' status based on length of residence. Serena (A17) said:

> "Because we'd been in Germany for five years, and it was strange coming here where I was the new person. Whereas in Germany I was the person who'd been there for a long time, and if anybody wanted to know anything they'd come and ask me. Coming here it was like I'm the new person now. That was hard, it was quite hard, but it is hard".

When Serena mentions the process being "hard", she refers to the level of effort which is exerted in becoming integrated on an RAF base, and the sense of loss, not unlike bereavement (Jolly 1992:127) which wives feel at constantly having to 're-invent themselves', she also stresses the effort involved in having to start all over again: making friends, and literally going back to the bottom rung of the ladder, having achieved quite a high level of insider status at the previous base.

Several wives said that moving 'wiped their confidence', and there was a general expectation that becoming settled on a new base **would** take time This brings into question the actuality of the wider RAF community, and introduces the argument presented by Anderson (1983), that all communities larger than primordial villages with face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.

There appear to be three possible strands to becoming integrated on a new base. Two of these relate to length of residence: in the form of knowledge of what goes on at a particular base and the people who live there (albeit the population is not static); some wives in this study found themselves in the fortunate position of moving to a base where friends from previous postings were already based. The other relates to general knowledge of RAF culture (see chapter 4 page 157 on the 'rules' of friendship), which can, it appears from the evidence, help to short-circuit the integration process significantly.

A very interesting finding, which detracts from length of residence as a facilitator of integration, is that becoming involved on the RAF base takes up so much time and energy, and takes place at a location physically removed from civilian life, that it could be seen to inhibit much involvement in the wider local community.

This is a fact that not all interviewees were happy about. Whilst 93% of officers' and 93% of airmen's wives who completed the questionnaire said they were happy with their level of involvement in RAF life (whether high or low), this dropped to 86% and 64% respectively with regard to contentment with their level of involvement in the local community.

Possible explanations gleaned from the data are that many airmen's wives felt there were not many opportunities to participate on the base, and that their location and length of tenure also inhibited possible integration within the wider community. Wives who felt relatively well integrated into the wider community tended to be those wives who worked away from the base, and correspondingly did not spend time socialising on the base or consider themselves to be highly integrated into the RAF community. Some quotes from interviewees with experience of working away from the base follow:

> "I've made some friends because of working at the school. You stand and chat
> to the children and their parents, and they say come round for a coffee sometime,
> and you make the effort, because they have asked you...." (Amy, A18).

"I did have a job.....and that was my sanctuary. My civilian friends helped me, as opposed to what you'd expect from my husband's colleagues" (Yvette, A4).

Another way of meeting people in the local community, mentioned by interviewees, is at the school gate. An example follows:

".....if you have children school-age, and you go along to the school, you might make friends with other mums who aren't air force. I know Jane's got some friends with similar aged children who come round for coffee in the morning, and the children play together in the holidays, and she's friends with their mums" (Cynthia, O13).

Length of residence is therefore a salient issue in determining integration levels into the RAF and wider community, but is more complicated than most writers (on civilian life) suggest, because of the need for wives to be conversant with RAF 'ways', (in relation *inter alia* to marriage, friendship, and reciprocal arrangements) in order to short-circuit the whole community process, in the interests of available time. The 'probation' period associated with settling into civilian life is less relevant on a military base because individuals have already been 'screened' by virtue of their status as RAF personnel or partners of RAF personnel. The demands of husbands' jobs necessitate support from other wives on the base.

Wives who are not familiar with RAF ways and those whose life course stage does not involve small children appear to take longer to become integrated, and those who reject the RAF way of life appeared, in the context of this study, to become alienated from the institution, and often sought to live away from the RAF base.

Participation
As outlined above, becoming integrated, or moving towards insider status, is open to negotiation, and participation in events on the base is a major pathway towards inclusion. There were many acknowledgements within the interview data of the need to 'get out of the house' and 'get on with it' (to facilitate becoming settled at a new base), the alternative being to 'go bananas!' (especially on a small base). That becoming involved can be difficult runs through the entire thesis.

A senior RAF wife, Mary (O1) with over 20 years experience of moving, highlights the differences between the ability of different wives to cope with this process, saying some wives 'bounce' onto a new base and others literally can't cope with it. This brief quote from a Maggie May poem also makes this point succinctly:

> "The kids haven't slept - they can't settle,
> And I *wish* that it wasn't so bleak,
> But I'm off to join Mothers and Toddlers today
> - It's the 'high spot' they say, of the week" (1989:17).

It is important to reiterate here that wives who work, who are childless or have older children were found to be presented with fewer opportunities for participation in the RAF community than those with pre-school children. Conversely, working away from the base can enhance possibilities for participation in the wider civilian community.

The questionnaire data showed that 78% of officers' wives and 60% of airmen's wives in the sample met either daily or weekly with other wives on the base. The majority of interviewees said they attended organised wives events on the base, with 14% of officers' wives and 40% of airmen's wives saying they never attended such events. A possible explanation for this stark difference is that less is provided (or perceived to be provided) for airmen's wives, as discussed in chapter 5.

With regard to squadron/section events, organised by their husbands' colleagues, all wives said they attended, apart from 3 airmen's wives who said no such events were organised in their husbands' sections. That wives are prepared to attend most events organised by their husbands' sections could be seen as a reflection of their loyalty to the RAF, and to supporting their husbands within their roles as RAF servicemen, despite the drawbacks; and another manifestation of the love/hate relationship between RAF wives and the institution.

