IDEOLOGIES OF MOTHERHOOD AND SINGLE MOTHERS
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Introduction
This chapter examines the situation of lone parents in contemporary Ireland, in particular the workings of ideologies of motherhood and the family through different sites, contexts and institutions in order to determine the impact of these ideologies on single mothers' lives. Specifically, the number of single mothers, ideologies of motherhood and the family, the influence of Church, State and New Right and Irish social policy are examined, and their combined impact on Irish single mothers is explored.

Exploring the influence of motherhood and family ideologies and locating them within current debates about 'the family' are important because motherhood and family ideologies lay out prescriptions for women in Irish society. Motherhood and family ideologies are key mechanisms in the promotion of asymmetrical power relations between women and men and exploring the workings of these ideologies demonstrates the "relations of domination" (Thompson, 1990:7) they promote and sustain.

Lone Mothers in Ireland
There are 153,900 one-parent families in Ireland representing an increase of 24.5% since 1996 (CSO, 2002a). At present a total of 444,438 people are living in one-parent families, which represents 11.4% of the population and of these, 85%, or 377,772 people, live in one-parent families headed by women (One Family, 2004a). In 2002, 31.82% of all babies were born to single mothers in Ireland, as opposed to 2.7% in 1971 (CSO 2002b). This increase in the number of births outside marriage coincided with a period of rapid social change that
included a shift in attitudes towards 'unmarried mothers' and state recognition and provision for the needs of single parents.

Ideologies of Motherhood, Femininity and the Family
An ideology is a set of beliefs that involve a judgement about the way things are, and the way things ought to be. The beliefs and values contained in an ideology become taken for granted and society regards the ideology as normal, right and proper. All ideologies operate at many levels, public and private, social and psychological, and they may be expressed and/or implied. There are a number of ways of regarding ideology. Karl Marx (1879) claimed that ideology was a means of representing the interests of the dominant or ruling class by creating a "false consciousness" (Schneider 1987:73) among subordinate classes, so they would accept the ideology as the natural order. Gramsci (1929) expanded Marx's theory and suggested that ideology should be regarded as a 'superstructure' and he termed the employment of ideology to obtain the 'active consent' of the subordinate classes the ability of the dominant class to exert "ideological hegemony" (Holub 1992:6).

Althusser (1969) distinguished between the mechanisms of the superstructure and identified 'repressive state apparatus' -the courts, police, prisons, and 'ideological state apparatus' -churches, schools, family, media, cultural and sporting institutions and claimed that the institutions in the ideological state apparatus are mechanisms for the propagation of the dominant ideology, while Therborn (1980) claimed that any ideology can be analysed through the operation of sanctions and affirmations, penalizing or rewarding those who do or do not conform.

Ideologies of motherhood suggest that mothers should be totally available to their children, solely responsible for their social, educational, physical, and psychological development, and should teach them state ideologies so that they will grow up "acceptable citizens" (Phoenix and Woollett, 1991:16). However, the term ideology is often used to suggest a distortion, a false picture of reality (Marx, 1879), or a set of beliefs and values that express the interests of a particular social group of the men in the provider and father role.

Ideologies are regarded as the by needs of the men, man, and the head. McIntosh claims that "women that women is a full-t provider and father and represents themselves.

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particular social group (Gramsci, 1929). Therefore, ideologies of motherhood do
not represent all women’s mothering, but the judgement by a particular interest
group of the circumstances in which motherhood ought to be experienced and
how mothers ought to behave.

Ideologies of motherhood complement the ideology of the family, which is
regarded as the basic unit of social organization, fulfilling the social and economic
needs of its members and of society. Family ideology presents the nuclear family:
man, woman and their children within a hierarchical structure of which the man is
the head. McIntyre states that married couples with children are regarded as
constituting the “proper natural and complete family” (1976: 158), while Gaffney
claims the “benchmark family” (1996: 159) involves a relationship between a man
and woman that is legal, permanent, sexually exclusive and reproductive. The
woman is a full-time mother and homemaker and the man is a life-long good
provider and father. This powerful archetype is presented as natural and normal
and represents the ideological family or benchmark against which people measure
themselves.

