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**Families, Work and Empowerment: Coalitions for
social change**

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Edited versions of these papers have been presented to conferences or are to be published in an edited book.



General Introduction

The theme of empowerment, and its link with the forming of social alliances or coalitions in order to bring about change, emerges from our work on a number of different projects. The papers brought together here were originally presented to different audiences and focus on different aspects of our work with families who have disabled children (of any age). There is overlap between different projects, and there is, therefore, overlap in the discussions and arguments we present in this volume, as well as some of the examples we bring from our research.

The first paper, was written for a collection of articles describing how radical psychologists have reconciled broadly Marxist theory with psychological thinking and practice. This reflects the interest we have in trying to understand the linkages between change at individual, family and societal levels. The paper looks at common ways in which power is conceived, and goes on to discuss different theoretical approaches to power and powerlessness. In arguing for collective action in empowerment, and for the importance of ideology in sustaining powerlessness, we highlight the flaws in thinking about power simply in terms of what individual can do.

The second paper adopts the same theoretical positions. Here we pick up on collective action in empowerment by considering the ways in which different social interests have co-coincided to create the conditions for change for some families caring for disabled adult sons and daughters. Using the accounts of families involved in a new parent movement seeking to plan positive futures for disabled sons and daughters, we show how potential alliances between quite different interest groups in Britain have begun to shift prevailing ideology about caring and family responsibilities. Within this collective action for change individual parents and whole families become empowered through active participation.

In a similar vein, the third paper shows how unlikely change for working parents of disabled sons and daughters will be if the common interests of employers, families, individual parents and the wider society are not harnessed for collective action. It is at the point of overlapping concerns, or potential social alliance, that change in both employment and family policy and practices may come about.

Rethinking Empowerment: Shared action against powerlessness

Mark Burton¹ and Carolyn Kagan²

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Psychology and Society: Radical theory and practice London, Pluto Press*



Socially responsible psychologists are aware of the problem of power in the interconnected domains of psychological practice, knowledge, theory and ideology. Doing something worthwhile about the problem requires more than a description of the experience of powerlessness. We need to know something about how power relations are constructed and maintained (produced and reproduced) - knowing that we can identify points for intervention, and the characteristics of viable strategies.

Context

We are both practical psychologists, involved in the provision and development of publicly funded services to people who are seriously disadvantaged through impairment and experience. Theory must therefore be applicable (cf. Argyris, 1993).

Sheila is 42 years old. She lives with her elderly mother in an inner suburb of Manchester. Their house is owned by the City Council and while structurally sound it is expensive to heat. Across the road are some derelict flats, and the area has high unemployment, high crime, and few amenities or community-based organisations. Sheila has an intellectual disability³, which in her case means that while she can wash, dress and feed herself, and she has the ability to hold a brief conversation, she finds it difficult to deal with novel situations and the unexpected.

Sheila attends a day centre with about 40 other people with various intellectual disabilities. The staff treat her with civility, but the days are empty with little purposeful activity, little contact with identity-conferring social worlds, and Sheila has been going there for 26 years.

Sheila's aspirations are for her own home, her own family, perhaps a job in a shop. Her likely prospects are for more of the same in the day, until her mother becomes unable to

care for her, when after some delay and indecision, Sheila will move to a staffed group home (with three other people she doesn't like much) before being placed with a couple of about her age as a sort of 'honorary family member'.

Occasionally she will meet outright hostility and discrimination, but more often the experience is one of a more subtle marginalisation.

Sheila, then has little power to influence what happens to her. While she has an intrinsic difficulty in identifying relevant aspects of the social situation to act on, a bigger problem is her almost total lack of access to power, that is to the means of influencing anything that has a bearing on her fate.

Other commentators have tried to characterise the problem facing people who both depend on others and who are seen as 'different'. The most systematic of these has been Wolfensberger (1992), who has argued that there is a universal dynamic of societal devaluation, whereby

entire classes of people are judged negatively by an entire collectivity, society, or majority thereof. it creates and maintains societally devalued classes who systematically receive poor treatment at the hands of their fellows in society and at the hands of societal structures - including formal, organized human services.

Wolfensberger, 1992, p 3.

He argues that this is universal across all societies, although the actual devalued class varies from society to society. Burton has argued (1994), that in addition to societal devaluation, there is a specific problem in modern Western societies whereby identity conferring social processes and structures (roughly coterminous with civil society) are subverted by the control mechanisms of both state and market: Habermas (1987) thesis of 'colonisation of the lifeworld. Moreover, the global reach of modern capitalism creates

particular threats for marginalised persons as ecological and other traumatic destabilisations occur (Burton, 1994).

A fundamental problem with accounts such as Wolfensberger's is that it gets little further than a moral stance and a description of the phenomena. That description is grounded in the typical experiences of devalued people, but it fails to extend to the socio-historical origins of these phenomena (Burton, 1983). Without a multi-level analysis it is difficult to understand where devaluation comes from, and what should be done about it, psychologically or politically.

We will show some of what happens when the problem of powerlessness is addressed without a multi-level societal analysis, and use work within the Marxist tradition to construct an alternative approach.

Some current responses

The first, and perhaps most traditionally psychological response is to treat lack of power as a characteristic of the individual, which is then tackled through therapy. The thinking seems to be that if, for example, the person has insufficient power, then they can be given more through additions to their behavioural repertoire. However, as we can see from the case of Sheila, powerlessness results from an interaction of personal, contextual and historical factors, and an intervention solely at the personal level is unlikely to create very much change, unless it is accompanied by more pervasive changes in the person's circumstances. This is not to disparage the idea of attempting to help people function more effectively in their social context, but to suggest that this is not the most immediate task if it is powerlessness that we wish to reverse. It should be noted that some writers on assertiveness recognise the contextual nature and hence the limitations of the approach (Trower, 1982), or its growth at the point of transition from the political and social

culture of the 1960s to the more introspective and private culture of the 1970s (Rakos, 1991). Despite this, practice in the field is often far less sophisticated than the more thoughtful academic writers, and in some cases is functionally indistinguishable from the ideology of 'blaming the victim' (IJHS ref).

A second response is the appeal to human rights, again in an untheorised way. As a typical example, a large welfare bureaucracy publishes a policy statement for its service provision to people with intellectual disability: the first section is a statement of the rights of these service users - for access to ordinary opportunities, to services that reflect individual need, for respect from staff, etc. etc. Such statements often draw on the philosophy of normalisation/social role valorisation (Wolfensberger, 1972, 1993; O'Brien, 1987; O'Brien and Lyle, 1987), or on the United Nations declaration of human rights. What comes next in the policy document is often in stark contradiction to the fine opening statements, for example a financial framework and a service plan that involves most people living in 4 person homes with staff rostered on a shift system, or assignment to day services on the basis of degree of disability. While service models have progressed considerably over the last fifteen years (Towell, 1987), we are still a long way from real inclusiveness of our most disabled citizens. While we can discount the mismatch between the rhetoric and practice of bureaucratic organisations, a similar phenomena can be found in the rhetoric and practice of individual service providers, including psychologists. Here there may be advocacy of a person's individual rights, but while this may be quite effective in preventing bad things from happening, and in some cases can improve access to various entitlements, it seldom leads to any transformation in the power relations that operate, and can paradoxically increase the reliance of the impaired person on formal services, so perpetuating powerlessness. Rights, like other concepts from the liberal tradition, can be useful in identifying the problems of a society based on social domination, but as guides to action they are of limited usefulness.

Thirdly, an emphasis on empowerment has become popular in social welfare circles since the early 1980s. As (Gomm, 1993) points out, it is usually vaguely defined, and like 'community' it has a generalised meaning of being a 'good thing', but specifically contradictory meanings to those of different political persuasions. There is much rhetoric about empowerment, but little real giving or sharing of power with marginalised people. While acting as a healthy critique of the power of welfare professionals (cf. Illich et al. 1977), the notion of empowerment can easily disguise unchanged social relations: when were you last empowered? Who was kind enough to give up their power for you, and why?

In these times with socialism in retreat and the market seen as the bringer of all good things, the tendency is increasingly to identify empowerment with consumer choice in a commodity market. While there may be some gains from the curbing of monopoly power, the question remains, how might being a consumer of services fundamentally change Sheila's experience of powerlessness? She might have a little more clout in terms of the service system supports she requires in order to construct an identity and life that meets her various needs (see Doyal and Gough, 1991), but her involvement in the social processes available to others (deformed as they are by capitalism) will still be limited by the dead weight of societal construction of her attributes, roles, relationships, and hence place. Moreover, we can, with Habermas (1987/1991, see also Ray, 1993), to see the recourse to markets as the outcome of crises in the legitimation and in the steering mechanisms of the modern state, rather than any kind of a rational choice of a more effective model of meeting people's needs.

The above 'solutions' to the problem of powerlessness share a common ideological basis, 'individualism', that sees social reality in terms of the behaviour, beliefs, values, etc. of individuals. This way of seeing the world, far from being inevitable, emerged only with the emergence of the labour market, and was only labelled in the C19th (Williams, 1976).