There was a large rank difference in the number of wives who said they utilised available facilities on the base. A total of 57% of officers' wives said they used facilities on the base, as opposed to 93% of airmen's wives.

Again, the sense gained from the interview and questionnaire data was that airmen's wives **do** use what is there, and often feel that not enough is provided for them. For both groups of wives the gym and keep fit classes were the most popular activities.

Again, more airmen's wives than officers' wives said they helped with organised activities on the base: 43% of officers' wives compared to 60% of airmen's wives. The most popular activities in this category were the role of road representative and helping at toddler groups. Such roles can be seen as 'a way in', of getting to know people.

As a road representative, wives are required to knock on the door of every new arrival on their street, welcome them and pass on various booklets. Some wives take the role quite seriously, use it to encourage integration, and arrange get-togethers such as coffee mornings, pot luck suppers and product selling parties. This was the case on the road where I lived at RAF Culswick, with very favourable results; wives saw the road as 'friendly' and made an effort to support any get-togethers which were arranged. Wives who weren't at home during the day often came along to such events, and met wives they would not normally have had the chance to meet.

Obviously this does not happen on every street on an officers' patch, and some streets or bases were seen by interviewees as 'unfriendly', not least because of the fast turnaround of residents, and this sort of 'propaganda' would be passed on and affect how wives felt or reacted to particular bases or roads (also Nicholson 1980). No evidence was found during this study of such initiatives to assist integration on an airman's patch, beyond the odd Tupperware or Body Shop party.

Supportive Relationships

That wives need support due to the nature of their husbands' work permeates this thesis. Husband absence, distance from family and old friends, and the very nature (and element of danger) of the job necessitates support from those nearby.

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This excerpt from a Maggie May poem illustrates this point:

"A wife might have a problem
While her husband is away
But those nearby will rally round
To help her through the day.

The Air Force spirit rises up
If someone's in a fix
- It makes us more united
When we're living in the sticks" (1989:25).

An ex-RAF wife, she clearly believes in the RAF community, referred to here as 'The Air Force spirit'.

Participation in life on the RAF base, as discussed in the previous section, is seen as the first step towards developing supportive relationships with other wives. When asked about reciprocal arrangements between themselves and other wives, 57% of officers' wives as opposed to 80% of airmen's wives said they were involved in such arrangements.

A possible explanation for the large discrepancy here is that airmen earn less, therefore fewer have cars (especially second cars for wives to use). Also, with fewer organised activities, airmen's wives perhaps do rely more on friends and neighbours nearby. The most common type of arrangement entered into for both groups was looking after the house, babysitting and looking after animals.

Regarding the type of support they would be happy to ask for and to provide, a high percentage from both groups said they would ask for support and that they would expect other wives to ask them for support: 86% of officers' wives and 73% of airmen's wives. The most popular type of support in both cases was friendship, also described as company and someone to talk to. This is a very important thread running through this entire thesis: wives' efforts to guard against the threat of loneliness. I would argue that participation, followed by the development of supportive relationships on the base can be seen as an 'insurance policy' against potential loneliness and isolation during husband absence.

Generally, wives were willing to provide any type of support which they would consider asking for themselves.

Friends

A total of 35% of officers' wives and 53% of airmen's wives said that most of their friends were on the base. A high percentage of wives said they saw their friends on the base daily or weekly (86% of officers' wives and 87% of airmen's wives). In contrast, only 50% of officers' wives and 50% of airmen's wives said they saw their friends off the base daily or weekly. This reinforces a point made in chapter 4, that RAF wives need to make friends for the time and place (not necessarily friends for life), who are nevertheless very important to them at that time.

A higher percentage of officers' wives than airmen's wives said they saw their friends on the base at the weekends (93% of officers' wives compared to 57% of airmen's wives). This could relate back to the social class theories of friendship (Allan 1996), and the working class (equating to airmen and their families in this instance) tendency to socialise mainly outside the home.

There was general agreement that friends are very important, with a slightly higher percentage valuing friends off the base more highly than friends on the base. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 as the most highly valued), 71% of officers' wives and 64% of airmen's wives rated friends on the base higher than 5; 79% of officers' wives and 71% of airmen's wives rated friends off the base higher than 5. Three airmen's wives said they had no friends off the base!

This in itself suggests that the base is the 'whole world' for some wives, and adds to the discussion in chapter 4 about resultant rootlessness, and sadness at having no shared history with any of their friends.

Most interviewees said they kept in touch with friends from previous postings, keeping in touch with between 1 and 10 couples altogether. Although they kept in touch with RAF friends, not many said they met with them frequently. The most common answers were that they met up every few months or yearly, with 32% of the sample saying they met up rarely.

Family

Wives in this study, as predicted, saw their families frequently only if they happened to live nearby. Most commonly they saw them monthly (28% of officers' and 28% of airmen's wives) or every few months (36% of officers' wives and 50% of airmen's wives).

All participants said their families were very important to them, giving answers on a scale of 1 to 10 of 8, 9, or 10, with 79% of officers' wives and 79% of airmen's wives giving an answer of 10. This emphasises again the poignancy of RAF life: which by its very nature separates wives (and husbands, but that's another discussion!) from their families.