Motherhood and family ideologies combine to prescribe a role for women
in Irish society. To fulfil these ideologies, women should be married and should
stay at home to properly rear and socialize their children. Following Therborn
(1980), affirmations are provided to women who conform to these prescriptions in
the form of cultural capital, social legitimacy, respectability, and moral power.
Rich (1977) claims motherhood is only one part of the female process, it is not an
identity for all time, however motherhood ideologies frequently identify women
as mothers first and women second: “Mothering […] is not simply one of the
things women do. It is the activity that above all, complete and confirms
feminine identity” (Conner, 1974: 165). Women’s identity is linked to their
ability to mother, thus women who cannot or do not wish to reproduce are placed
in a relationship to motherhood, even if a negative one. This is a major area
where “contemporary notions of gender are still rooted naturlistically” (Walby,
1990: 105), because motherhood provides a degree of cultural capital to women
for conforming to feminine and motherhood roles. The representations of women promoted in ideologies of motherhood and the family identify women's place within the patriarchal nuclear family home and promote a maternal model of femininity.

Motherhood continues to remain an important component of the discourse of femininity: "femininity is not something that can be seen simply as physical appearance. It is an institutionalized sign that also operates as a form of cultural capital" (Skeggs, 1997: 116). Ideological representations of femininity present a partial view of reality and do not reflect actual femininities as they are lived. Femininity was not constructed, developed or controlled by women, "[a]ll forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men" (Connell, 1987: 187). Like motherhood and family ideologies, feminine ideology represents the values of a particular social group. However, ideologies establish standards for what is feminine and how motherhood should be experienced, so only those who conform to these standards can achieve cultural capital: "the white wedding was so central because it is the ultimate spectacle of heterosexual femininity which combined legal and cultural legitimacy" (Skeggs, 1997: 114). Lone mothers, therefore, find it difficult to achieve legal and cultural legitimacy not being married, while symbolic representations of 'stay-at-home mother' and the 'nuclear' family exclude lone parents. That many women in contemporary Ireland do not or cannot subscribe to the ideologies by being single, separated or divorced mothers, lesbian mothers or working mothers does not seem to have affected these ideologies. The sanctions imposed on these mothers are that they are presented as deviant and a threat to social order.

Thompson (1990) claims ideology is concerned with the interrelations between meaning and power; and to examine an ideology requires investigation of the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms, the social contexts within which these symbolic forms are employed, and how the meaning mobilized in domination.

**Church and State**

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Church and State
The symbolic forms employed to promote ideologies of motherhood and the family are visible in representations of motherhood and the family in Ireland by the Church and State. Althusser's 'ideological state apparatus', who have historically worked to confirm women in their dependent place: sexually, morally and financially because representations of the family and motherhood fit with political ideologies of maintaining women in subordinate positions both publicly and in the family.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the Church maintained its power within Irish society by developing an alliance with mothers. This alliance offered women power in the private sphere and ensured women promoted Catholic ideology within their large families: "The result of that alliance was an embodiment of the rules and regulations of the Church among successive generations of Catholics. The price of that alliance was a chaste motherhood with unregulated fertility" (Engle, 1987: 214). This alliance made women dependent on the Church for the little power they had; in return, women's ability to participate in anything other than domestic life was severely curtailed. This alliance between Church and mothers saw women acting as patriarchal gatekeepers, promoting motherhood and family ideologies. In a society where women's opportunities for sources of status and power outside the home were restricted, some women felt these ideologies were worth defending and promoting, because they preserved the only power women had: "Patriarchy's strongest hold over women is its ability to promote this inner division, which inhibits women's will for change and recruits women damaged by patriarchal ideology to the cause of patriarchy itself" (Meaney, 1993: 232).

