

CREATING KINSHIP:

AN EXPLORATION OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUNG ADULT
NEW ZEALANDERS, THEIR PARENTS AND THEIR INTIMATE PARTNERS

Donna McKenzie

ABSTRACT

It has been argued (Carsten 2004) that kinship involves not just rights, rules, and obligations but is also a realm of new possibilities, and what has been lacking in anthropology is an examination of the experience of kinship. Kinship or relatedness is a significant part of human experience, although it will take culturally and historically specific forms. Dominant themes that shape Western or Euro-American ideas of kin in parent-child relationships are to do with degrees of independence from parental control and authority coupled with a never-ending familial responsibility (Allan 1996). Young adults are in a transitional phase, one in which many are attempting to secure an independent adult identity and become fully adult social beings. This has the potential for conflict between parents and adult children and to create emotional and/or physical distance from each other. However, the support of young people by parents and other close kin is also a significant factor for the individual resilience needed in times of distress. If a young person does not have kin to depend upon, an alternative may be friendship with the parent/s of one's intimate partner. The danger with this is that if the intimate relationship ends, so too may the friendship. This paper examines these relationship experiences for a group of young adult New Zealanders.

INTRODUCTION

Kinship or relatedness is a significant part of human experience, although it will take culturally and historically specific forms in different societies. Most social theorists are agreed that early learning within the family is the prime site in which people learn how to be members of society (Bourdieu 1977; Jamieson 1998). Rayna Rapp (1987: 128) has written that 'the family' is a key symbol in American culture and that '...everyone grows up in its shadow'. Families are

people who occupy roles and responsibilities associated with kinship ties of 'blood' and marriage (Schneider 1968). The Euro-American form of kinship is most common in New Zealand and is based on notions of a male-dominated household or family and the autonomous nuclear family as normative (Baker 2001). Rapp (1978) has also noted that a further norm about families is that they should be loving and sharing and protective, but that in reality it is often not the case. In practice family life can just as easily be characterised by conflict and resentment.

On 5 July 2002, the actions of one young man, Daniel Luff, due to circumstances directly related to a break-up with his girlfriend Stephanie, led to a series of devastating events in the small community of Rongotea near Palmerston North. By the day's end, Daniel had not only taken Stephanie's parents hostage in their home, but even more distressingly, shot and killed one police constable and wounded another. In September of that same year, Daniel Luff was sentenced to life imprisonment for his actions. There were many reports from various news media at the time about reasons why this happened. Typical of many were the following excerpts that quote Daniel's defence lawyer, Roger Crowley:

That break-up represented, for him [*Daniel*], the loss of the first supportive, loving family he had ever been part of, after 17 years of emotional deprivation.... 'He was holding on to it for all he was worth.' (The Evening Standard 18 September 2002)

The relationship with Stephanie Cocker was a 'defining moment' in Luff's life. The relationship, coupled with his inability to understand emotional boundaries, 'consumed him'. When it fell apart, because he had become 'possessive and pushy', he fell apart too. (The Evening Standard 19 September 2002)

Daniel Luff had so enjoyed being part of Stephanie's family that he had come to think of her parents as his own, surrogate family. However, like other young adults in such circumstances, she had become unable to cope with the burden of his excessive emotional need and ended their relationship. Unfortunately for Daniel this also meant the end of his relationship with her parents. Reports suggested that her parents were of equal, if not more importance to him than Stephanie, but to be able to be with them depended on being in a relationship with her. Daniel Luff found himself unable to cope with the loss of both relationships and the knowledge that he did not, after all, belong. This is a tragic example of how, despite the perception that young adults may in many

ways be 'grown up', close relationships with older adults are important ongoing emotional supports.

Carsten (2004) suggests that the experiential dimension has often been excluded from anthropological accounts of kinship. Kinship, she says, is more than diagrams of connectedness, bio-genetic patterns of inheritance or relationship terminology. Relatedness is embodied. Indeed, Carsten further argues that kinship involves not just rights, rules, and obligations, but is also a realm of new possibilities. She says this aspect of kinship has been neglected because:

This lived experience often seems too mundane or too obvious to be worthy of close scrutiny. But ...kinship is far from being simply a realm of the 'given' as opposed to the 'made'. It is, among other things, an area of life in which people invest their emotions, their creative energy, and their new imaginings. These of course can take both benevolent and destructive forms. (Carsten 2004: 9)

Classificatory systems of relatedness are also changing as society itself changes (e.g., surrogacy), and the notion of choice has entered debates on kinship. Strathern (1992, cited in McKinley 2001), for example, refers to the term 'enterprise kin' in relation to reproductive technology. So how much of a choice do we have when it comes to whom we designate or treat as kin? Despite the struggle by young people in Western societies to become 'individual and separate' (see for example Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995) there is a need and desire by young people for the encouragement and approval of an older adult. Belonging to a family group is an important way for young people to cope with the emotional challenges life brings. Indeed, 'feeling loved and cared for is fundamental to one's ability to care for and establish healthy relationships with others' (Ministry of Social Development 2004: 42). For most young people this is provided by a parent or other close adult relative, but for others it may come from a friendship with, for example, another older adult such as the parent of one's intimate partner. Although families are important in young people's understandings and experiences of their relationships with others, Bell and Coleman (1999) suggest that a clear distinction between kinship and friendship is not always easy to sustain, and can easily become blurred.