A Community of Wives

As demonstrated above, the need to pull together in the face of adversities faced in the course of RAF life has been underlined by the questionnaire data. Participation in RAF life does appear to take up a great deal of time and energy, and a high degree of integration into the RAF community seems to be at the expense of integration into the wider civilian community, and vice versa. One interviewee supports this claim when she says on the questionnaire that she would have rated herself at 10 on the scale of 1-10 with regard to integration into the local community when she was living off the base, whereas now, living on the base, she rates herself as 5.

The need for wives to feel they are part of a supportive community has been discussed here and in chapter 5. In short, services marriages are not conventional (Chandler 1985), and established friendships and frequent family contact is largely denied. In addition, civilians often do not understand and cannot empathise with the situations faced by RAF wives, in the same way that wives on the base can. Wives need other wives.

An interesting piece of evidence provided by the questionnaire data is that many of the wives who participated significantly in life on the base did not consider themselves to be particularly well integrated into the RAF community. For example, Karen (A7) sees other wives daily, RAF couples weekly, goes to mess functions, serves on committees, is involved in supportive reciprocal arrangements and says most of her friends are on the base, but she rates herself as 5/10 with regard to integration into the RAF community. Anthea (O15) sees other wives weekly, RAF couples monthly, goes to wives' events weekly, goes to all her husband's functions, takes part in activities on the base, serves on committees and says most of her friends are on the base, but she rates her integration into the RAF community as 4/10. This finding appears to reflect one of the major tensions at the heart of this thesis and of RAF life; the love/hate relationship many wives have with the institution. Many wives in this study indicated that they become involved on the base out of necessity, and enjoy some but not all of the life. There is also the question of 'friendly distance' (Willmott 1986), which can be difficult to achieve on a military base (see also chapter 4, page 132), but which can be very important to wives in terms of maintaining some part of their lives separate from the RAF.

The evidence supporting a high level of participation on the base which does not include husbands is quite striking (and inevitable since husbands are not at home during the day and also go away on detachments), and supports the arguments presented in chapter 5, with regard to the distinction between 'His and Her Community'. Some interesting observations were recorded in the interview data (but are also relevant here) in relation to this topic. One example is of two opposing viewpoints (although obviously finer shades of opinion existed in between): the first follows the premise that it is good to go along to anything which is arranged for wives, during the day or in the evening, and the second is based on the idea that it is better to be selective about the events you attend, and preferable to go out with your husband in the evening. Examples of both viewpoints follow:

> "....if there are nights out or whatever, like the ladies meal, I go to that. Whatever goes on, I try and do. I try and do anything. I've done things here that I've never done before.....If something's going on I'll go along and do it" (Serena, A17).

" If I want to go and do it then I'll do it. You know the wives club here get together and go out for a meal and say 'oh why don't you come?' Well if I'm going out for a meal then I'd rather go out with my husband than ladies. They're all very nice, but to spend an evening out I'd rather spend it with my husband" (Anthea, O15).

The Question of Rank

As discussed throughout this chapter, rank really does appear to affect potential integration to RAF life. Airmen's wives appear to be less well provided for in terms of activities and location (their houses tend to be more spread out than on the officers' patch), thus inhibiting opportunities for development of cohesion and community spirit. Physical location, together with lack of available transport (fewer cars plus inadequate bus services) were given as reasons why involvement in the wider community could be difficult.

Airmen's wives in this study have portrayed a sense of a 'gulf' between themselves and officers' wives, in terms of housing, husbands' salary, and community provision, which in itself can be seen to hinder integration into the RAF community. This 'gulf' can manifest itself in a sense of two 'classes' of serviceman and wife, which all wives (including officers' wives) I spoke to resented and felt to be unnecessary (Jolly, 1992 also speaks strongly on this subject). To quote Rosie (A1):

> ".....the rank structure shows more in quarters. It's like the blacks and whites in South Africa.....the system seems unfair".

Particularly resentful of the 'class divide' were two professional airmen's wives in this study (Monique, A10 and Cassie, A11), who felt socially in between: having little in common with other airmen's wives, but feeling unable to join in with officers' wives' activities, and thus harbouring feelings of alienation. McRae's (1986) study of *Cross Class Families* emphasises the tension this position could create. In her study, wives dominated the friendship choices of cross-class couples (friends being chosen from status levels equal or similar to that of the wives). Obviously because of the rank divide, this could create difficulties for RAF wives in the same situation.

Conclusion

As set out above, the process of integration, or becoming an insider on an RAF base is very complex. It is also an ongoing process. Wives gradually become integrated and then people around them move on, they move on, and the life course keeps moving: children go to school and wives go out to work, bringing about changes in integration levels both on and off the RAF base.

RAF life can be all-consuming, particularly for those wives who are at home during the day, and constraints of time can thus inhibit potential integration into the wider community. As shown, integration into RAF life is important because of the nature of RAF life. In the context of this study, very low participation on the base and thus low integration into the RAF community is associated with discontent with the lifestyle.

Also highlighted was that high participation did not necessarily equate to high integration into the RAF community, and two reasons have been identified for this finding. Firstly, wives need to be involved in RAF life in order to build up supportive relationships (as an 'insurance policy' against husband absence) and secondly mobility inhibits the establishment of deep friendships, therefore although wives might see many people on a regular basis, they might not feel particularly attached to them, and instead spend time nurturing their long term family and friendship attachments.

Also, as mentioned above, many wives value 'friendly distance', and the maintenance of a part of their lives which has nothing to do with the RAF, and as a result can limit their commitment levels to other wives on the base. Individuals can be simultaneously inside community relationships according to some criteria and outside by others (Willmott 1986), in this case denoted by differing levels of involvement and commitment.