A consequence in psychological work has been the emphasis on power relations in the dyad, where person A exerts influence over person B, rather than on the effects of power wielded by social institutions, for example on interactions between A and B. The latter kind of, multi-level, set of relationships is more difficult to analyse, especially within the dominant paradigm of social psychology, where models that are both reductionistic and individualistic have been developed, some of which are fine as far as they go (e.g. French and Raven, 1968), but which fail to consider how power is produced and reproduced in a self producing society. It has been left to non-psychologists (e.g. Lukes, 1974; Wrong, 1979), to analyse power more adequately.

Marxism and powerlessness: some pointers to psychological practice

We now want to show (all too briefly) some of the ways in which Marxist analysis can help us understand the production and reproduction of powerlessness, and suggest ways forward.

We will begin with Marx and his classical analysis of exploitation. Marx and Engels, once they had dialectically moved on from idealistic and mechanistic theories of society, developed what may be seen as a general or meta- theory of the determinants of human society, including the main forms of human experience within it. They saw material necessity, the need to produce food, shelter, etc. as underpinning human society, and the particular mode of production as critical in shaping the social relations and social forces that we experience as social reality, - work, culture, relationships, science, religion, etc. Specifically, they saw classes as the contradictory elements with conflicting interests. Under Capitalism, the property owning class extracted more labour equivalents of value from the production process than they gave back to the labouring class: they extracted 'surplus value'. This set of exploitative social relations was disguised ideologically

through the reification of the things produced, as commodities, rather than as the labour that went into their making (see Mepham, 1979).

In its full articulation (Marx, 1865, 1867) this account has the following characteristics (we are less concerned with its accuracy as social theory than with its style of analysis):

1. It identifies the difference in power (control of the means of production versus sale of labour power) between those with different interests (classes).
2. It describes the historical development of these particular social relations.
3. It provides an account of why this exploitative relationship is not usually seen for what it is (commodity fetishism, individual contracts between property owner and labourer)
4. It describes and accounts for some of the psychological phenomena experienced by the oppressed (alienation, but also the development of consciousness as a result of the contradiction between the 'forces of production' and the social 'relations of production' - people work together collectively and learn new skills).
5. It makes some statements about what has to happen for these relationships to be transformed (proletarian revolution).

The above characteristics might be a reasonable set of criteria for assessing the adequacy of a theoretical approach to power and liberation.

Freire (1972a, b) writes on the basis of practical work with non-literate people in North Eastern Brazil. His is an explicitly liberatory educational practice that he contrasts with what he calls the 'banking' model of education, where neutral knowledge is put into passive recipients, by those who know better. Instead, for Freire, education is a 'dialogic' practice, whereby the learner assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the educator, so reality is 'demythologised', as those who had been 'submerged' in oppressive

social relations begin to understand these relations and the ideology that hides them, so recasting their social role with critical awareness. Freire articulates this approach against the 'culture of silence', where oppressed people are prevented from what Doyal and Gough (1984, 1991) called 'critical autonomy', the opportunity for participation in the political process. Without this, Freire suggests, people are not allowed 'to be'.

Freire (1972a: 42-44) is clear that such transformations go hand in hand with changes in social relations, using the example of agrarian reform in Chile: he quotes one peasant who explains that he had not learned to read and write previously because

'I didn't even think. Neither did my friends. ... Because it wasn't possible. We lived under orders. We only had to carry out orders. We had nothing to say'.

Freire, 1972a: p43.

The process of 'conscientization', as Freire calls the deepening awareness of both social relations and the possibility of their transformation, is then, not a magical power, or a technique, but a fundamental kind of reflection in action that underpins the work of principled social change agents.

The situation for people like Sheila is not so very different from that of the Chilean quoted earlier, and it is possible to witness a kind of conscientization as people come to simultaneously understand their social situation and find a voice to begin altering it, for example, and in a constrained way, in the self advocacy groups and movement of people with intellectual disabilities (e.g. Williams and Shoultz, 1982; Shearer, 1986: chapter 8). Although Freire's work analyses the oppression of class and of North-South expropriation, he argues (Freire and Macedo, 1993) that the other sources of oppression (race, gender) work in the same general way. While ultimately schematic and suggestive rather than providing an analysis and action orientation that we can 'lift off the shelf' and

use in our context (others have developed this line of work, however, see for example McLaren and Leonard, 1993) Freire develops the subjective element in Marx and Engels classic analysis, always keeping it connected with the historical determinants of the context in which we find ourselves.

Habermas (e.g. 1987/1991) is associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, another home of the subjective side of Marxism. However, Habermas combines a variety of frameworks from western social theory, phenomenological and linguistic philosophy, and psychology (G.H. Mead and Piaget) in a 'reconstruction' of Marxist theory of society and its contradictions (see Dews, 1992; Pusey, 1987; Ray, 1993; White, 1988). While Habermas is chiefly regarded as an academic writer, he has also intervened in politics in Germany (see Holub, 1991). Like Marx, Habermas starts from 'first principles' to build his social theory. He identifies three kinds of rationality, or types of references that could be made in justifying a statement:

- A. to a world of events or facts, (teleological, strategic, rational choice, cognitive, or means-ends rationality - 'truth')
 - B. to the world of others and hence of social norms, (contextual, normative, or inter-subjective rationality - 'moral rightness');
- and
- C. to the world of personal subjectivity - and that of others - (dramaturgical or aesthetic rationality - 'authenticity').

Habermas argues that the competent human actor and speaker has access to all three of these sources of rationality, simultaneously, and that we have the capacity to select the most appropriate for interpreting a given situation. He argues that we therefore have a shared basis for intelligible communication. It is this recourse to a shared basis for the

assessment of rationality that makes social interaction possible, because participants enter with two implicit expectations: that the other person's actions are intentional and that she could, if called upon, justify any claims made in interaction.

Habermas postulates an *ideal speech situation* wherein coordinative speech acts are subject to such an open and equal process of justification.

Habermas connects this formal analysis of communicative pragmatics to the phenomenological concept of the shared '*life-world*'. The lifeworld is both the social world in which we learn to become social beings, and the stored work of preceding generations. The life-world as a totality is not apprehended, but aspects of it are subject to critical reflection, and as that happens they are no longer part of the life-world as such, but part of critical consciousness.

Habermas counterposes to the lifeworld, the idea of the *system* examples of which include the capitalist economy or a bureaucratic organisation. These systems employ *steering media* - money and power, which substitute for the implicit or communicatively attained agreement among actors, in order to co-ordinate social activity.

Under 'late-capitalism' the steering media of market and bureaucratic organisation have grown without control, increasingly governing (commodifying and bureaucratising) activities within the lifeworld that would otherwise be intrinsically bound to communicative action: this is the thesis of *colonisation of the life-world*.

Habermas is pointing both to contradictions in modern societies and to social pathologies resulting from them - analogous to 'alienation' (Dews, 1992, p.14).

Coordination of action through implicit or explicit agreement is essential for the everyday transmission of culture, social integration and the socialisation of individuals, but when such social relations become instead coordinated (colonised) by the steering media of a

modern capitalist society, with their bias to strategic rationality, they become distorted, leading to a variety of individual and collective social pathologies.

More specifically, Habermas reviews the trajectory of late capitalist society: Advanced capitalism defused class conflict in the sphere of production, and at the same time the public sphere has been neutralised as a site for authentic public participation. So while the social roles of employee and citizen have been delimited and curtailed, compensations have flowed via the roles of consumer and client.

Habermas has been criticised (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Flood, 1990) for having little to say about power. Yet his whole analysis is concerned with the ways in which open and democratic coordination of human action is subverted by media of power and money. His concern with the erosion of the public sphere, although in the context of a different society from that of Freire, is also a radical concern with the prevention of vast numbers of people from gaining access to the political process. His analysis of the effects of welfare bureaucracies is also of great relevance to the situation of people like Sheila whose already impoverished lifeworld is further colonised and objectified by the formal and technical surrogates for human solidarity.

Both Marx and Freire wrote in social contexts very different from our own. Habermas lives in a society much more similar to ours, but while providing us with a comprehensive and sophisticated 'definition of the problem', he offers little in the way of an action orientation.

Gramsci was both a revolutionary activist and a social theorist, and he was explicitly concerned with problems of political action and the organisation of power in a society that showed at least some of the features of the Western democracies.

Some Marxist approaches to ideology have tended to stress the base/superstructure metaphor, false consciousness, and conspiracy. This gives a rather dualistic notion of ideology, seeing it as ideas that - while reflecting basic class divisions - are somewhat disconnected from the fundamental social relations, as it were standing above them as non-functional epiphenomena.

Gramsci developed an alternative and more integrated approach to ideology in his Prison Notebooks (1971). They are not the easiest of writing, but Williams (1973), Sassoon (1980), and Simon (1982), among others, provide accessible discussions. Elsewhere we discuss Gramsci in relation to the radical behaviourist concept of the 'verbal community' (Burton and Kagan, in press).