Overseas empirical studies of young people's relationships (for example, Scharf and Maysless (2001) and Zimmer-Gembeck (1999)) emphasize a correlation between the quality of marital and parent-child relationships and young people's relationships with their partners and peer group. These studies tend to stress that parent-adolescent relationships contribute to better social com-

petence and higher capacity for intimacy in partner relationships as well as friendships. Scharf and Mayseles (2001: 394) suggest, for instance, that ‘...parents’ capacity to grant autonomy, while setting limits and remaining emotionally available, may be central in shaping children’s capacity for individuality and separateness’. Further, the authors of the Canadian Adolescents at Risk Research Network (2004) argue that for adolescents, ‘parents appear to be the best defense against poor emotional health’.

So does the example of Daniel Luff mean that when young people’s intimate relationships break up (and they live in the absence of the support of a caring older adult), that they may place themselves and others at risk? Young people are often positioned as an ‘at risk’ population not only because of what they do but also because of who they are. But risk is not the same as chance or uncertainty. Culpitt (1999) suggests that dominant contemporary discourses rest on notions of individual responsibility and management of social life and leave little room for notions of randomness, fate or chance. I argue that relationships per se are more about uncertainty rather than risk, and that the risk is instead in the consequences of having to cope with emotional rejection and disappointment.

Longitudinal studies offer the best evidence for how young people develop emotional resilience. New Zealand’s Dunedin Multidisciplinary Study has produced a Families Relations Index to measure family cohesion, expressiveness and conflict. This study found that the Index had the potential to predict childhood disorders at age eleven and behavioural and emotional disorders at age fifteen (Poland and Legge 2005: 6). The Christchurch Health and Development Study has found that changes in family structure and relationships between parents and children can have profound effects on young people’s later health (Poland and Legge 2005: 9). Other New Zealand studies such as the Connectedness in Youth Project are concerned with identifying those factors that optimise positive experiences for adolescents (Poland and Legge 2005: 21). These studies’ common aim is to determine how young people develop into adults. A summary of the research on resiliency suggests that four broad factors influence young people’s emotional resilience: individual characteristics, family support, a supportive person/agency outside the family and (more recently) culture (Atwool 2006: 316). Certainly, it is much more than an individual capacity to cope, but it is also something that one can learn and develop over time so that ‘it is never too late to change a life trajectory’ (Howard, Dryden and Johnson 1999: 310). The interaction and accumulation of individual and environmental factors are most likely to make the difference but this varies depending upon age, ethnicity and class (Howard *et al* 1999).

Indeed, it requires a certain amount of emotional resiliency for anyone to cope with the end of a relationship. For most older people resiliency is acquired through past experience and by simply having lived longer; one knows what is going to happen next. But for young people resiliency depends more on the level of support they can draw on from supportive family and friends rather than an accumulated past knowledge or individual personality characteristics (which not everyone possesses in equal measure).

Resiliency is therefore largely a cultural process and a measure of the life course. For young people, resiliency increases if they are able to depend upon a network of close relationships, especially with an older adult/s. The path to adulthood is aided by the approval and nurturing of this older person with whom a young person will have something in common.

When the norms are more clearly a matter of choice (the situation of 'being oneself'), each person has to find other human beings who are capable of, and willing to, confirm his or her valued identities. (Gullestad 1996: 37)

The most significant adult/young adult relationship in New Zealand tends to be with one's parents or other close kin. Nevertheless, should this not be the case, an alternative exists within dominant discourses of relatedness to develop a supportive friendship with one's partner's parent/s. Friendships are more about choice and conscious decision-making, so developing a friendship with a partner's parent can fulfil two roles – as adult friend and as supportive older adult able to act in a familial capacity. The only problem is that if this person is the parent of one's intimate partner, and if the relationship ends, then the friendship may also end. At this point it should be noted that the data on which this argument is based are the perspectives of young people only, and no information from the parental point of view is available. They also represent the perspectives of the dominant ethnic group in Aotearoa/New Zealand (i.e. NZ European/Pakeha) and are reflective of heterosexually oriented experiences.¹