In effect, on a military base wives can feel that they are part of something that is quite temporary, unless (like a handful of wives in this study) they are content for the RAF to be their 'whole world', and can view their present situation as part of a larger RAF community, in which they might meet up with people they have known before and the members of which have much in common with them: in knowing RAF ways. Community is thus understood in terms of shared culture rather than shared interests.

This thesis has presented the results of a study of a sample of RAF wives in modern Britain. Much attention has been devoted to showing the ways in which RAF life differs from civilian life, and to identifying the significant challenges faced daily by RAF wives living in married quarters, in terms of their marriages, friendships and community involvement.

This chapter will show how my thesis has answered the questions initially framed, discuss the main findings emerging from this project, and summarise the contribution of the research to academic and other debates, as well as the potential for future research following on from this work.

The decision was taken early in the study to focus in on the question of living on the military base (as opposed to undertaking a comparison between living on and off the base) and to aim for depth in a small number of subject areas (marriage and family, friendship and community) rather than breadth in many subject areas. The comparison of the differential experience of officers' and airmen's wives was retained, and produced very interesting results; existing studies being deficient in this area.

The questions initially framed relate to the impact on women's lives of being married to RAF servicemen, the effect of the job on family relationships, how RAF marriage affects wives' identity, the nature and quality of wives' friendships, how (temporary) community is generated and sustained, the interplay between public and private domains, group membership, the social forces surrounding RAF life, and the effect of rank on wives.

These questions were answered firstly by ensuring that relevant data were recorded in the interview context, and by augmenting interview data with questionnaire and observational material.

In this way a clear sense of the factors wives see as affecting them personally, as opposed to my own projections and those gleaned from the literature, was obtained.

The thesis examines three main areas: marriage and family, friendship and community, but rather than discussing the findings strictly in that format in this chapter, the key findings, described below as themes, are explored below. The following discussion will show how the initial questions posed by this research were answered, and how the findings encapsulate the experience of participants and contribute to contemporary debates.

Themes. The first theme is that the RAF wives studied were not, and did not see themselves as passive victims, but as active agents, making the most of what was available to them: constrained but not defeated. They lacked control over some 'big' issues in their lives (such as location), but not over areas such as friendship choices and levels of community involvement. A major pre-cursor to success as an RAF wife was found to be the ability to be resourceful and flexible: an aspect of wives' incorporation into men's work seen by Finch (1983) as an implicit contract, built into marriage. A complaining attitude was more commonly found amongst officers' wives, who tended to compare their lot unfavourably with contemporaries outside the air force. Many officers' wives displayed 'grudging acceptance' of the lifestyle, and in many instances the reality had fallen short of their expectations; experience of military life prior to marriage was found to be a distinct advantage.

A second very prominent theme was the paradoxical love/hate relationship which was observed between RAF wives and the employing institution. Wives acknowledged the 'perks' of the job, such as travel and attending 'posh' functions, as well as expressing resentment about issues such as husband absence, living in married quarters and the loss of their careers. This theme was commonly manifest in ambivalent feelings about parting company with the RAF; consciousness of the value of their culture at its boundary (Cohen, 1982). More pride in their position as RAF wives was recorded on the part of airmen's than officers' wives.

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Thirdly, motherhood was found to sharply intensify wives' involvement on the RAF base, and change the experience of being an RAF wife in a way which would be difficult to anticipate prior to the event. For all mothers, the experience is life-changing (Ribbens, 1994, Skevington and Baker, 1989), but there is another dimension to becoming a mother on an RAF base; from leading a life which is separate from the RAF, the majority of wives in this study reported being 'plunged' into RAF culture on becoming a mother. Motherhood was found to increase wives' responsibilities, with distance from family and old friends rendering normal channels of support unobtainable, except by phone or extended visits by either party. All these challenges were found to exist against a backdrop of media promotion of rising expectations of intimacy in marriage, of the 'new man' and the 'career woman', although some academic and media sources (for example, Allan and Crow, 2001, P. Johnston, 1999) claim this sort of media 'hype' is out of touch with reality. No significant difference on the basis of rank was recorded in relation to the changes heralded by motherhood. There was a general feeling amongst wives that it was easier to go along to events on the base with a child in tow, although not all activities and groups were seen as welcoming (which was occasionally seen, whether rightly or wrongly, as related to rank).

The fourth theme is the impact of continual mobility, which was found to affect every area of an RAF wife and family's existence. Initial excitement about moving around was found to be generally replaced by weariness, and acknowledgement that it is usually traumatic to uproot. Again, previous experience of the military seemed to help wives to cope. Because of mobility, wives were found to be very much 'thrown onto their marriages' in the absence of extended family and old friends.

This increased emphasis on the marriage relationship was found to present problems in many cases, not least because of the bachelor ethos of the RAF, which has the effect of dividing a wife and her husband into two separate social spheres and reinforcing traditional ideals of marriage. A tension is thus created between aspects of RAF life which encourage and reinforce traditional marriage, (such as the bachelor ethos and the large number of RAF wives who sacrifice their careers in favour of their marriages) with the associated images of longevity and female dependency, and other job-related factors such as mobility which encourage fluidity and fluctuation in other personal relationships.