While in the nineteenth century the order was maintained mainly by force (the threat of starvation or violence) in modern capitalist societies it is maintained on a day to day basis (although the threat of force is always there) by the organisation of consent. Gramsci uses the concept of ideological hegemony to explain how this is done. His understanding of hegemony is not just about beliefs and ideas, but concerns the whole of society, "saturating" it as Williams (1973) puts it, and even defining the nature and limit of common sense. In the Gramscian view, ideology is not simply a set of ideas that can be "read off" from an economic base. Nor is it a world view imposed by a conspiracy masterminded by the ruling class. Both these formulations are one-sided, and both imply a split between the world of ideas, of beliefs, of world views, or of subjectivity, and that of production, of practice, action, objectivity.

As Williams puts it

...hegemony is not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation. It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy,It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear reciprocally confirming.

(Williams, 1973, p. 38).

For Gramsci, ideology acts as a kind of 'social cement', unifying a bloc of varied social groups and interests. In this, a hegemonic social group exercises leadership and power, not through crude ideological domination, but rather through the combination of key elements from the ideologies of those social groups that form an alliance or social bloc with it. Thus the Thatcher government was able to appeal to the anti-egalitarian sentiments of the skilled working class, as well as to the more traditional ideologies of middle England.

While Gramsci's analysis was constructed for explaining this kind of phenomenon, we can also use it to examine the maintenance of power relations in other social and organisational contexts. Moreover, the point of Gramsci's work is to use the theoretical understanding of domination to construct an action orientation that leads to a transformation in social relations.

A limited example of this can be seen in the widespread adoption of normalisation / social role valorisation, as formulated by Wolfensberger, O'Brien, and others, in the intellectual disability field. Much of this can be attributed to the work of activists inside and outside the formal human service system, including groups such as Values into Action CMHERA. Training workshops for human service workers have been a large part of this work, but because it has been possible to interpret developments in service provision (dispersed, small scale, ordinary housing based residential provision, for example) as exemplars, the endeavour has been articulated with other social forces (progressive aspects of social policy changes) and with a changing reality on the ground. As a result, although we do not want to overplay the robustness and sustainability of these gains, there is a new received common sense about people like Sheila, and what she might reasonably expect from life (see Burton, 1989, for a detailed example of a Gramscian analysis of social and

service system change). Normalisation can also be seen as a candidate for hegemonic status since it combines a variety of other ideological currents, for example those of civil rights activists, service users, professionals, families of service users, and those concerned with the cost of hospital provision, and it covers several areas of content including social inclusion and equal rights, autonomy and self determination, and human development and educational/clinical technology.

Gramsci, then, shows us how the exercise of power suffuses civil society, so even if people are not silenced, their understanding of social reality may reflect the ideology of the hegemonic coalition. However, none of this is fixed, and because we all take part in reproducing power and ideology, we have numerous points at which we can subvert it, and join with others to construct counter-hegemonic alliances. In the case of Sheila and people in similar positions, such alliances and their ideologies must incorporate at least a majority of those individuals, groups and interests that impinge on her day to day experience, including family, workers including professionals and managers in a variety of organisations, and so on. The tasks of constructing such alliances for principled change are extremely complex, requiring a broad horizon and the opportunity for critical reflection as well as principled action.

Implications

We have considered naive attempts to tackle the problem of powerlessness, and reviewed a sample of Marxist approaches to the problem. These approaches have differences of emphasis, each has its gaps, but they are all helpful in different ways.

In attempting to do something about the powerlessness of others we might try to keep the following principles in mind:

1. Power is a relative attribute: some have more than others.

2. However Power is primarily systemic in nature, tied to material relations between groups of people with irreconcilable interests.
3. Power is all around us, in our everyday practices and speech, and in our understanding of the world. As such its exercise is greatly hidden.
4. Power decays: it has to be continually regenerated through social interaction.
5. Power is not in our gift, although we can alter social relations on a small scale to catalyse the winning of more power.
6. Power can be acquired by joining with others: the more diverse the social movement, the more powerful, but the more prone to fragmentation. This involves sharing power.
7. Power to change things rests on a vision of what things could be like, and a criticism of the world as it is.
8. While power exists on a societal level, it (or its absence) also exists in the consciousness of individuals, and this self perception of power can, within limits, become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

We can not prescribe a course of action: that would be bad psychology and bad Marxism, but socially responsible psychologists can use a multi-level analysis such as that sketched above to identify the most important power relations and to decide where to intervene. Beware the twin traps of individualism and social determinism: power is both systemic in nature and exercised by people (see Bhaskar 1989:36), so while it can be challenged and won, and social relations transformed, this will never be done outside a broad alliance that can be mobilised for sustainable change.

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³ We use this term here since it is perhaps inoffensive (unlike the American 'Mental Retardation', or now obsolete British 'Mental Handicap'), but not misleading (like the current British term 'Learning Disability').

Family, Empowerment and Social Change in Britain: Coalitions and counter-hegemonic action

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Family, Empowerment and Social Change in Britain: Coalitions and counter-hegemonic action

Introduction

Accounts of women with multiple commitments (Kagan and Lewis, 1993) revealed the complex ways women manage their lives. We saw that they draw on their own resources, strengths and capacities to manage the situations with which they are faced and to derive positive satisfactions from their lives. They employ various cognitive strategies in construing their lives as fulfilling, valued and of importance. They employ various behavioural strategies to handle day-to day practical demands and to harness other resources to help them do this. We got a picture of the 'crazy quilts' notion that Balbo uses to characterise the way women piece together, juggle with and co-operate over time resourcefully and creatively (Balbo and Nowtony, 1986).

Much of the women's time was spent mediating between members of the family, between the household and the state, or between the household and work. This meant they had relatively little time for themselves or for integrating the time spent on their different activities. We argued, in 1993, that to move on from the current situation would require some transformation of the sources of and organisations of support in terms of the actual practical assistance available within the family and from the wider society. We also argued that just as ideology unified the interests of different social groups and interests (via a hegemonic bloc - Gramsci (e.g. 1971), so the focus of change efforts must be on the forming of coalitions between different interest groups who can then be empowered in the process of engaging in counter-hegemonic action. Such a hegemonic coalition would pose a serious threat to the dominant group, and may lead to changing consensus about the ideologies of individualism, patriarchy, work, family and

disability. Active participation in such a social process is one form of empowerment (Burton and Kagan, 1995, forthcoming).

This paper will describe two social processes that may be evidence of the start of just such counter hegemonic action. Briefly a recent all parliamentary group on 'Parenting', will be described. Then the evolution of the Federation of Local Supported Living Groups will be described to show how the ideological forces of the Major years have been harnessed to overturn the disempowerment of the ideologies of the Thatcher years, resulting in a counter hegemonic process of empowerment for families which include a member with severe disabilities.

All-party parliamentary group on *Parenting*

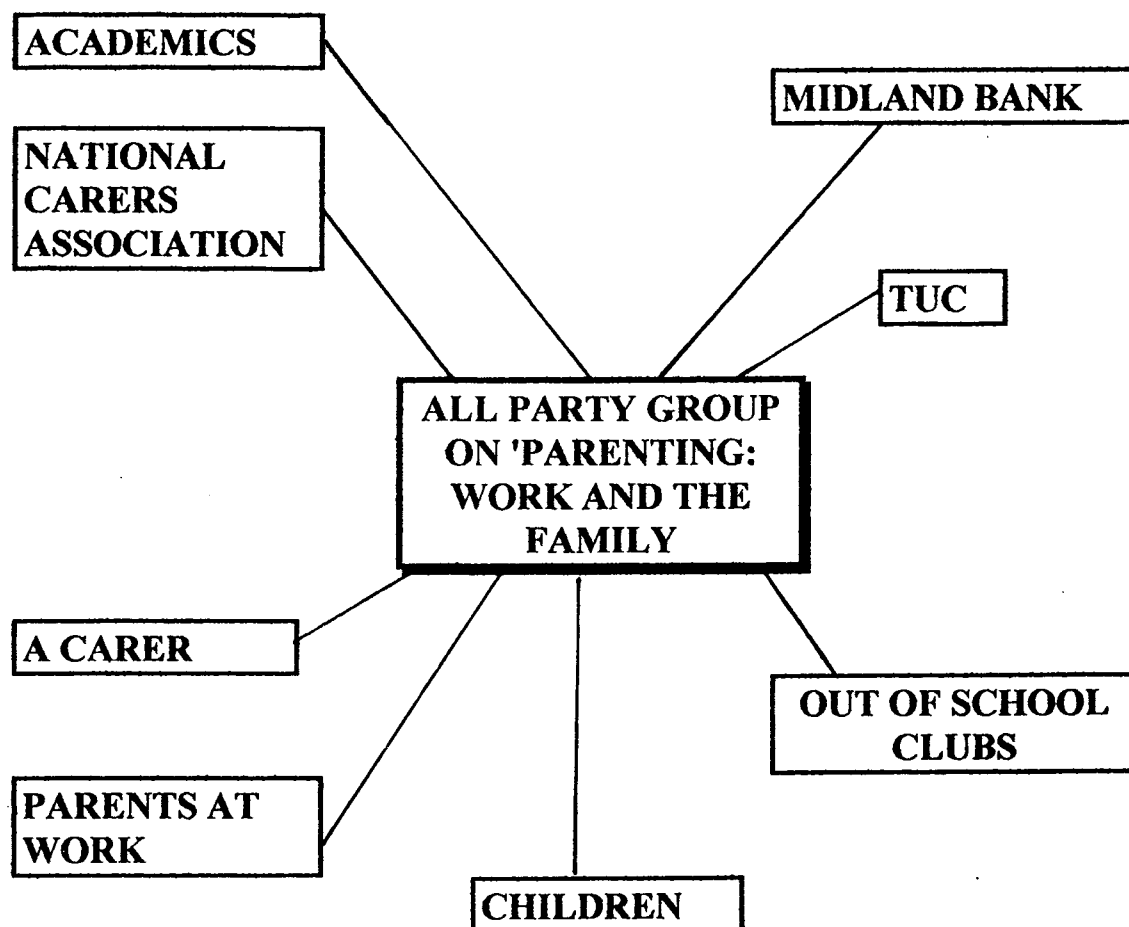
In 1994, the International Year of the Family, the British parliament has convened its first all-party parliamentary group on Parenting. Such all-party groups can be influential in fact-finding, which often precedes proposals for legislative and/or policy change. As well as inviting written evidence, the group is sitting for three separate days to hear from interested parties about (i) work and the family; (ii) families and poverty; (iii) families and relationships.