THE NEW ZEALAND POPULATION

New Zealand's population is diverse; differences are characterised by age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, geographic location and mobility (Statistics New Zealand 1998). According to 2006 Census results,² NZ European was the largest of the major ethnic groups at 2,609,592 people (67.6% of the population). Maori, although the second largest ethnic group, numbered only 565,329 (14.6%),

with Asian (the fastest growing group) numbering 354,552 people and Pacific peoples numbering 265,974 (14.7%) (Statistics New Zealand 2006). The 2006 Census also revealed that Auckland was the most ethnically diverse region in New Zealand, with 56.5% of its population identifying with the NZ/European ethnic group, 18.9% with Asian, 14.4% with Pacific, and 11.1% with the Maori ethnic group (Statistics New Zealand 2006). New Zealand's population is also highly urbanized, and at the 2001 Census 86% of New Zealanders lived in an urban area (Ministry of Social Development 2006:13).

Couple-only and one-person households are the fastest growing household types in New Zealand (Ministry of Social Development 2006:16). In 2003 just over half the population (52%) was living in a 'couple with children' family with the second most common arrangement being 'couple only' at 22% (Families' Commission 2006). Between 2003 and 2004, 10% of fifteen to twenty-four year olds left home to become a 'couple only' or to go flatting/living alone and enter the 'other' family type category (Families' Commission 2006). Young people in partner situations most commonly live in couple-only households (approximately 40%) but *de facto* couples, unlike married couples (and other couples with children), are more likely to share housing with others. Women tend to enter into partner relationships at a younger age than men and are also more likely to be sole parents compared to men (Statistics New Zealand 1998). One marker of adulthood in New Zealand for young people, if they are able, is to live independently of their parents (Families' Commission 2006). Despite this many young adults in New Zealand find independent living difficult, if not impossible, if they are unable to fully support themselves financially.

METHOD

The most popular qualitative research method in the social sciences is interviewing, of which several types exist. This method assumes a particular kind of knowledge in order to answer a particular kind of question with a specific kind of data.

Underlying [*this*]...is a constructivist view of knowledge. The claim is that perception, memory, emotion and understanding are human constructs, not objective things. Yet, this construction is not a chaotic process because it takes place within cultural and sub-cultural settings that provide a strong framework for meaning-making. So, we share similar (but not identical) understandings of things that are common experiences and subject to society-wide interpretations.... However, we also bring to each of these an understanding that has

personal elements.... As we move to more personal events, such as falling in love, then understandings and meanings that go with them, although they are still socially shaped, are likely to become more diverse. (Arksey and Knight 1999: 3)

The data for the larger study on which this paper is based (McKenzie 2004) examined perceptions of young adult New Zealanders' intimate relationships. Data was gathered using a multi-interview method and involved 94 participants to capture the greatest possible range of perspectives. Participants were selected for their competence rather than their ability to represent the whole of New Zealand's population (Russell 1994). The aim of this study was to investigate dominant discourses that exist in New Zealand society, and all participants had in common the fact that they were either born, brought up or went to secondary school in New Zealand. A requirement for participants was that couples agreed that they were in a committed couple rather than casual relationship. The average participant age was twenty-one years. Interviews included focus groups; joint interviews with couples followed by individual interviews with the people who formed those couples; individual interviews with people in couple relationships (without conducting a joint interview); and individual interviews with people who considered themselves single by choice (rather than circumstance).

Participants were self-selected from a variety of recruiting sources and methods. Only three participants were parents, one couple and one single man. The majority of participants were in couple relationships, but focus groups consisted of people both single and partnered. A small group of six people (three men and three women) identified themselves as single by choice. Most participants (63 people) were students engaged in a variety of further education courses at tertiary institutions, four people were unemployed and twenty-seven engaged in various other professions ranging from retailing to law. The majority (70 people) reported a personal income of between only \$0 and \$15,000. This reflects a common situation for many of New Zealand's young people (especially students), and these individuals are likely to have limited financial resources. A variety of ethnic groups were represented, but the majority (81 people) identified themselves as New Zealand/European or Pakeha. All participants were living in Auckland at the time, although several had moved to the city to study and considered their permanent home to be elsewhere in the country.

Analysis began with reading and re-reading interview transcripts as whole narratives. Group interviews were then read as public conversations between peers and couple interviews as public stories (the audience being the couple

themselves and the interviewer). Individual interviews were read as private narratives about one person's life. Narratives often provide invaluable and moving insights to reveal complex and diverse responses and experiences. The ways in which people talk about their lives and the stories they tell give meaning to experience and mediate the relationship between individual experience and normative expectations (Popay and Groves 2000). Such narratives also reveal culturally transmitted norms and meanings and illustrate how individuals employ these in their specific and everyday realities. An effective analysis for narratives is discourse analysis, because as Lock (2001) notes, narratives rarely capture the full range of political and structural interests at work that influence and shape most cultural understandings. Discourses are the means by which we make meaningful sense of our world through language and action. Discourse analysis provides a way of looking at how people make sense of the world through the communication of signs; the focus is on language and the purposes for which it is used. Discourses are a way of creating and reproducing truths; they have consequences and are historically evolved (Cameron 2001).