In addition, as Harris, 1994 contends, marriage and family life appear to be becoming increasingly overburdened with (often unrealistic) expectations. It is thus unrealistic for wives (and especially incorporated wives) to expect marriage to provide for their every need (Jamieson, 1998). The vagaries of a highly mobile existence also intensify the need for supportive friendships. It was found that being mobile and living alongside other mobile individuals renders longevity in friendship problematic. Poignantly, many wives in this study reported, due to lack of time at any one base, that they were finding their 'niche' only when they had to move on. The pain of exclusion from perceived community (or sometimes cliques) was mentioned by several wives in relation to mobility and the early stages of settling on a new base. Such experiences were found to have a profound effect on wives, and could colour future experience. It was felt by some wives that once established on a base it is easy to forget what it feels like to be the new person and thus fail to provide a warm welcome to new arrivals. No major rank difference was observed in relation to the impact of mobility on wives.

Related to mobility (and also to the previous theme of motherhood) is the issue of career and loss of career. This was found to be a contentious issue for many wives. Others were however found to be able to 'go with the flow': take on any job they could find to fit with their circumstances at a particular base, or stay at home and look after children (also Finch, 1983).

As a fifth theme, it was found that there are certain 'rules' of RAF friendship, which could make life easier for wives, were it possible to interpret them in advance. Unique to my analysis was the identification of the idea of anchoring to a core group from some point in the past, which was found to help wives in this study deal with their feelings of rootlessness. Part of this theme is that it was found to be relatively easy to form superficial friendships on an RAF base, but that there are no short cuts towards meaningful friendship, which can prove difficult and isolating for wives arriving on a new base, who value close female companionship.

Many incidences of the operation of inclusive intimacy (Marks, 1998) were recorded, involving a high degree of superficiality, a low level of disclosure, and denial of some of the vital functions of friendship (Allan, 1979): of confirmation of individual identity and emotional support, whilst the other two functions, of sociability and practical support, may be met.

The rules identified as being capable of benefiting RAF wives if they were able to discern them in advance of making mistakes (such as rushing into unsuitable friendships and regretting later) are rooting friendships in the present (contextual friendship), accepting a natural process of fall-out due to mobility, sticking with the superficiality of acquaintanceship until like-minded friends are found on a base and retaining a small core group of friends from the past (which can potentially be added to) to maintain a sense of identity and roots. Pre-marital experience of the military was found to help wives to make sense of RAF friendship patterns. Rank was not found to be a major issue in relation to interpreting the rules of friendship. The differential befriending patterns based on class observed by Allan (1979) were not seen as existing to a significant degree amongst wives studied. In practice however wives in this study did seem to stick within their own groupings, and making friends across the divide of officers' and airmen's wives was found to be unusual.

That almost all wives in this study saw community on an RAF base as important (even if they tapped into it only in emergencies) is the sixth theme. Prominent within this theme is the sense gained from the study that guarding against the threat of loneliness (in view of the previously discussed issues of mobility and husband absence) was seen as crucial to RAF wives studied. A tension was observed in many cases, of wives trying to balance involvement against intrusion of the RAF into their private domains. A very interesting finding here (from the quantitative data) was that high participation did not necessarily lead wives to feel highly integrated into the RAF community. Reasons for participation were given in a number of cases as a need for involvement 'in case' an emergency led to calling on the resources of fellow wives. The absence of shared history and knowledge about most other wives on a base was however found to inhibit feelings of attachment to them. In essence, different levels of involvement and commitment to a community were observed, and it was found that you can be inside community relations according to some criteria but not by others (also Willmott, 1986).

Formal social provision was found to operate alongside informal provision. It was found that more formal provision is required and utilised on overseas and remote bases, because people are more likely to become involved, in the absence of outside activities and extended family and old friends; a resultant observation was that wives generally had fond memories of their time on remote or overseas bases. A heightened sense of community was also recorded in times of adversity, such as during the Gulf war (also Peck, 1993). To sustain community and a sense of community spirit on an RAF base, it was found that a core of wives who are willing to take on responsibilities is crucial. Unlike Jolly's experience (1997) of a lack of willing volunteers, my fieldwork showed wives being prepared to step forward and fill positions as others moved on; the maintaining of reputations such as a 'friendly road' or a 'good creche' being taken seriously by many wives. With regard to rank, many wives at RAF Blyton and RAF Culswick reported no sense of community spirit on the base, due to housing layout, the vast number of airmen's quarters in several different locations on the base, and the differential (inferior) provision for airmen in terms of accommodation, furnishings and social functions.

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The final theme is an overall sense, gained throughout this study, of the RAF lagging behind the times socially; of not responding sufficiently to societal change. In this age of increasing emphasis on the freedom of the individual, participants in this study put forward the clear message that wives and families do not want to be 'controlled' by military rules and regulations, or by social forces in the form of rank, intrusion into private lives, ideas about homogeneous living (which can be seen to insulate against the outside world and limit the range of role models) and outdated social expectations (Jolly, 1992): to attend certain events and fit into certain roles. Neither do they like the underlying threat to husbands' careers if their wives do not do what is expected of them. Put forcibly, "....military wives represent a population of women who particularly need to be liberated from government and traditional dependency....." (Dobrofsky and Batterson, 1977:676).

In sum, this has been an exciting and unusual research project. Exploration of existing literature served to identify a gap worth filling, both in terms of policy debates on the military and sociological understanding of the position of occupational wives.

The literature, although quite dated in many cases, proved useful and provided some interesting parallels, especially in the persistence of patterns observed in studies carried out in the 1970s and 1980s. No other study framed or answered the particular questions posed by this study in any depth.