Brennan's analysis of symbolism in Irish political culture (1997), revealed that pro-life groups still hold this very traditional and restrictive view of motherhood, and regard the mother as custodian of social stability: "why are
nurturing or mothering women seen to be sufficiently powerful to be the root source of all political stability, provided they remain in the private sphere, yet they are perceived as dangerous when they become working women in the public sphere?” (Bresnihan, 2004: 123).

At the Irish Bishops Conference in May 2004, Archbishop Sean Brady stressed the privileged status of the family based on marriage, Irish society’s “primary vital cell” and insisted that “other forms of relationship are not of the same nature and status as that of marriage.” The Archbishop warned of the family disintegrating when its privileged status is diminished and the inevitable unacceptable rise of individualism that shall follow.

Daly and Clavero (2002) claim the role of the state in promoting certain models of family was a persistent feature of state-family relations in Ireland throughout the twentieth century. For Hantry, “[u]nitive motherhood ideology is endorsed by the state because it maintains the status quo and because it benefits those in power” (2001: 39); and Humphries, Fleming and O’Donnell (2000) state that for statistical and legislative purposes, definitions of the family in Ireland primarily refer to marital, parental, hereditary and/or caring relationships. Having one exclusive definition of the family such as the one in the Constitution endorses and perpetuates a hierarchy among different kinds of families. Despite the fact that 31.82% of children are born outside of marriage (NPD, 2002a), that the number of marriages is lower in 2002 than it was in the 1950s (NPD, 2002b) and that the number of cohabiting couples has increased significantly since the 1990s, as has the number of children in family units among those cohabiting couples (NPD, 2002c), “[...] forces for the preservation of a patriarchal Irish nation underpinned by an idealised version of the ‘Irish family’ continue to hold sway in Irish society” (Gray and Ryan, 1997: 529).

New Right
In recent times, concern has been expressed regarding declining family values and conservative or right wing commentators identify single lone parents as a particular problem (Leane and Kiely 1997:298). Such commentators deploy the
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Despite the fact , 2002a), that the (NDP, 2002b) and y since the 1990s, exhibiting couples rchal Irish nation uc to hold sway in

family values and one parents as a nators deploy the symbolic form of ‘the welfare mother’ to portray single mothers as “welfare scouners breeding pathological children in non-visible social and economic units (Murray 1993, Toomey Jacksonville 1994)” (Leane and Kiely, 1997: 296). This deployment of ‘the welfare mother’ symbol has become evident in Irish legal and political circles. Justice Roman Keane (2004) claimed single mothers were to blame for rising crime, because their ‘out of control’ male children had no male role models and were therefore responsible for a high proportion of all criminal activity. Interestingly, Justice Keane did not himself subscribe to the ideology of the family, being separated from his wife. Also, McNally (1996) wrote in the Irish Times “Rise and Rise of the Welfare Mother,” in which he, an elected public representative, strongly criticized the social acceptance of single mothers. Leane and Kiely (1997) express concern that the traditional stigmatization of single lone parents in Ireland does nothing to instil confidence that this New Right rhetoric will not gain ground here.

This concern about declining family values was also evident at a number of public ‘Family Forum’ held in Donegal, Kilkenny, Cork, Galway and Dublin in 2004. The Department of Community and Family Affairs, conducted this research into attitudes and opinions towards the family with a view to informing family policy. Daly, conducting this research, found that there was a strong representation from some groups wishing to preserve the patriarchal, nuclear family as the true definition of the family in Ireland: “[i]t was pointed out on a number of occasions […] that the Constitutional understanding of the family – as consisting of children who live with their married parents and in a family situation where the mother is based in the home – is still the official definition of the family in Ireland for legal purposes” (2004: 25). These few, highly vocal, groups at the Family Forum felt that the patriarchal nuclear family was being eroded:

the definition of the family was being changed by stealth. […] With marriage seen as integral to the stability of society, the underlying fear is that recent changes in policy, such as moves to individualise the tax system, serve to dismantle the protected status of the family based on marriage. (2004: 23-4)
The symbolic forms of the 'stay-at-home mother' and the 'nuclear' family pathologize single mothers, while right-wing commentators suggest that single mothers are responsible for declining family values and rising crime.