EXPERIENCES OF KINSHIP AND FRIENDSHIP

In this paper the concept of the family is based on Schneider's (1968) model of American kinship. Schneider conceptualised kinship as a cultural system, arguing that biological thinking about kinship was actually cultural. This approach provides a tool for understanding the inter-relationship between kinship and other domains such as friendship. Although feminist anthropologists such as Yanagisako and Collier (1987) have pointed out that Schneider's model of kinship is limited and ignores gender issues, the intention in this paper is not to defend his model but to use it as an insight into how young people understand their kin relationships.

Schneider argues that kinship is a fluid, flexible and diverse system. People are related either through the laws of nature or 'blood' (that is, parents and children) or through the laws of humanity (that is, by practices such as marriage). Blood relationships are relationships of identity that involve a concept of distance. These relationships, despite being either close or distant, cannot be ended or altered because blood relatives share a common identity. Marriage, because it is not a 'blood' relationship, can be terminated. Although it has natural aspects, it is not a natural object and therefore exists only in law, not in nature. Family members are also defined and differentiated by the symbol (not the practice) of sexual intercourse. The practice of sexual intercourse is how love is expressed – as 'making love'. In Schneider's argument, love is an explicit cultural symbol for which there are two types. The first is conjugal

between husband and wife, and the other cognatic because it represents the relationship that created parent and child. Schneider says that as a kind of relationship, love is an 'enduring, diffuse solidarity'. Solidarity means that the relationship is supportive, helpful and co-operative and rests on trust. It is diffuse because it is not narrowly confined to a specific goal or kind of behaviour. Family members can also never be indifferent to each other, and because their co-operative love does not have a specific goal or time in mind like work does, it is enduring. Love – or diffuse, enduring solidarity – is the way relatives *should* behave towards each other. These normative rules of kinship codes of conduct are just that, rules and definitions, not practices. The family is singular, not plural, and because nature serves as the symbol, a family is not considered complete unless it involves children.

Who a person designates as their kin and how they conduct these relationships are formed by individual experience, unique family histories, and by cultural definitions of 'family'. Allan (1996: 53) (drawing on Schneider 1968) refers to ties between parents, siblings and children as 'primary kinship'. Any breakdown in these relationships, he asserts, is seen as undesirable and something that warrants explanation. In other words, there is a moral basis to the ways in which kinship ties are understood and organised, in that people share a commitment to and solidarity with one another.

CONSTRUCTING AN ADULT IDENTITY

Significant themes to do with family influences on relationships for young people are also ideas about identity and the importance of becoming an adult. A requirement for full adulthood for many participants in this study was to be a different and therefore separate person from one's parents, to be one's 'own person' or to realize one's 'true self'. Despite the acquisition of an individual identity, it is very hard to become indifferent to one's parents – the people with whom we have our primary 'blood' relationships. Most participants in this study were raised within their natal family group and as members of the same household consisting of one or two parents and a number of children. Kath Weston (1997: 6) notes that nuclear families '...supply one cultural framework for configuring kinship that people can draw upon to interpret the world around them'. There are two dominant, albeit conflicting, principles that shape Western or Euro-American ideas about parent/adult child relationships. The first is the degree of independence from parental authority and control that is part of full adulthood. The second is that of a never-ending familial responsibility (Allan 1996). Many younger participants said they desired autonomy from their families, but almost all of them also said their parents or another

older family member were integral to their lives and valued them for their support in times of strife. So regardless of any difficulties they may have had with their families in the struggle to become independent adults, kinship ties for these young people meant security, safety and unconditional acceptance. Marianne Gullestad offers one explanation for this:

The very idea of being oneself, and the associated notion that being oneself is to be authentic, easily lead to the idea that in order to be oneself one needs to struggle against some externally imposed rules. Relations with parents are particularly important in this regard, since young people develop their own values to a large extent through resisting and reshaping the influences of their parents. (Gullestad 1996: 36)

Indeed, when asked about who were the most influential people in their families of origin when it came to relationships, parents were overwhelmingly the example. Simon and Kim (both aged twenty-one) had been together for four years. They used their parents' experiences as examples for their decisions about what it was they wanted from their relationship.³

Simon: I like to think that one day I'll have a relationship as sound as theirs. But they've always been really good at talking and things like that and so I'm sure that, I hope that's the way to go rather than fighting. I've never seen them hit someone so I've never thought about doing anything like that myself. My grandparents haven't been around that much but even then they've always had a pretty good marriage and married life and stuff.