Other material consulted, such as newspaper articles on the military seem to report mainly from the victim standpoint: of wives waiting for their husbands to return from detachments or discontent with married quarters. Most military publications and magazines paint a rosy picture of RAF life. In addition, and as previously stated, government studies tend to be policy-driven, and a problem for government is not necessarily a problem for the population studied. I feel this thesis presents a realistic picture of RAF wives today, focusing in on the areas found to be dearest to the hearts of those involved. The results are colourful and enlightening and have I feel served to give a 'voice' to RAF wives, previously denied them.

The group studied have emerged as diverse in background and experience, and as displaying varying levels of commitment to and acceptance of their husbands' jobs. By using the methods chosen I was able to gain direct access into their social worlds, find out their hopes and fears and establish what it really means, in terms of the everyday lived reality, to be an RAF wife.

As regards contemporary debates, this study has several key contributions to make. Firstly, in relation to defence, this research has shown the significant impact of government cuts leading to threats of redundancies, hiving off of services and sale of married quarters, on the wives and families of RAF servicemen. Ample evidence of disillusionment caused by redundancy threats was recorded, as well as nervousness about new landlords and perceived resultant lowering of maintenance standards.

It was found that whilst employees are sent on out-placement courses and prepared for leaving the RAF, nothing is done to prepare wives and families for this eventuality, and these findings feed into the more general sociological debate on changing meanings attached to work.

As in other areas of employment, a military career is no longer seen as a job which is guaranteed for life. Much disillusionment on the part of RAF servicemen and their wives and families is a natural by-product of this development, in view of the commitment and sacrifices made by whole families, over a long period of time, to the job. The subject of the increasing incidence of part-time working and short-term contracts in today's job market is also relevant here, with highly mobile wives proving ideal candidates for such terms of employment (whereas employers can be reluctant to take on military wives for long-term contracts, knowing they will not stay 'forever', although employment law does now forbid such a stance).

Movement and change is another area which is the subject of much contemporary debate. Chapter 5 served to reinforce the sociological idea (Young and Willmott, 1957, Crow and Allan, 1994, Wellman, 1994, Urry, 2000) that network is a more effective tool for charting personal communities than community of place. Also significant was the finding that whilst moving from place to place can be fun for a time (given the human desire for novelty), and potentially character-building, fatigue usually does set in, especially in uprooting school children. Most wives in this study were found to yearn for roots at some point in the future. RAF bases, as communities of mobile individuals, were found to be relatively easy to enter, but to offer little in terms of security (Jolly, 1992) (and this principle could equally be applied to many other occupational communities).

The hierarchical nature of community structure is another debate which this research feeds into. The complexities of rank are significant in relation to hierarchy, in the way airmen's wives consider themselves to be very separate from officers' wives (although the reverse is not necessarily true). Also important is the higher status of wives who have much experience of RAF life, and wives who participate extensively in activities on the base. The complicated process of becoming an insider on an RAF base (only to go back to the bottom rung of the ladder on the next base) is also an important area, in relation to hierarchical community structure.

Another area of contemporary debate in sociology is the elusive nature of solidarity, and several important issues have been identified in this thesis on that subject. The intense need for community and its loose (yet stable) nature on large bases is significant here, as is the finding that wives bond together more closely in the absence of other outside resources and in times of adversity. Gossip was found to be capable of rocking the basis of community on small and remote bases, whilst its potentially altruistic and beneficial properties were grudgingly acknowledged by some wives in this study.

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The status of marriage is also currently a key sociological topic, and as stated in chapter 3, marriage is still the contemporary expectation of women, with almost 300,000 marriages per year taking place in England and Wales in the mid-1990s. This study has shown that marriage is very much encouraged in the strong heterosexual culture which is the RAF, where homosexuality was outlawed (and is still not encouraged) and cohabitation is not recognised. Lack of exposure to other role models and heavy investment in RAF culture and the marriage relationship itself were found to encourage many wives to 'stick it out'. Those who don't were found to be faced with the double blow of losing their husband and their lifestyle.

Living in married quarters and being exposed to the surveillance, behaviour and expectations of other RAF wives and the employing institution itself was shown to impinge heavily on the living out of married life and the bringing up of children. Several wives in this study made mention of the benefits, described as having a 'life of your own', of living away from the base. A significant issue for many wives in this study was that rank has no relevance away from the married patch. Again, similar experiences have been recorded by other researchers in occupational communities other than the military (for example Young, 1984 and 1993).

In relation to methodological debates, the value of doing research in an area known to the researcher, to ensure maximum access on a variety of levels, was underlined, as was the value of the triangulation of methods.

Considerable potential for further research was identified. With regard to the work presented in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, there is ample scope for exploring aspects of these subject areas in more depth. Chapter 3 contains material which could be built upon to engage in a detailed study of the career paths of RAF wives over time, for example by charting the careers of retired wives and comparing them to those of younger women. Another study could be undertaken on the incidence of post-natal depression in RAF wives (observed in this study to be high) who are deprived of their extended family, compared to a civilian control group.

Marriage longevity and failure in the RAF could also be studied in depth, alongside the impact of the high focus on the marriage relationship (within the context of a mobile existence) in the absence of other enduring channels of support.