The first of these meetings has taken place and illustrates quite nicely the diverse interests that can be mobilised to share the points of common concern. Figure 1 shows the different groups who made representations to the day on work and family.

Thus we can see the convergence of different stakeholders in work-family matters. Ordinarily these groups would not campaign together, instead they would push forward on their individual sectional interests. Here, though, we see an alliance of commercial and industrial interests, the interests of trades unions, citizen interests, the interests of voluntary organisations (each with different sectional interests) and academics.

Together, they form a formidable alliance to challenge the existing separation of employment, family and welfare policy, and associated ideologies.

Figure 1: The All Party Hearing On Work And The Family



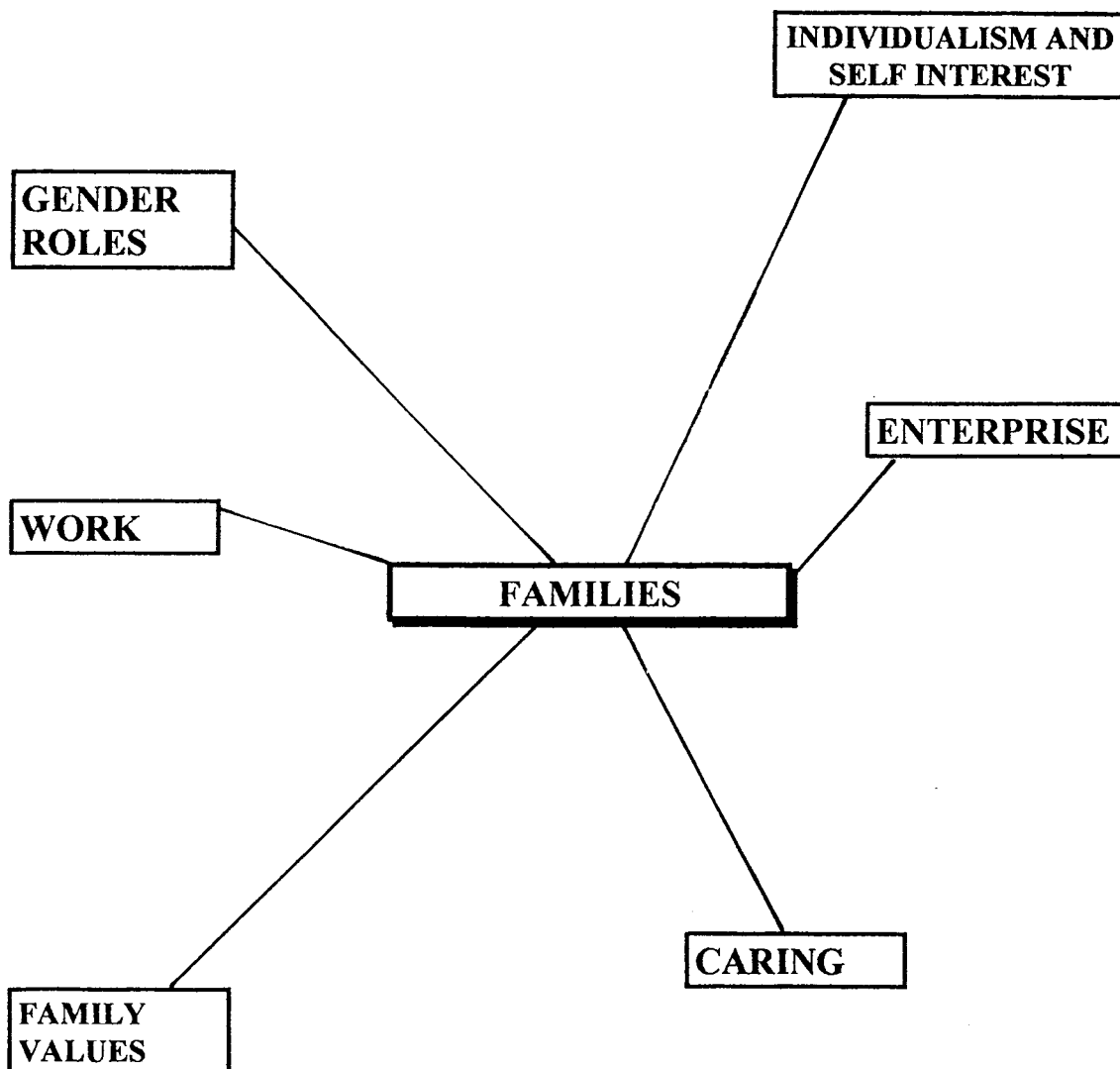
Federation of Local Supported Living Groups

The Federation of Local Supported Living Groups was conceived in 1990 as some parents of adult sons and daughters with severe learning disabilities in the North West got together to design and provide relevant, stimulating supports for their sons and daughters who were living at home. There are now approximately 20 groups in the North West. Four groups have developed fully staffed residential and daytime supports for people with learning disabilities, and several others have appointed development

workers to oversee the developments. Others have identified which people they are planning supports for and what these might look like (Kagan, 1993 a; b).

Prior to the Federation stimulating the growth of local parent-led groups, families were trapped in the daily demands of caring and working, with little time for themselves. Social attitudes and ideologies of family, work, and gender roles, all constrained women's life opportunities and experiences. During the Thatcher years these ideologies came to the fore, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 The Thatcher Years



One woman who is now active in a local Federation group said

there is less money available..they are all for keeping children in the home because it is cheaper..bung them a few bob for income support..attendance allowance, and it's a well known fact that they will close their eyes and let the parents keep the children until they drop.

Another, pointed to the restrictions that male ideologies of work create. If work were viewed differently, it might be easier for her husband to take time off and support her at home.