Social Policy
The social context within which the symbolic forms of traditional 'stay at home married mother' and 'welfare mother' are employed is evident in the treatment of lone parents in Irish social policy. Inglis (1987), Fahy (1998) and Daly & Clavero (2002) provide evidence that the motherhood and family ideologies were developed in Ireland by Church and State and that Irish Social Policy was developed on the premise of 'patriarchal familialism' (Fahy, 1998).

Traditionally in social policy, questions about children have tended only to focus on children's needs 'for care' when the family is seen as unable or incapable of providing adequate care: "childcare in the social policy and social services literature has come to mean the care of children in contexts other than the privacy of the 'normal, nuclear family'" (David, 1991: 95). The assumption in social policy is that child-care is the private concern of individual families and presupposes the existence of a 'normal' family and the state is at least indirectly involved in defining what normal standards of family and care are and should be.

State agencies such as welfare systems, state health professionals and social workers, Althusser's 'repressive state apparatus', engage in surveillance of mothers, particularly single and working-class mothers whose circumstances do not conform to the social constructions of motherhood as laid out in ideologies of motherhood and the family. The result is that mothers are scrutinized, and where mothers deviate from the accepted constructions, as defined by state agencies, the ultimate sanction is that their children are removed from them: "mothers should ensure that independent provision is made for their children in such a way that neither the children nor the mothers themselves come to public attention" (Phoenix and Woollett, 1991: 14).

Lawler (2000) claims that single mothers are pathologized and government agencies in the U.K. take a specific interest in single mothers because they are seen as incapable of caring for their children. In Kiley (1997), Lawler argues that agencies engage in a repulsive and threat to the social fabric of children, irrespective of status of the mother. Low income families subsidized by state services have a responsibility to maintain their own children, which is why they are excluded. This disregard is the result of the influence of benefits on the family.

1 Child Benefit Payment: mothers become the official children per month.
2 Family Income Support with one child per month.
3 Allowances for dependants is £36.70 per week per child.
4 One Parent Family Payment: integrated unmarried net benefit for all three categories is £154.10 per week, earn
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seen as incapable of producing well-adjusted children. It is perceived that the
children of single mothers are, or will be, a threat to social order; and Leane and
agencies engage in surveillance of single mothers and present them as excessive,
repetitive and threatening.

In Irish social policy, the influence of motherhood and family ideologies is
apparent in the different nature of welfare benefits available to married women
and to lone parents. Benefits to lone parents are pro-employment, while benefits
to married women are neutral. Child Benefit is paid to all mothers, for all
children, irrespective of means. It is attractive to Irish policy makers because it is
seen as benefiting all children and is neutral as regards the employment or marital
status of the mother. The Family Income Supplement is an in-work benefit for
low earning families which represents Irish social policy's approach to
subsidizing low income from economic activity. Child dependent allowances are
paid to social welfare recipients for each dependant child and, since 1995, these
allowances have remained static in value, with changes only relating to the
possibility of retaining these payments for a specific period should the recipient
take up employment. In 1997, the One Parent Family Payment was introduced,
which sought to broaden the conception of lone parent to include the role of
worker, and included entitlements towards employment with earnings disregard.
This disregard is the equivalent of 20 hours work at the minimum wage.

The influence of the motherhood and family ideology on these welfare
benefits is evident. The family income supplement is predominantly pro-work,

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1 Child Benefit Payment: introduced in 1944, paid to head of household (father) until 1974 when
mothers became the official beneficiaries. At 2004, the rate is €231.00 for each of the first two
children per month.

2 Family Income Supplement: an in-work benefit for low earning families. To qualify, families
with one child must earn less than €487 per week after tax + the One Parent Family Payment.