In relation to chapter 4, detailed analysis of wives' social networks could be undertaken, with wives being asked to chart their networks. Attention could also be paid to how many friendships survive from each posting, and how long friendships survive after wives move away from the base on which the friendships were formed. The particular characteristics of friendships 'for life' could also be examined, against the background of Pahl's claim that friendship is becoming the 'social glue' which holds contemporary societies together (1998).

On community (chapter 5), a study of the precise nature of wives' daily contact on a base over a given period of time could be undertaken; wives being asked to keep a diary of their activities. Exploration of the characteristics of individuals who are able and willing to take on positions of responsibility on the base as opposed to those who are not could also be attempted.

With regard to chapter 6, on the subject of integration and alienation, there is considerable scope for research into the way wives manage involvement on military bases, and the personal consequences of this (for example loneliness in the case of low involvement and fatigue and overload in the case of high involvement, with various intermediate stages).

To conclude, RAF life is not a romantic dream. The employing institution has been found to gain much (in terms of the loyalty and support of husbands) from wives, but wives often feel they are afforded scant recognition of such services, and receive little support or consideration from the RAF.

"The institution which employs the husband proceeds on the assumption that the alternative uses of the wife's time are neither important nor productive" (Papanek, 1973:856). They can be deprived of their husbands, families, old friends and careers, and very much thrown onto their own resources, both in terms of their marriage and their own daily lives. Positive effects of military life are that those 'who can hack it' and go with the tide of RAF life, emerge as strong women with a deep-seated survival instinct and the determination, commitment and ability to overcome any hurdle presented. The corollary of this is that one woman's bread is another woman's poison so to speak; some wives cannot 'hack it' and become increasingly disillusioned until ultimately their marriages break up or their husbands leave the air force.

The negative effect of government-imposed change on wives and families: redundancies, contracting out, selling off married quarters (lowering morale), and lack of reaction to societal trends such as cohabitation has a knock-on effect on the military man and thus the effectiveness of the RAF. Such issues need to be addressed in order to sustain an effective air force into the 21st century.

APPENDIX I

Pen Portraits of Interviewees and Respondents in Alphabetical Order

OFFICERS' WIVES

Name	Life-Stage	Husband's Job	Career Status	Moves
Alison (O16)	1 small child, 2 school-age	Squadron Leader: Fighter Controller	At home	7
Amelia (O14)	No children.	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	Student - Teacher training	2
Anthea (O15)	1 school-age child	Flight Lieutenant: Fighter Controller	Part-time school assistant	3
Betty (O8)	1 small child	Flight Lieutenant: Engineer	At home. Trained nurse	2
Cindy (O10)	1 small child	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	At home	1
Cynthia (O13)	1 small child	Squadron Leader: Doctor	At home. Trained Nurse	1
Diane (O9)	1 school-age child	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	Full-time welfare assistant	7
Jane (O4)	No children	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	Full-time nurse	1
Jenny (O7)	1 small child	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	Part-time social worker	1
Mandy (O12)	1 small child	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	At home. Trained Accountant	1
Mary (O1)	Grown-up family	Group Captain: Station Commander	At home. Trained teacher	8
Paula (O6)	1 small child, 1 school-age child	Squadron Leader: Pilot	At home	2
Penny (O5)	1 small child	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	Full-time travel consultant	1
Sally (O2)	Grown-up family	Squadron Leader: Padre	Part-time creche worker	3
Sharon (O11)	1 small child, 2 school-age	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	Part-time nurse	2
Shirley (O3)	1 small child	Flight Lieutenant: Navigator	At home. Trained nurse	2

AIRMEN'S WIVES

Name	Life-Stage	Husband's Job	Career Status	Moves
Ann (A13)	2 school-age	Corporal: Technician	Part-time hairdresser	4
Amy (A18)	No children	SAC: Technician	Part-time school assistant	1
Carolyn (A8)	Grown-up family	Flight Sergeant: Air Traffic Controller	Full-time welfare assistant	7
Cassie (A11)	1 small child	Corporal: Air Loadmaster	At home. Trained retail manager	4
Gwen (A15)	2 school-age children	Corporal: Fireman	Part-time playgroup assistant	5
Helen (A16)	1 small child, 2 school-age	Corporal: Fireman	At home	7
Josie (A6)	1 small child	Corporal: Mover	At home	2
Karen (A7)	1 small child	Corporal: Technician	At home	2
Lucy (A9)	2 school-age children	Flight Sergeant: Air Traffic Controller	Part-time secretary	2
Marion (A3)	1 small child	Corporal: Air Traffic Controller	Full-time secretary	3
Melissa (A5)	1 small child	Corporal: Technician	At home. Trained hairdresser	1
Monique (A10)	2 small children	Sergeant: Air Loadmaster	At home. Trained teacher	2
Rosie (A1)	2 school-age children	Corporal: Driver	Part-time factory and cleaning work	5
Serena (A17)	2 school-age children	Sergeant: Catering	At home	4
Shelley (A2)	2 school-age children	Corporal: Driver	Full-time administration work	2
Suzanne (A12)	No children	Flight Sergeant: RAF Police	Full-time work/ social work student	4
Vanda (A14)	1 small child	Flight Sergeant: Technician	At home	1
Yvette (A4)	1 small child, 1 school-age	Corporal: Air Traffic Controller	Part-time administration work	6