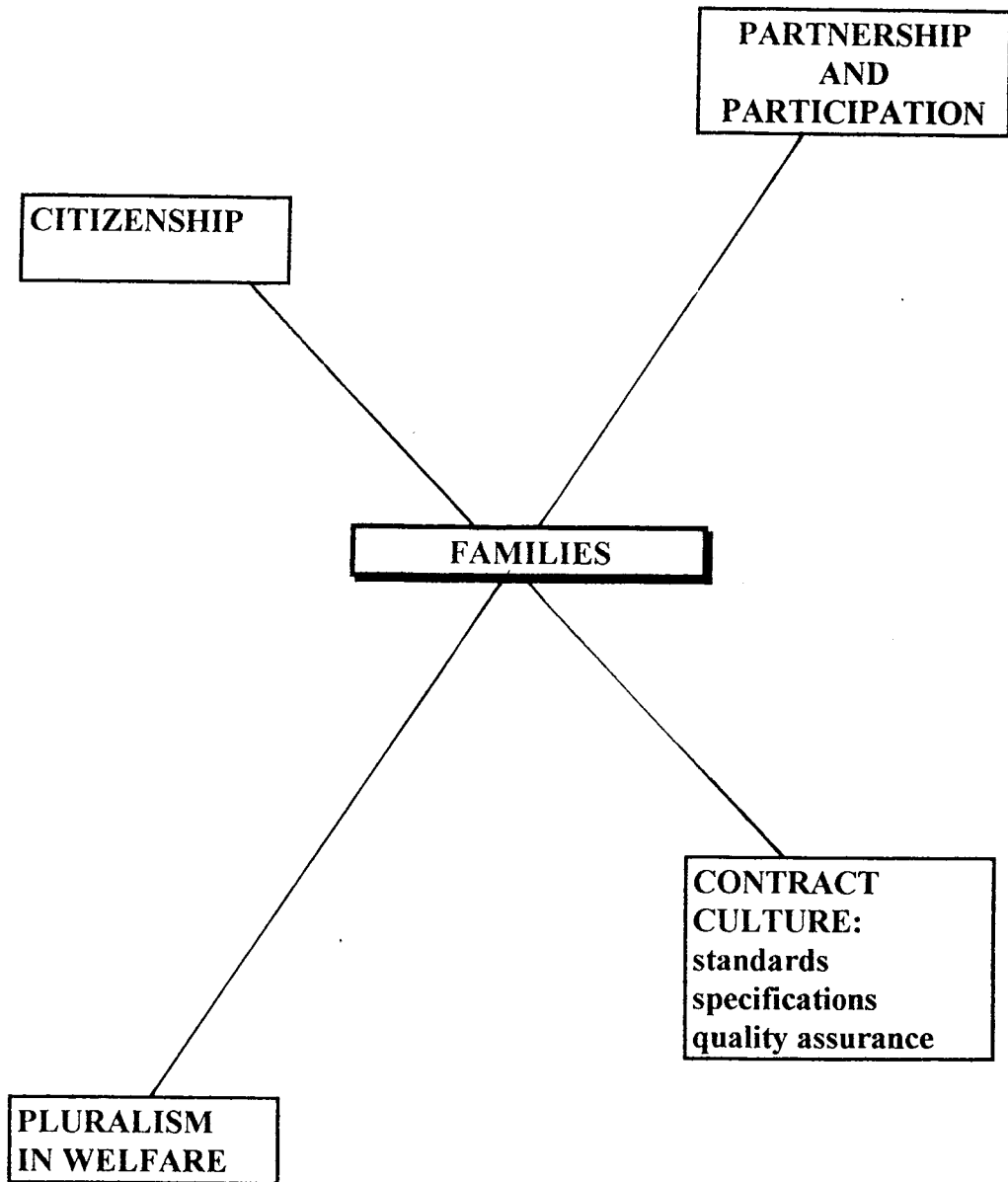
if it were a more common thing for men and women that would help..a part of it is as recognition that there's a life outside work.

The same woman thought that the ideology of individualism contributes to an unhealthy pattern of work.

it would be quite healthy for work to be viewed differently..we just seem to have got to the point where people..are having to work ridiculous hours..and.. more people are out of work..I think that's down to individualism..my husband is in a job where they don't have flexi-time. There are times when he comes home early, but..he..doesn't want to be seen asking favours at work..I think he feels he doesn't want to be seen taking advantage.

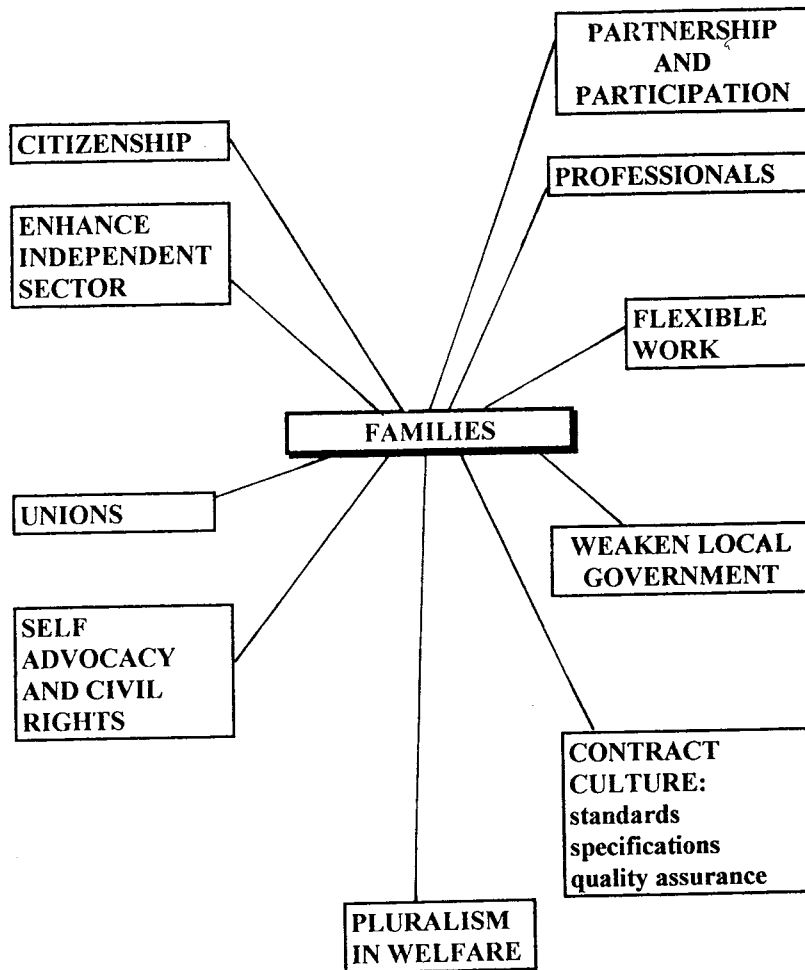
Both of these women are now active in the Federation. What brought the Federation about? We have said, above, that initially a group of parents got together because of their dissatisfaction with available services and their belief that their sons and daughters should be able to move out of the family home, even though at the time the family were coping, and they were not viewed as priorities. Since then, a number of features have enabled social groups with different interests to form coalitions and create change. Figure 3 illustrates some important features of the Major years that have provided social conditions wherein organisations and activities like those embraced by the Federation are possible.

Figure 3 The Major Years



In the name of a different kind of conservatism, the Major years have introduced policies that re-define, in part, social attitudes and change the ideological consensus. In have come notions of 'citizenship', 'partnership and participation'. The 'contract culture' has been strengthened and quality issues prevail. Pluralism in welfare has been extended as a means whereby the power and control of local government is reduced. Some of these features of government policy can be seen in recent community care legislation (see Figure 4).

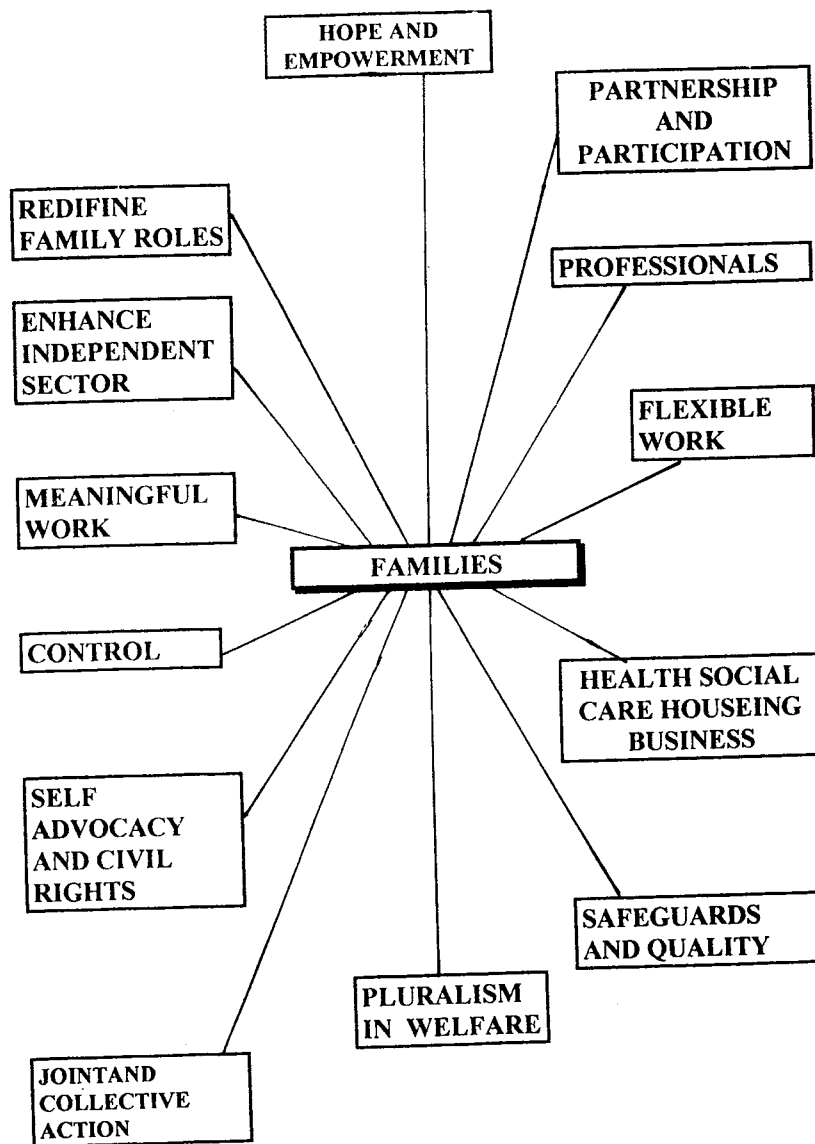
Figure 4· The Advent of Community Care



Taken together, these policy and legislative changes have set the conditions for alliances to form and strengthen between different social groups, and have enabled the Federation to be taken seriously and to be engaged with by local purchasers of health and social care. Family members get together in partnership with local health and social; care professionals, housing authorities, business people, self advocacy groups, volunteer agencies and other interested groups to develop and maintain high quality supports, tailored to the needs of people with severe learning disabilities, which enable them to live in their own locality and lead fulfilling lives. Family members have got together in their own localities to plan and design (sometimes to take part in managing) supported living for their sons and daughters. Together, they have obtained information, secured

financial resources, developed purposeful roles, planned for psychological security for themselves and the rest of their families, maintained their commitment to relevant and individually tailored care without compromise, become leaders in the welfare field in terms of building in advocacy for the people with disabilities (and sometimes for themselves), designing a participative system of ensuring standards are maintained, and in finding creative and innovative solutions to providing support for some people with extremely complex (and costly) care needs. Figure 5 illustrates some of the forms of empowerment families have experienced.