Kim: Some things that my parents have done or their friends or my friends have done, I don't ever want to do and I've learnt from their experiences – I just don't ever want to go through what they've been through. Like my parents have had quite hard times with money so I don't ever, I want to get to the point where I've got money in the bank and my kids can go to school and they have everything that they want or they need to a point where I know that that money is safe. I don't ever want to have to worry about money and I want a career and just... I don't know just some things you look back and you think – I don't personally want to do that or go through that.

Other participants said they felt their parents were reluctant to treat them as adults (although this may have been in part due to the young person's behav-

our rather than intransigence on behalf of their parents). This was the case for Anne (aged nineteen) who had been through some difficult times with her parents in her attempt to create a separate identity for herself and only now had begun to understand what had happened. Anne's experience is also an example of how parental values may differ from those of their children.

I've always been brought up the Catholic way and by that, very, very Catholic. Like boys aren't allowed in the house, boys aren't allowed in the room especially, you are not allowed out on dates until you are twenty, stuff like this. And I was going to nightclubs when I was sixteen, and really rebelling. I was about fourteen and I got to the stage and I said, 'No, I'm not going to church anymore, it's stupid, I don't believe in that, that's not me.' And that really just rocked their world. They couldn't believe that they had produced this daughter who just did not want to follow the rules, didn't want to go their way. They've dealt with it, but I think they were influential in conditioning what I thought was right and wrong, because I didn't want to listen to them. In a way, everything I thought to do was rebellion. Staying out all night and not telling them and having them ringing round all my friends. 'Where is she, where is she, we can't find her, who's she with?' And of course a lot of them kept their mouths shut because I'd told them. I think very manipulative behaviour on my part, very manipulative and quite disturbing for them obviously, but that's just what happened. I mean obviously that's settled right down because it's all out in the open.

However, Anne also said she still had difficulty in imagining her parents could tell her anything at all about relationships.

I don't see their relationship as a relationship in a way, they're married, they've got three kids, they're in a different space, they are going through different things and to be honest I don't like the idea of my parents having sex. So I just don't want to think about their relationship.

However different people wanted to believe themselves as not the same as their parents, early learning within the family environment is a significant and very powerful influence (Bourdieu 1977). Additionally, some participants noted that they felt there would always be an unconscious element to their thinking and behaviour that would limit the degree to which they felt they would ever be free of family influences. Moreover, many young people in New Zealand today

do not leave home as early as their parents and grandparents may have, and the break is generally more gradual and subtle than in the past. Some parents even subsidise the living costs of adult children who live elsewhere whilst still others support children who have returned to live at home. The exchange is not just of love and care; it is material as well, although such resources that are given or shared will be offered based upon the feelings and commitment of kinship ties.

NATURE VS NURTURE

Strathern (1992, cited in Carsten 2004: 22) has suggested that kinship is of particular significance to anthropology ‘...because, in Euro-American ideas, it has been thought of as a realm where nature and culture interconnect’. Richard (aged twenty-five) was brought up by his stepfather, his biological father having left the family when he was still a toddler. However, he said that he felt his stepfather had not as great an impact on his behaviour in relationships as his biological father. He credited his mother with his upbringing rather than his stepfather. Richard’s story reflects popular models of ideas about kinship in which ‘nature’ rather than ‘nurture’ has the greater power to determine behaviour.

My father for example, as much as I don’t like to say it, every day I get older I remind myself more of him. I like to think I’ve learnt his bad traits and can steer clear of them but in relationships I definitely have not. I definitely have what my father had for example, everything from how I meet them, and how I have affairs, that sort of thing.

So your Mum brought you up on her own?

Oh pretty much, I didn’t really get to know the guy but my stepfather was the bomb, he’s great. As much as I’d like to be more like him I find that it’s not part of me to be self-sacrificing and stuff like that, thinking about the family unit.

This exchange illustrates Schneider’s argument that ‘blood’ and distance are significant concepts in whom and how people are designated kin. However, Richard said he was currently single by choice and had found, as he grew older, that he did not like the way he formed relationships or the way he behaved in them. In the past he had begun all his relationships in what he termed a ‘typical New Zealand way’ – getting drunk, sleeping with a woman then waking up

the next day in a relationship. These relationships never lasted very long and he often ended them by causing arguments or by cheating on his girlfriend. His story is interesting on several levels, not the least of which is the hint of guilt for possibly caring more about his step-father than his biological father. Richard's dissatisfaction with his relationship behaviour is perhaps due to the fact that he was one of the few participants who had a child. Although he did not live with his son's mother, he saw a lot of the boy and since his birth had begun deliberately trying to change what he saw as his 'hard wired' attitude in his relationships with women and to be a 'better' person. Richard said he considered his relationship behaviour to be just like his father's – biologically pre-determined. However, by trying very hard to change, he was also disproving his own argument. Furthermore, not everyone agreed about the power of the bio-genetic relationship. Stephen (aged twenty-one) said he was unlikely to introduce a partner to his family. Although he did not say why, he did say that he had minimal contact with them and that:

[*With*] family, you are just kind of lumped within true blood kind of thing, and you can often be totally different people to them, and with totally different tastes.