RESPONDENTS

Name	Life-Stage	Husband's Job	Career Status	Moves
Catherine (R3)	No children	Squadron Leader: Engineer	At home. Trained Marketing Manager	3
Doreen (R6)	1 school-age child	Flight Lieutenant: Navigator	At home. Trained nurse	3
Edith (R9)	Grown-up family	Squadron Leader: Administrator	At home.	8
Gaby (R7)	1 small child, 2 school-age	Flight Lieutenant: Navigator	Part time music teacher	3
Janice (R4)	1 small child, 1 school-age	Flight Lieutenant: Administrator	At home. Trained teacher	5
Janine (R1)	2 small children	Flight Lieutenant: Navigator	At home	1
Joan (R12)	3 school-age children	Squadron Leader: Padre	At home. Ordained Anglican Priest	5
Josephine (R17)	1 small child	Flying Officer: Mover	At home	2
Kay (R11)	1 small child	Squadron Leader: Engineer	At home. Trained teacher	3
Leanne (R10)	2 small children	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	At home. Trained Teacher	1
Libby (R8)	Grown-up family	Wing Commander: Administrator	At home. Trained teacher	9
Linda (R16)	1 small child	Flight Lieutenant: Pilot	At home. Dentist	3
Lydia (R5)	1 small child, 1 school-age	Flight Lieutenant: Navigator	At home	1
Maisie (R19)	Grown-up family	Squadron Leader: Pilot (deceased)	Retired	10
Margaret (R18)	Grown-up family	Warrant Officer: Air Loadmaster	Full-time teacher	3
Marge (R13)	2 school-age children	Flight Lieutenant: Administrator	At home. Trained BT Engineer	4
Molly (R20)	Grown-up family	Squadron Leader: Pilot (retired)	Retired	12

RESPONDENTS CONTINUED

Name	Life-Stage	Husband's Job	Career Status	Moves
Patricia (R14)	1 small child	Squadron Leader: Engineer	At home	3
Sheila (R21)	No children	Lawyer: civilian	At home. Counsellor	N/A
Sophie (R2)	2 small children	Flight Lieutenant: Navigator	At home	3
Wendy (R15)	Grown-up family	Flight Lieutenant: Administrator	Part-time secretary	7

APPENDIX II

<u>Rank Structure of the Royal Air Force (from highest to lowest)</u>

OFFICERS	AIRMEN
Marshall of the Royal Air Force	Warrant Officer
Air Chief Marshall	Flight Sergeant (Chief Technician)
Air Marshall	Sergeant
Air Vice Marshall	Corporal (Junior Technician)
Air Commodore	Senior Aircraftsman
Group Captain	Leading Aircraftsman
Wing Commander	Aircraftsman
Squadron Leader	
Flight Lieutenant	
Flying Officer	
Pilot Officer	
Acting Pilot Officer	

APPENDIX III

QUESTIONNAIRE: INTEGRATION INTO THE RAF 'COMMUNITY'

Please circle as appropriate, and write additional answers in the space provided

1.   How often do you socialise with other wives on the base?

        daily   weekly   fortnightly   m o n t h l y

        less than   never
        monthly

2.   How often do you socialise with other RAF couples on the base?

        daily   weekly   fortnightly   monthly

        less than   never
        monthly

3.   How often do you attend wives events on the base? (coffee mornings, evening get-togethers etc.)

        daily   weekly   fortnightly   monthly

        less than   never
        monthly

4.   Do you go to events organised by your husband's squadron/section?

        yes   no

If yes, do you attend

        every event   almost every event   the occasional event

5.   Do you attend group activities/utilise facilities on the base?

        yes   no

which activities do you attend/facilities do you use? (e.g. drama group, keep fit)

6.   Do you help with any organised activities on the base? (e.g. running children's groups, acting as a road representative etc.)

        yes   no

If yes, please specify which activities and what your role is.

7. Do you attend mess functions? (e.g. summer ball, Christmas draw, dining-in nights)

   always   sometimes   occasionally   never

8. Do you get involved in recriprocal arrangements for minding children/dogs/houses while people are away?

   yes   no

   if yes, please specify which arrangements you get involved in

9. Do you participate in a babysitting circle?

   yes   no

10. Do you/would you seek support from other wives when your husband is away?

    yes   no

    if yes, what type of support would you feel comfortable asking for?

11. Do others seek support from you?

    yes   no

    if yes, what type of support would you expect them to ask for/be willing to provide?

12. Do you have friends from other ranks?

    yes   no

13. Are most of your friends   on the base
                                 off the base

14. Do you see friends who live on the base

    daily   weekly   fortnightly   monthly   every few   less
                                                               months   than
                                                                             that

15. Do you see friends who live off the base

daily	weekly	fortnightly	monthly	every few months	less than that

16. Do you see friends who live on the base at weekends?

    yes   no

    If yes, do you see them when your husband is at home, or only when he is away?

17. At this moment in time how important, on a scale of 1-10, are your friends

    (a)   on the base?

    (b)   off the base?

18. How many RAF friends from previous postings do you keep in touch with?

    How often do you see them?

19. Do you see your family

daily	weekly	fortnightly	monthly	every few months	less than that

20. On a scale of 1-10, how important are your family to you?

21. On a scale of 1-10, how integrated would you say you are, into the RAF community?

22. Are you happy with this level of involvement with the RAF?

    yes   no

23. On a scale of 1-10, how integrated would you say you are into the wider local community?

24. Are you happy with this level of involvement in the wider community?

    yes   no

25. How important on a scale of 1-10 is length of residency to how involved and settled you feel in

    (a)   the RAF community, and
    (b)   the local community?

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