Figure 5: The Federation of Local Supported Living Groups



There is no doubt that women involved in the Federation feel empowered. Some of the things that have been said by those involved are:

it is really great to be able to meet with other people- and find out that you are not struggling on your own

the chance to share experiences with others on an equal footing gives us a strong sense of 'belonging' - it's really important that most of us are parents. It doesn't matter how understanding professionals are, they can always go home - to know that there are others who have to live day and night with their decisions, and yet who still want to find ways of doing the best for their children is wonderful.

We no longer feel alone..there is the possibility of actually being able to get something done....for the first time I feel I can take control of my life - even have a life.

we have found we can do things we never thought possible...it's partly the information - until we got together we did not know what we did not know.

we arranged a circle of support, as a way of thinking through what might be best for M... - but we do have to say, the circle has been of most support to us!

What most professionals don't understand is that being a parent of a son with learning disabilities is a life-time commitment. We can never let go of our love (just as we could never let go of our love for our other children). Of course this puts strain on us. With the Federation, we can share this concern - it is recognised that we must be involved and that we are the ones who will always be there, even if we cannot always do the caring.

I will always care about S..., but I think it's time I stopped caring 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year - as I have for 36 years. I know S...thinks it's time for a change. The Federation gives me real hope that his might, some day, be possible.

Conclusion

We have offered two examples of the beginnings of counter hegemonic action that may be the start of ideological shifts and social changes that will make it less stressful for women and other family members to try to combine work and caring. Engagement in action for change, in itself is empowering for family members, and especially for women who have subjugated themselves to the needs of their families more than most.

However, these two sets of action, in themselves, will not be sufficient to form a serious threat to the dominant ideology underpinning contemporary social practices. They may well contribute to wider overall change, as Williams (1973, p.38) points out:

..hegemony is not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation. It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy,...It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experiences as practices appear reciprocally confirming.

For the actions of those involved in wither the parliamentary process or the Federation, to be empowering, we must recognise that power is both systemic in nature and exercised by people (see Bhaskar, 1989:36), so while it can be challenged and won, and social relations transformed (as possibly in our examples), this will never be done outside a broad alliance that can be mobilised for sustainable change (Burton and Kagan, 1995, forthcoming). As such both these sets of actions referred to here may form part of a larger social movement that will ultimately lead to social change.

Whilst this is happening, though, parents of people with severe disabilities and their families feel empowered. This is partly, as we have seen through hope. At the first Annual General Meeting of the Federation, John O'Brien quoted Vaclav Havel, writing from prison (Havel, 1991). Everyone there thought that it summed up their feelings, precisely.

Hope is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for success. But rather (hope is the) ability to ask for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.

Hope is definitely not the same as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.

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Work, Family and Empowerment: Prospects for change in Britain

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An earlier version of this paper was presented to the symposium on Work and Family Issues and Organisational Change European Association of Work and Organisational Psychology, Gyor, Hungary, April 1995



Background

It is increasingly recognised that organisations benefit from having a diverse work force and that traditional modes of work will have to be adapted to meet the needs of different groups of employees (Cooper and Lewis, 1995). In particular, the growing number of women in the labour force, and changing expectations of men and women within families, has highlighted the need for organisations to take account of non-work demands and the work family interface if employees are to be enabled to enhance their contribution to the workplace as well as to the family.

Multiple roles in family and paid work can create considerable stress for carers and members of their households (Lewis and Cooper, 1987; 1988a; 1988b). Most research on stress in managing paid work and family in Britain has focused on parents of young and usually able bodied children (Lewis and Cooper, 1987; 1988a; Brannen and Moss, 1990; Shipley and Coates, 1992). Even American research which broadens out the work family interface to examine multiple roles in caring for children, adults and elders has paid little attention to the specific needs of employed parents caring for children with disabilities (Neal et al, 1993). It is, however, families who have children with disabilities who usually have the longest term caring commitments: children with disabilities grow into adults with disabilities, and families are expected to provide care throughout their lives. Most other caring relationships are time limited, defined by life stage (as in caring for young children), life span (as in caring for elders) or duration of illness (as in caring for people who are ill).

The pressures and challenges associated with the care of disabled children are well documented (eg Bennett and Abrahams, 1994; Beresford, 1994; Glendenning, 1992;), although recent work has also documented the satisfaction gained through a relationship with a disabled child and shown that other aspects of parents' lives can be more stressful

than having a disabled child (Beresford, 1994; Kagan and Lewis, 1993). Medical advances, together with a public policy emphasis on community based care for those with disabilities, increase the demands for informal family care (Levick, 1992; Parker and Lawton, 1994).

At the same time the growth in the numbers of single parents and the economic need for two incomes in two parent families means that a growing number of parents caring for disabled children are also in employment. However, fewer parents of children with disabilities than without are in employment, and work has proved particularly difficult for single parents and for women (Bennett and Abrahams, 1994; Smyth and Robus, 1989; SSI, 1994).

Lack of opportunity to work can result in extreme personal and financial hardship (Glendenning, 1992), as well as exposing parents to increased risk of stress and symptoms such as depression. Employment can offer some protection against these outcomes, providing satisfaction and a break from the fatigue of caring. As such, it can have a positive impact on family well being (Kagan and Lewis, 1993; Neal et al, 1993). However, it is essential to understand the experiences and needs of employed parents caring for disabled children to enable both local service provision and employer policies and practices to develop in ways which will support these families (Bennett and Abrahams, 1994; SSI, 1994).

Experiences and Needs of employed parents caring for disabled children

As part of a study we conducted in 1993 (Kagan and Lewis, 1993), mothers of children with disabilities told us about some of their experiences trying to combine work and family. Along with women undertaking different kinds of caring, they felt the pressures of societal constructions of motherhood and good mothering. Good mothers care for their families, especially their children, and more especially their children with

disabilities. They described social expectations that they should be physically available for their children at all times, whatever their age. One mother said:

You've just got to be there whenever the bus turns up, and the time might vary between ten to four and twenty past.. you've got to be there at the earliest it might arrive... its something I feel quite angry about. We received a letter from the education department saying you really must be home, school finishes at 3.10 so its not unreasonable that you should be available from then on..... and in the future if you are not there the escort will have no choice but to take your child to the nearest police station.

While women continue to be constructed as the main carers, the expectations of employers continues to reflect the traditional male model of work, which precludes time for involvement in family (Pleck, 1977; Lewis, 1991). Social constructions of the good mother, especially for mothers of children with disabilities, and the construction of the ideal employee remain mutually incompatible (Lewis, 1991).

Mothering children with disabilities threaten women's identities (Breakwell, 1986). For mothers of young healthy children the highlighting of their maternal status in the workplace and the difficulty in maintaining self esteem by conforming to the socially constructed mutually incompatible ideals in both mother and employee roles, create dilemmas of identity (Lewis, 1991). For mothers with disabled children the issue is how to have any identity at all beyond motherhood.

I feel if you have a child with a disability you can be reduced to the level of that child. Its difficult to be seen as a person yourself.

Even so, mothers of children with disabilities did not consider themselves entitled to special consideration. Indeed, the ways in which they construed 'entitlement' reflected the internalisation of the view that care of disabled children is primarily if not exclusively, the mother's responsibility.

Sense of entitlement

Past research on employed mothers has suggested that the social construction of mothering as women's primary responsibility fosters low expectations of support from husbands, employers and external agencies (Brannen and Moss, 1991;1992). Those women in our study who lived with a partner displayed low expectations of the men in terms of family work and involvement in all forms of caring. Men's greater earnings were used to justify men's greater entitlement to free time, even when the women's reduced earnings were due to their part time or reduced hours for caring.

We have found that women choose to modify their attachment to work by part time or flexible work or by the rejection of the dominant (male) definition of commitment to the job, in order to accommodate their caring roles. Because of the lesser value assigned to caring work, however, those who live with a male partner construct their total workload (paid and unpaid) as less than that of the men with their greater paid workload and lesser involvement in caring. Men are thus constructed as being entitled to greater consideration and exempt from the more burdensome aspects of caring and domestic work (Gilbert, 1993).

Women tend to resolve inconsistencies between the demands made upon them in the family and the ideology of a close, loving relationship with a partner by emphasising closeness and emotional support (Brannen and Moss, 1991: Croghan, 1991). The women in our study construed emotional support from their partners as compensation for lack of practical support.