However, ideas associated with what 'blood' ties mean remain culturally powerful. Babula (2001), for example, imagines it would be almost impossible to remove herself from her biological family. She says 'this would require, in essence, a rewriting of myself' (Babula 2001: 121), and she considers herself 'emotionally incapable' of letting go of familial obligations. This, argues Allan (1996: 61), suggests that '...kinship needs to be understood as a network of ties rather than as a series of unconnected individual relationships'. People relate differently to each other depending on their interpretations of what kinship means within the context of their own experiences.

CONFLICT

The emotional intensity of familial obligations can cause problems between young people and their parents. A commitment to a partner can be a potential cause of disagreement and create emotional and/or physical distance between young people and their families. For the participants in this study, one of the main reasons for conflict was reluctance by their parents to accept their choice of partner or that they were of an age to have a partner. Although it is not necessary that a person's family accepts their partner, for those who valued their relationships with their families, the ability of a partner and a family to get on together was very important.

Marie (Pakeha, aged eighteen) and Neville (Maori/Australian, aged nineteen) had been together for three years, ever since they met at school. Marie said that although her father did not seem to trust Neville at the start of their relationship, over time the situation had improved significantly. Indeed, Neville had become part of her family, and had formed a friendship with her father.

My Dad didn't really like him very much when we first got together, but I didn't listen to him, and now Dad's his friend, yeah, you know, Neville is like – part of the family now, he even comes to family dinners, every Sunday, and Dad goes and watches him play rugby and stuff, so I just think that, I didn't listen to Dad because I didn't think that he knew him and so I just didn't listen.⁴

Marie's family had provided Neville with examples of a lifestyle and familial environment different to that of his own family. Neville said in his individual interview that, not only could he not remember the last time he had gone out with his family, but he also did not want to be like his parents who seemed to him to be 'miserable'. Carsten (2004: 35) suggests that it is possible for '...kinship [*to be*]... *made* in houses through the intimate sharing of space, food, and nurturance that goes on within domestic space'. By sharing family activities and meals this young man had come to experience a friendship that had some of the qualities of a kin relationship, ones he felt were lacking in his own family.

In Western societies, as a general rule, the intimate relationship, the relationship that says to society that a person is an adult, takes primacy. But young people are in a transitional stage and many are still sorting out what an adult identity means, so the possibility for conflict between their different relationships is elevated. It is at this point that kin relationships based on the laws of nature or substance and those based on the laws of humanity or code meets (Schneider 1968). Notions of distance associated with 'blood' kin and relationships with partners must be renegotiated or conflict can be ongoing. Sarah (aged eighteen) talked of the difficulty when she felt she had to decide about whom to put first.⁵

I think it depends on how strongly you feel about someone, like, both my older brothers didn't like a guy I was going out with, and he was just their age, and I mean, it was hard, because it meant that what we had was quite personal and I couldn't combine it in all the other facets of my life, I had to kind of keep it separate from – you know, things I did with my brothers or our family, but in the end,

there's no way I'd break up with someone just because my brothers didn't like them, you know, like if my feeling was strong enough for that person, in the end it doesn't matter what other people think, it's an added bonus if everyone else accepts your boyfriend, but in the end, I'm the only one who has to accept the person.

Did your brothers explain why they didn't like him?

No specific things, they felt he just wasn't their sort of person, kind of, and... I suppose they're quite used to being quite matey with people that me and my sister go out with, and I think it was just different, a challenge to their usual role as my big brothers.

In the end the stress of dealing with familial displeasure was too much for her and she ended the relationship. 'I was miserable – I had to choose between him and my family and to be totally honest, I chose my family'. For others, families could be a disappointment. Nicholas (aged twenty-four) was frustrated that his parents did not trust his judgment:⁶

Parents can be stressful, like you introduce them to your girlfriend and that, but the last time I did that, they were like, 'She's pretty nice, is she on drugs?' So yeah, it's something I try to avoid.