3 Allowances for dependant children paid to social welfare recipients. At 2004 (and 1994) the rate
is €126.70 per week per child.

4 One Parent Family Payment: introduced in 1997, bitherto Lone Parent's Allowance (1990) which
integrated unmarried mothers' dependant wives', prisoners' wives' and widows' allowances into one
benefit for all three categories of women. The current amount of the One Parent Family Payment
is €154.10 per week, earnings disregard is €145.50 per week.
however, it facilitates 'stay-at-home mothers' in a marital situation. The child
dependant allowances are pro-work to entice welfare recipients to get into
employment. The child benefit scheme is pro-natal, irrespective of marital or
employment status of the mother. The One-Parent Family Payment is
predominantly pro-work to entice lone parents into paid work, but it could also be
seen as pro-natal, in that it provides an income for lone parents to care for their
children. However, the earnings disregard in the One Parent Family Payment
limits the number of hours a lone parent can work while retaining benefit, and the
level of benefit is so low that lone parents who do not work or work part time will
be at a high risk of poverty.

Married women are facilitated in being 'stay-at-home' mothers by the
Family Income Supplement, while unmarried women are presented with either
pro-employment benefits or poverty. Nolan and Whelan (1996) and Nolan and
Watson (1999) found that the most important factor contributing to the increase in
poverty risk for female-headed households is the level of welfare payments on
which many lone parents and households headed by single women rely. In 2004,
Combat Poverty found that there has been a 50% rise in the number of lone
parents who live in poverty in the last 10 years, and One Family reported that
42.9% of persons at risk of poverty in Ireland (60% of median income) live in a
lone parent headed household, in comparison with 21.9% of the overall
population (One Family, 2004a).

McCahin (1996) and Richardson (2004) found that some lone mothers
experience acute basic deprivation, unable to meet basic costs for utilities and
many lone mothers go without material goods and services for themselves in order
to meet the needs of their children.

In launching the recent OECD "Babies and Bosses" report, the Director of
OECD stated that "single parents on social welfare who reject job offers should be
forced to work" (Troeir, 2003); and while Minister for Social and Family Affairs,
Mary Coughlan, rejected this call for coercion, she supported the government
working with lone parents to get them off social welfare and into work.

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Daly and Clavero, in a review of Irish Family Policy, claim that debate on lone-parent families has centred on the extent to which public policy should encourage or compel them to be employed and on matters of maintenance and support. They conclude that the thrust of policy in Ireland is to permit the Irish lone parent to raise her family’s total income above the benefit level without jeopardizing either the benefit or commitment to the care of her children, “[h]owever, employment and employability are not ruled out” (2002: 157). The only way lone parents can raise income above benefit level is through paid employment, thus confirming the pro-employment nature of Irish social policy as regards single mothers.

There is an inherent conflict in the way in which pre-natal and pre-employment aspects of welfare benefits apply to lone mothers. Pathologizing and penalizing lone parents is evident in Budget 2004¹ which introduced the discontinuation of lone parent creche places, extension of the qualifying period for the Back to Education Allowance, introduction of a qualifying period for new rent allowance applicants and discontinuation of the transitional half-rate One Parent Family Payment when a lone parent takes up employment. According to One Family:

Budget 2004 should have provided the first instalment of provisions which would assist one parent families to reduce their risk of living in poverty and social exclusion. This was due to it being the first Budget in the implementation period of the Government’s new National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion. However, just before Budget day a series of cuts were announced [...] of these 16 cuts, several could work together to have negative impacts on the lives of every one-parent family in Ireland today. (2004b: 4)