*He is not very good around the house so I have everything to do....
but he's supportive in many ways... emotionally he is very
supportive.*

The women tended to make excuses for their partners, but also recognised the impact that ideologies of work and individualism had in constructing the different patterns of caring and working between them and their partners.

*...It would be quite healthy for work to be viewed differently..we
just seem to have got to the point where people..are having to work
ridiculous hours..and ..more people are out of work..I think that's
down to individualism.*

Other obstacles created by the right wing discourse of individualism are connected to the ways women understood their partners' reluctance to ask for time off work in order to help at home. discomfort the women and their family members feel in asking for help.

*(My husband) is in a job where they don't have flex-time. There
are times when he comes home early, but ..he..doesn't want to be
seen asking favours at work..I think he feels he doesn't want to be
seen to be taking advantage.*

Similarly, the same ideologies made it difficult for the women to ask for help, even from their own family.

*It is quite hard to ask (for help). Whereas I don't think my mother
minds helping out...I try not to impose...I do have to [psyche*

myself up to ask...you tend not to ask if you can't reciprocate.

They were ambivalent about their entitlement to external support for family responsibilities.

(my husband) has an even stronger sense than I have..that it's kind of our problem so we just have to sort it out..a big bit of me thinks services should be better, and we should have all sorts of things..but there's a big bit of me too that says..at the end of it all (my daughter) is a part of our family and..you do just have to get on with it...

The women were critical of the policies and public attitudes which made it difficult for women with caring responsibilities to follow a career.

..There is less money available..they are all for keeping (disabled) children (of whatever age) in the home because it is cheaper...Bung them a few bob for income support..attendance allowance, and it's a well known fact that they will close their eyes and let the parents keep the children at home until they drop.

Despite the threats to mothers' identities and their feelings of lack of entitlement to work or to gain assistance, women employed a number of positive coping strategies which enabled them to combine work with caring.

Coping Strategies

The women had developed cognitive and behavioral strategies for managing their complex lives, which appeared to reflect dominant ideologies of family responsibilities

and self sufficiency, but which were often creative and positive.

The strategies they identified were:

COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Positive Appraisal

Luck and good fortune
Personal characteristics
Personal satisfaction
Defining what is personally important

Personal Values

Importance of the family

Enhancement of self-esteem

Recognition
Status

Self nurturance

Meditation
Buying things

BEHAVIOURAL STRATEGIES

Practical Activities

Organisation and planning
Doing more than one thing at a time
Reorganising family life

Assertiveness

Involvement in the community

Use of additional services

Finding and using personal Support

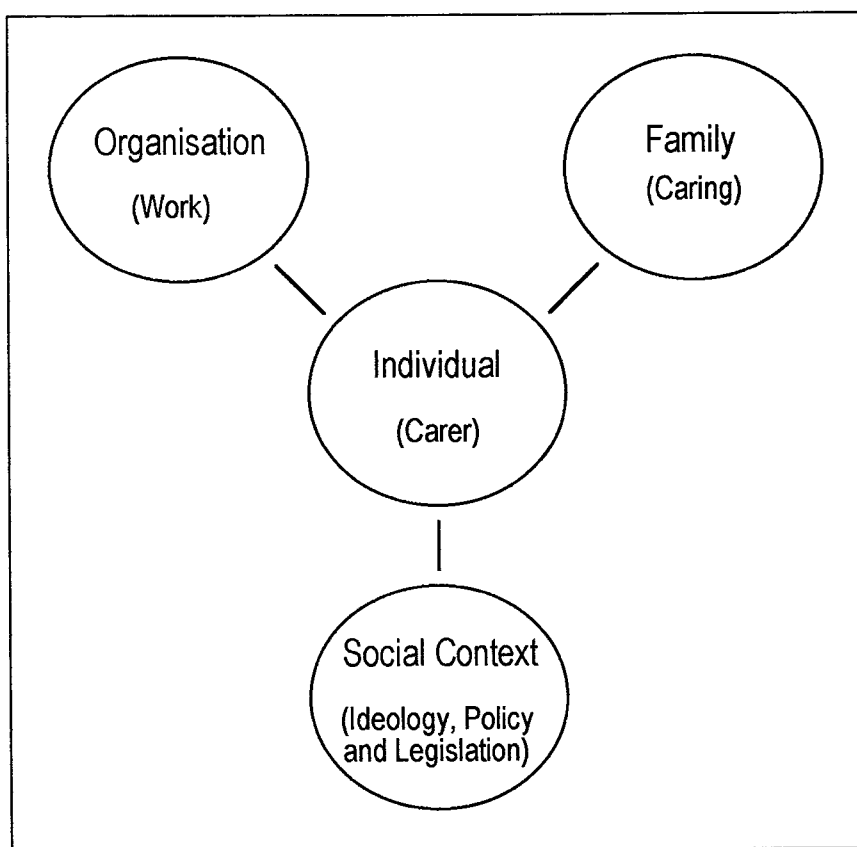
Family support
Support from others in similar positions

Thus, women draw on their own resources, strengths and capacities to manage the situations with which they are faced and to derive positive satisfactions from their lives. They employ various cognitive strategies in construing their lives as fulfilling, valued and of importance. They employ various behavioural strategies to handle day-to day practical demands and to harness other resources to help them do this. We got a picture of the 'crazy quilts' notion that Balbo uses to characterise the way women piece together, juggle with and co-operate over time resourcefully and creatively (Balbo and Nowtony, 1986).

Much of the women's time was spent mediating between members of the family,

between the household and the state, or between the household and work. Figure 1 illustrates the position of individual women trying to balance competing pressures and demands from the worlds of work, the family and the social context in which they live.

Figure 1: Individual carers and their relationships to work, caring, and the wider social context.



In this model, individual women are central. There are two important implications of placing individual women at the centre of such a complex system. Firstly, the system may come to depend upon them keep it intact. Because of their personal strengths and resources, families with multiple responsibilities manage. However, should women fail to cope, the system may fragment. Social policy is often directed at enabling women to

cope better (via family aid workers, respite schemes and so on). A more radical approach may be to direct social policy at strengthening other parts of the system (the families, work organisations and the wider social context) so that less reliance is placed on individual women.

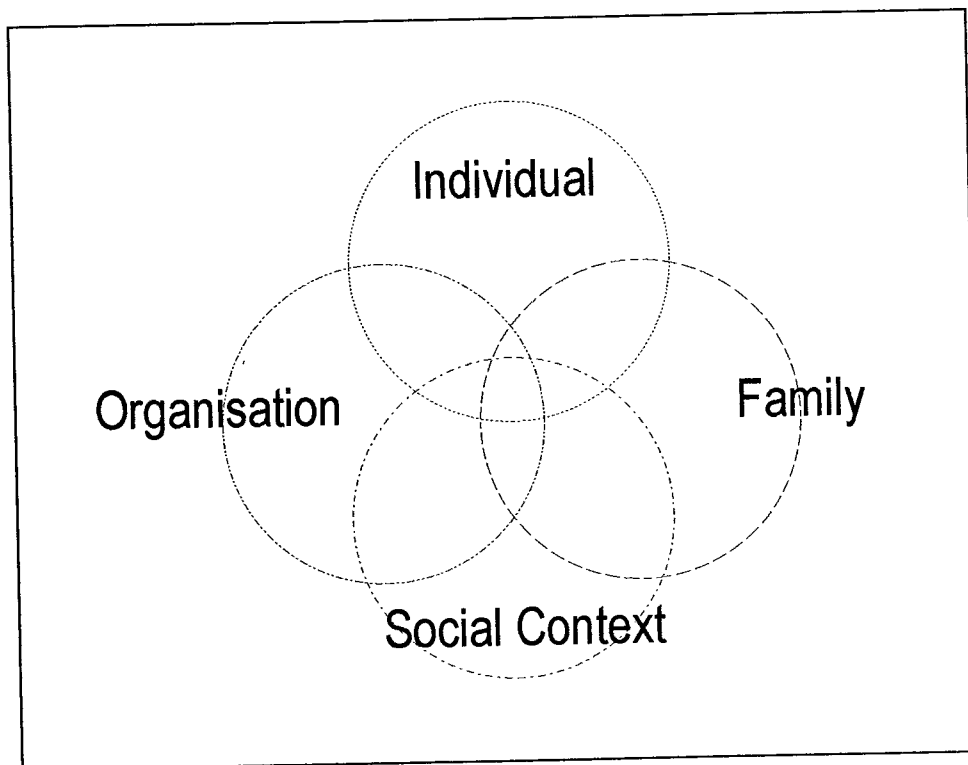
Secondly, when women are so central, they become to be relied upon as the sole focus and agent of change. If women did things differently, the system would change. It follows, that if women do not change the system will not change. It is an easy step, then to blame individual women for their situation. Solutions are sometimes offered in terms of empowering (via self-help, consciousness raising and so on) individual women, so that they are better able to take some kind of positive action for change. However, given the inter-relatedness of the different parts of the complex system, it is unlikely that women taking action, alone will lead to change, as the system will just adapt to a change in any one element. A more radical approach may be to direct empowerment strategies at all parts of the system (the families, work organisations and the wider social context) so that social transformation, not just individual action is more likely.