Ehrlich (2001) points to the 'problem' of mothers-in-law in Western society as a cause of relationship distress. He suggests the problem is not an in-law problem, but rather a problem between a parent and child. The child's partner becomes involved because kinship ties with a parent both delimit and supersede conjugal loyalties. This creates stress for some people as they try to manage their different relationships when competition develops about which relationship should 'come first'. This is more likely to be the case if there is already conflict in a young person's relationship with their parent/s. But once a relationship is established, and if parents (and siblings) and partner get to know and like each other, life becomes much less stressful for all concerned. Parents and children can begin to accept each other more as adults and less as people constrained by their parent/child roles, and partners become drawn into existing family arrangements.

Daphne and Gavin (both aged eighteen and of Chinese descent) had been going out together for a year. Although Gavin lived at home and had a relatively amicable relationship with his parents, he said he had little in common with them and spent most of his time at Daphne's house. Both Daphne and Gavin

were bemused to find that the rest of her family also enjoyed and benefited from their relationship.

Daphne: He lives at my house (laughing). Yeah, I think my Dad loves us having a guy 'round the house, because it's me, my mum and my sister and then Dad and the cat, which is also a girl. Yeah, and I don't think fish count, but he's always been on his own and he goes fishing with my cousin but it's because he gets so, he's like, Gavin! Every time sees his car pull up on the driveway, 'Oh, he's here'.

Gavin: Oh save me.

That's nice.

Daphne: Yeah, yeah, it really means a lot to me that they like him, because I've had friends before and my parents don't like them or my sister doesn't like them and she'll just go... At least this time my sister gets along, and she's mocking and treating him, just like she treats me, which is a good thing.

CONCLUSION

The family environment is the site in which most people learn from family members or other close kin how to become social and cultural beings. But because familial relationships are intensely emotional experiences, some young people may experience difficulties in these relationships. Indeed, for many of us it is almost impossible to remain indifferent to one's family and their feelings. As young people change and mature, it becomes important for them to acquire an adult identity – one that marks them as separate individuals to their parents. As Rayna Rapp (1978: 91) says, 'Autonomy means escaping your childhood family to become an adult with your own nuclear family. But of course, autonomy is illusive [*sic*]'. Although a young person may want to escape the influence of their family, parents and other close kin remain a 'safety net' and a source of general support when needed.

Carsten (2004: 186) remarks that what is 'so arresting' about contemporary Western kinship is '...the very explicitness with which one person's rights are weighed against another's, one kind of connection is compared to another...'. Intimate partner relationships are one marker of an adult identity for young people but can become a source of tension between young people and their families. Arguments with families do cause distress, so although adult inti-

mate relationships are likely to take precedence over other relationships, it will depend on the decisions made by the individual concerned as to which of their relationships 'win'. The difficulty is in deciding whose opinion matters most, those of a person to whom one is linked by blood or those of a partner, someone with whom relationships can and do end. If young people experience problems with their parents that remain unresolved, within existing discourses of kinship and friendship there is an alternative – to form a friendship with a partner's parent. The difficulty is that should the intimate partner relationship end, so too may the friendship; after all, it is not the wisest decision to try to take someone else's parents from them. For those who do form such friendships, they can provide not only support similar to that provided by one's parents, but also offer opportunities to experience other kinds of familial environments and lifestyles.

The data for this study is limited to the perspectives of young people and it would be useful to know whether similar perceptions exist from a parental viewpoint. Moreover, it would be interesting to determine if cross-sex friendships between young people and a partner's parent exist and what their characteristics may be. Further research could also determine whether young gay, lesbian and transgender New Zealanders experience the same kinds of difficulties and pleasures in their relationships with their partner's parents. Perhaps anthropology should, as Carsten (2004: 189) suggests, now take the *experience* of kinship as the object of our study. Certainly more research into the uses to which meanings of kinship are put in New Zealand would be productive for determining how young people develop into resilient adults.

NOTES

1. When it comes to the cultural construction of kinship, Weston (1997) argues that gay people are positioned outside both law and nature so their experiences of relationships are likely to be qualitatively different.
2. At the time of writing not all 2006 Census statistics had been fully analysed and published.
3. These excerpts are taken from their individual interviews. All names used are pseudonyms.
4. Excerpt from Marie's individual interview.
5. Excerpt from a focus group interview.