¹ Since January 2004, if parents are receiving the One Parent Family Payment for more than one year and their earnings are greater than €200 per week, the benefit will automatically cease. Prior to this budget, a reduced benefit at 50% of the rate was available for an additional year to facilitate the lone parent’s transition to employment. Cessation of half benefit is an unusual measure, not being pro-employment. If lone parents lose the OPF, they also lose medical card, rent supplement and back to school clothing and footwear allowances, and would therefore need to command a high salary to compensate these losses and pay for childcare. In reality, lone parents are predominately in low earnings brackets and women with dependant children have a higher than average risk of poverty (NDP 2002).
Irish social policy is pre-employment with regard to lone parents and the reality for many is that if they wish to conform to one aspect of ideologies of motherhood by providing full-time care for their children, they will experience poverty because welfare levels are inadequate. This, furthermore, would imply that they are unable to fulfill another aspect of ideologies of motherhood by not being able to provide economically for their children.

Ideologies of motherhood and the family which assume women have primary responsibility for all caring work create and sustain relations of domination between women and men; however, ideologies of motherhood and the family, as constructed in Irish society also create relations of inequality between married and unmarried mothers.

Daly and Clavero (2002) report that individualization, childcare and the appropriate manner of support for lone parents are issues which remain to be resolved in family policy in Ireland. Meanwhile, following Therborn (1980), lone parents experience sanctions in the form of pressure to get off welfare and into work, while married mothers are free to provide unpaid care for their children, suggesting that the conservative values of right-wing commentators are promoted and reinforced in social policy.

Conclusion
In reality, more than 30% of all children are born to unmarried women; therefore material conditions appear to change more rapidly than ideologies do. There is no material reason why mothers are expected to have certain functions and lifestyles if married and other functions and lifestyles if unmarried. That different expectations of mothers' roles exist is influenced by these ideologies and perpetuated in the Irish social context via various sites including the media, the welfare system and state agencies.

The contradiction between married mothers remaining at home with their children to fulfill ideologies of motherhood, while unmarried women are expected to take up employment, is evident. If the reason for this purely economic with lone mothers in employment seen as "cheap, flexible labour" on the one hand and representing a saving ideology that only the latter is the case of mothers, but also

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ideology that only wants to see motherhood existing within a nuclear family? If
the latter is the case, there is a danger of Ireland developing not only two classes
of mothers, but also two classes of children.

During research at the Family Fora, Daly found ideologies of motherhood
and the family were more, not less, influential on single mothers: "As a lone
mother, I feel an additional responsibility to be there for my children and to rear
them properly" (Participant, Family Fora, 2004: 4). The meanings this mother
derives from the ideologies of motherhood and the family are that she believes she
has an additional responsibility because she must compensate for the absent
parent; she has internalized the symbolic form of the 'stay-at-home mother' and
believes she must "be there" for her children; and because she is a lone parent, she
believes she has to prove that she can "rear them properly." However, proper
rearing is that which is determined in ideologies of motherhood and the family.
Lone mothers do not necessarily mother any better or worse than married
mothers; however, they are seen as the producers of the children who are, or who
will be, a threat to social order "and they are seen as doing this through
inadequately nurturing the selves of those children" (Lawler, 2000: 2).

With current changes in 'the family' and within debates about
individualization in social policy, do the concerns of those who spoke at the
Family Fora, concerned that "the family was being changed by stealth" (Daly,
2004: 23, emphasis added), reflect the existence of a real threat to the nuclear
family by lone parents and other changes? And does this suggest that there will be
a diminution of the influence of family and motherhood ideologies? Or, perhaps it
suggests there will always be a strong backlash against any measures to reduce the
privileged position the nuclear family holds in Ireland?

Perhaps the presentation of lone mothers in Irish society is a reflection of
the extent to which the New Right and Social Policy reinforce one another. Or,
maybe it suggests that lone mothers present that most threatening proposition to
those in the dominant group - potentially redundant contemporary masculinities.
And perhaps this crisis in masculinity opens up new possibilities for rethinking lone motherhood into the future.

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National Development Plan (b) Fig 1.11: Co-habiting couples by size of family unit. Women and Men in Ireland: Facts and Figures. NDP Gender Equality Unit: Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform.


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