If there is to be any real and lasting change which will enable families with children with disabilities to combine work and caring so that all members are fulfilled, we will need a model of the current situation wherein the individual (woman or mother) ceases to be central. Instead, a model in which all the component parts of the system overlap may be more promising, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Sustainable change will be more likely when it is focused on those parts of the system where elements overlap (Kagan, 1994), and where the different elements have a common interest that can form the basis of an alliance for change (Burton and Kagan, in press; Kagan and Lewis, 1994). We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that we are talking, here, about human systems. Social power contained therein is both systemic in

nature and exercised by people (see Bhasker, 1989:36), and it is via the process of empowerment, broadly conceived, that change may be achieved. This means empowerment at work as well as empowerment within families, and not just empowerment of individual women at work or in families.

Figure 2: Integrated social system in which individuals care and work.



Empowerment at work

The notion of empowerment has received substantial attention in management and organisational behaviour literature (Block, 1987; London, 1993). It is usually constructed in terms of ensuring that employees have the authority to do their jobs, in the context of flatter organisations, in order to achieve more rapid decisions. Given the interdependence of work and non work experiences (Barling 1994; Zedeck and Mosier,

1990), it follows that the concept of empowerment, like other organisational concepts, must be broadened to incorporate the non work elements of peoples' lives.

Empowerment of people in the workplace thus becomes the process of ensuring that employees have the autonomy to fulfil their obligations in paid and unpaid work; to do their jobs and their caring.

The empowerment in organisations literature maintains that supervisors who empower their subordinates must demonstrate trust and confidence and treat subordinates with dignity and respect (London, 1993). The broader understanding of empowerment would involve the acceptance and valuing of employees' diverse non work needs, providing them with the flexibility to manage their paid and unpaid work in ways which best suit their needs, and trusting people to do their jobs in a time, place and manner defined by work and family needs and not just by management.

In an empowered workforce men as well as women, at all levels would be enabled to manage their multiple roles without having to rely on sensitivity or favours from management and without sacrificing opportunities for advancement or recognition. How can this be achieved? It is clear that so-called family friendly policies in Britain are not achieving this, although they may help some women to combine paid work with their traditional family responsibilities (Cooper and Lewis, 1995). Where "family friendly" policies exist they are marginalised "add on" policies. They challenge neither gendered notions of family responsibilities nor the traditional work structures which disempower people with involvement in caring. It will be necessary to move beyond policies which accommodate women with caring responsibilities, who are constructed as deviant employees, towards the integration of work/family issues into core thinking and strategic planning in organisations which accept these issues as an intrinsic aspect of the organisational context.

The role of management in an empowered environment will be one of support rather than control. Lotte Bailyn (1993) argues that an important distinction must be made between strategic and operational responsibility. She maintains that managers will retain strategic responsibilities such as goal setting and fighting for resources, but that operational autonomy, or discretion over the conditions of work and how work goals are achieved is critical to satisfactory and productive work, as well as to employees' ability to meet work and private demands. This will require management to display basic trust and support, to find different ways of looking at outputs, inputs and processes. It will also require different ways of looking at time in the workplace and career development, such that those with substantial caring commitments are not written off as uncommitted and undervalued workers.

Empowerment in organisations will thus depend on the valuing of diversity in people's non work lives, and a rethinking of traditional notions of management, and ways of working.

Empowerment within families

Empowerment within families will involve enabling people to care for each other, and especially for needy family members with maximum satisfaction and minimum stress. It will be necessary to enhance family members' sense of entitlement to support and their involvement in determining the nature of these supports

Currently women are overloaded in terms of family care. The most effective parenting and other caring occurs when women's traditional responsibilities are shared by spouses, families and the state (Hall, 1992), so for families to be empowered there must be greater equality in caring. Such changes within the family cannot be separated from changes within organisations and the wider society. In particular they are dependent on changes towards greater flexibility for men as well as women at work, and changes in

the expectations that women should be the main and often sole carers within families.

Family empowerment also depends on supports available, including instrumental support such as a secure income, help with day to day caring, and access to and involvement in appropriate forms of care. The need for financial and other supports are currently threatened by new ways of working which emphasize flexibility from the employers' perspective, ie to hire and fire according to needs of the market without consideration of the needs of employees or families, and by social policies which prioritise the reduction of public expenditure rather than needs of vulnerable members of society and their carers.

Empowerment within families will thus depend on actions to increase family members' sense of value and entitlement to support within and beyond the family, and to challenge dominant ideologies of gender responsibilities, work structures, and the balance of private and public responsibilities for caring.

Conclusion

We argued above that there is a limit to the change that can be created by individuals. Clearly it would be as much of a mistake to think that we can achieve change by focusing either on organisations or families alone. Instead we need to find the points of overlap between the different elements of the system (See fig 2) and focus resources on these points of common interest. Thus instead of working with each element of the system we are working at the "edge" (Kagan, 1994) and thereby maximising the energies for change. The challenge will be to find these points of common interest and broaden our understanding of empowerment (Burton and Kagan, in press)

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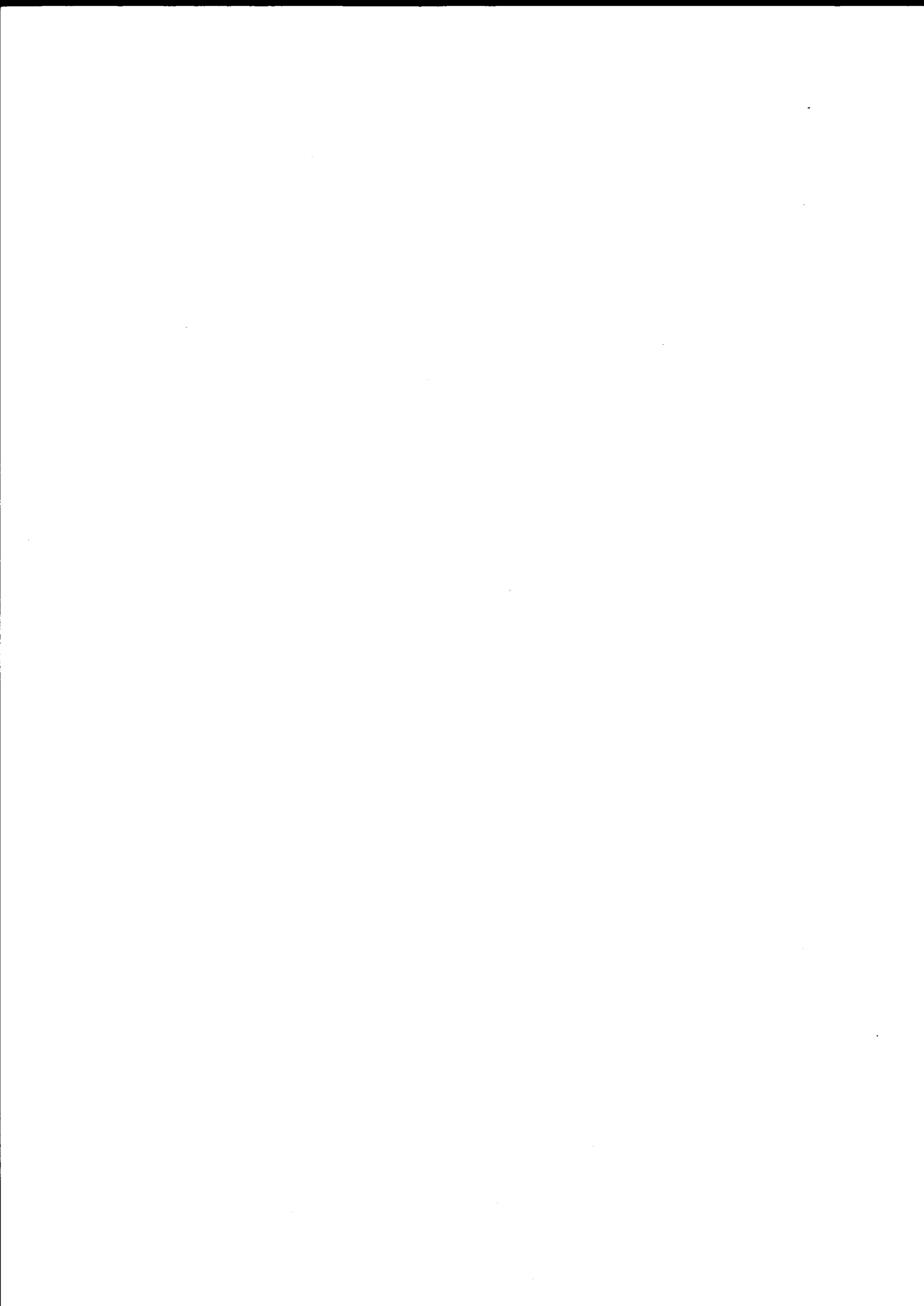
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