6. Excerpt from individual interview

REFERENCES

- Allan, G. 1996 *Kinship and Friendship in Modern Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Arksey, H. and P. Knight 1999 *Interviewing for Social Scientists: An Introductory Resource with Examples*, London: Sage.
- Atwool, N. 2006 'Attachment and Resilience: Implications for Children in Care', *Child Care in Practice*, 12 (4): 315–330.
- Babula, C. 2001 'Family I Imagine' in J.D. Faubion (ed) *The Ethics of Kinship: Ethnographic Enquiries*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield: 250–65.
- Baker, M. 2001 *Families, Labour and Love*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Beck, U. and E. Beck-Gernsheim 1995 *The Normal Chaos of Love*, translated by M. Ritter and J. Wiebel, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bell, S. and S. Coleman 1999 'The Anthropology of Friendship: Enduring Themes and Future Possibilities', in S. Bell and S. Coleman (eds) *The Anthropology of Friendship*, Oxford: Berg: 1–19.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cameron, D. 2001 *Working with Spoken Discourse*, London: Sage.
- Canadian Adolescents at Risk Research Network, 2004 'Emotional Health of Adolescents' <http://www.educ.queensu.ca/~caarrn>
- Carsten, J. 2004 *After Kinship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpitt, I. 1999 *Social Policy and Risk*, London: Sage Publications.
- Erlich, A.S. 2001 'Power, Control, and the Mother-in-Law Problem: Face-offs in the American Nuclear Family', in L. Stone (ed) *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield: 175–184.

- Evening Standard, 18 September 2002 *Taylor was my friend, Luff wrote*, Independent Newspapers Ltd. <http://io.knowledge-basket.co.nz.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/magz/cma/cma.pl?id=19914-...>
- Evening Standard, 19 September 2002. *'Emotional neglect' led to shooting*, Independent Newspapers Ltd. <http://io.knowledge-basket.co.nz.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/magz/cma/cma.pl?id=19914-...>
- Families' Commission, 2006 *Moving On: Changes in a Year in Family Living Arrangements. Summary of Findings*, Wellington: Families' Commission.
- Gullestad, M. 1996 'From Obedience to Negotiation: Dilemmas in the Transmission of Values Between the Generations in Norway', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2 (1): 25–42.
- Howard, S., J. Dryden and B. Johnson 1999 'Childhood Resilience: Review and Critique of Literature', *Oxford Review of Education*, 25 (3): 307–323.
- Jamieson, L. 1998 *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lock, M. 2001 'The Tempering of Medical Anthropology: Troubling Natural Categories', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 15 (4): 478–92.
- McKenzie, D. 2004 *Happily Ever After: Discourses of Love, Emotion and Health in the Intimate Relationships of Young Adult New Zealanders*, Unpublished PhD Thesis in Anthropology & Community Health, Auckland: The University of Auckland.
- McKinley, R. 2001 'The Philosophy of Kinship: A Reply to Schneider's 'Critique of the Study of Kinship'', in R. Feinberg and M. Ottenheimer (eds) *The Cultural Analysis of Kinship: The Legacy of David M. Schneider*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 131–167. Also available from <http://www.press.uillinois.edu/pub/books/feinberg/ch6.html> Accessed 16/04/2007.
- Ministry of Social Development, 2004 *Children and Young People: Indicators of Wellbeing in New Zealand*, Wellington: Ministry of Social Development.
- Ministry of Social Development, 2006 *The Social Report 2006*, Wellington: Ministry of Social Development.

- Poland, M. & J. Legge 2005 *Review of New Zealand Longitudinal Studies*, Wellington: Families' Commission. Also available from <http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz>
- Popay, J. and K. Groves 2000 'Narrative' in Research on Gender Inequalities in Health', in E. Annandale and K. Hunt (eds) *Gender Inequalities in Health*, Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press: 64–89.
- Rapp, R. 1978 'Family and Class in Contemporary America: Notes Toward an Understanding of Ideology', *Papers in Women's Studies*, May: 85–110.
- Rapp, R. 1987 'Toward a Nuclear Freeze? The Gender Politics of Euro-American Kinship Analysis' in J.F. Collier and S.J. Yanagisako (eds) *Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis*, Stanford: Stanford University Press: 119–31.
- Russell, B.H. 1994 *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Scharf, M. and O. Mayselless 2001 'The Capacity for Romantic Intimacy: Exploring the Contribution of Best Friend and Marital and Parental Relationships', *Journal of Adolescence*, 24: 379–99.
- Schneider, D.M. 1968 *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Statistics New Zealand, 1998 *New Zealand Now: Young New Zealanders*, Wellington: Statistics New Zealand.
- Statistics New Zealand, 2006 'QuickStats About Culture and Identity' <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/5F1F873C-5D36-4E54-9405-34503A2CoAF6/o/quickstatsaboutcultureandidentity.pdf>
- Weston, K. 1997 *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, Revised Edition, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yanagisako, S.J. and J.F. Collier 1987 'Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender and Kinship', in J.F. Collier and S.J. Yanagisako (eds) *Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis*, Stanford: Stanford University Press: 14–50.

Zimmer-Gembeck, M.J. 1999 'Stability, Change and Individual Differences in Involvement with Friends and Romantic Partners Among Adolescent Females', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 28 (4): 419–38.