BACKGROUND

The essence of ideological statements is that, unless our political senses are developed, we will fail to spot them. Ideology is released into society like a colourless, odourless gas. It is embedded in newspapers, advertisements, television programmes and text-books – where it makes light of its partial, perhaps illogical or unjust, take on the world; where it meekly implies that it is simply stating age-old truths with which only a fool or a maniac would disagree (de Botton, 2004, pp. 214-215).

The individual lives within an ideological framework internalised through socialisation from birth, within which social position, opportunities and identities are negotiated. In Western cultures, the social order is hierarchical so that those with greater access to power are better placed to protect their interests through normalising supporting ideology into a "natural order" that sustains privilege (Nafstad, Blakar, Carlquist, Phelps, & Rand-Hendriksen, 2007). To quote Vaclav Havel (1991) "The primary excusatory function of ideology… is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the… system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe" (in Jost & Hunyady, 2003, pp. 111-112).

In this chapter, I will consider the function of ideology in Section 2.1 with particular reference to patriarchy as it privileges male endeavour and seeks control over women's sexuality through institutionalising the family and heterosexual coupledom as the adult norm. Section 2.2 reports the role the social sciences have played in constructing marriage and the family as necessary for human wellbeing, generating an optimal relational model closely compatible with patriarchal organisation. The ability of patriarchy to adapt to neoliberal ideology that promotes consumer markets and individuality as freedom is exemplified by the hypersexualisation of contemporary Western culture, discussed in Section 2.3. I argue that an outcome of capitalism's need for women's labour and consumer power to ensure economic growth has been their reduced dependence on male support for income security. Consequently, with more women able to choose independence, sexual attachment has assumed discursive value in keeping women's focus on dating and mating, if not marriage.

Section 2.4 reports the institutionalised social disadvantage that is the corollary of living outside the ideologically interdependent norm.

2.1 Ideology

Ideologies are fundamental organisational systems that structure our social worlds. They are sociocognitive, social, discursive constructs embedded in notions of morality about good and bad, right and wrong that determine the acceptability or otherwise of beliefs, behaviours, attitudes and values (van Dijk, 1995a). "They are more or less egalitarian and oriented towards minimising or maximising differences and reducing or encouraging society's status and power hierarchies" (Nafstad et al., 2007, p. 315). Put quite bluntly, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force (Marx & Engels, 2002, p. 48). Often characterised as "false consciousness" (Mills, 1997), ideologies structure our reality, imposing meaning on our social environments (Moscovici & Duveen, 2000).

The ubiquity of power-based ideology legitimises inequality, serving, it is suggested, a palliative function for those disadvantaged by their status as, at the same time, it rationalises the privilege of the advantaged (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). Yet, precisely because it is a social construct, ideology is not necessarily fixed for all time. Political, economic and social systems evolve; in the past decades communism, for example, has been replaced by adapted free market principles in Russia and China and the shaky foundations of globalisation have become apparent, attracting increasing protest within major participating nations from activists who prefer to think they live in a society rather than an economy. Emotional expression also changes according to the ideological environment, with some that seemed so "natural" in their time now having a different manifestation or even becoming extinct (Cancian, 1986; Gillis, 1988; Harré & Finlay-Jones, 1986), elaborated below.

2.1.1 Patriarchy. One ideology of some durability is that of *patriarchy*. As will be described in more detail in the Chapter 4, the dominance of man over woman (and child) as head of a family, a community, a country and, finally, the Divine has had ideological legitimacy, in the societies from which Western culture grew, since pre-historic times. Inextricably linked with the accumulation and protection of wealth and power, the patriarchal system is predicated on masculine qualities of physical strength and bellicosity (Armstrong, 1993; SE Taylor et al., 2000) that define the feminine as the subjectable Other. While class

plays a major role in individual men's access to valued resources, gender affords men at all tiers of the social structure status over women (Hepburn, 2003b; Pollert, 1996).

Of major concern to patriarchy has been the management of women's fertility (Rowbotham, 1999) so that man's labour and its rewards benefit his bloodline rather than that of another man. To maximise exclusivity of access to a woman's procreative potential, the fundamental unit of social organisation across millennia has been *the family*. While women may have had varying degrees of independence and influence in a patriarchal family structure, sexual freedom was never an option. This was particularly so in societies where marriage was an alliance between families of the ruling, craft or merchant classes; that is, where women were commodified for gainful exchange. In such a social structure, women who are unmarried – especially those who do not want to marry – are anomalous, even regarded with fear and hostility by those for whom marriage, or at least conventional sexual attachment, has high ideological value (Mitterauer & Sieder, 1982).

The family is afforded normative status through institutionalised public and corporate policy, reinforced by mechanisms of transmitting popular culture such as the news media, advertising, film, television, music and literature (Amador & Kiersky, 1998; C. Anderson, Stewart, & Dimidjian, 1994; Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Chandler, 1991; Chasteen, 1994; DePaulo, 2007; Schwartzberg, Berliner, & Jacob, 1995; Stein, 1976; Whiteley, 2000). In recent decades, the family model has been allowed some flexibility to accommodate increased rates of informal (*de facto*) marriage and blending of households as parents divorce and remarry. However, the model remains the aspirational template, latterly also for the homosexually interdependent, underpinned by norms of romance and pair-bonding.

Not only is coupledom reinforced through popular culture and its institutions, deviation from this norm attracts gratuitous denigration such as that below although the increasing size of the independent population may be responsible for the emergence of some sympathetic, albeit defensive, references. Compare, for example,

> *Berthe was a spinster with a heart of one. It had never been broken, although every other part of her body was so brittle and dried up it was a wonder she remained intact* (Bauld, 2005, p. 31);
>
> *Girl? She's pushing forty, make-up not quite concealing the fan of lines flanking each eye, such marks of age seeming all the more pronounced by her*

> *trying to act like she's still twenty-two… trying to look like she belongs among the lads-mag spank-bank nymphettes, but managing instead to resemble their embarrassing aunty, the one who is single, increasingly desperate and whose lack of a significant other is most manifest in her having nobody to tell her she shouldn't dress like that any more* (Brookmyre, 2006, pp. 79-80)

with

> *There was never a shred of evidence Virginia Kinsey was anything other than a dyed-in-the-wool heterosexual. She preferred being single, but that's not aberrant behaviour. A lot of folks are like that. I'm one* (Grafton, 2009, pp. 302-303); and

> *"Anne-Isabelle was eighty-six, Christelle was eighty-three. Both were spinsters." "Unmarried" I* corrected (Reichs, 2009, pp. 94, emphasis added).

2.1.2 Couples culture. Idealisation of the family coincided with the advent of the early modern era, the Reformation and nascent industrialisation (Gillis, 1996). Prior to this, the family had been a primary economic unit but it was organised religion that had legitimised social organisation. As religion's influence waned, the family became the source of socialising authority. However, compliant with patriarchal dictate, it was a particular family model, comprising two biological parents with gendered responsibilities and their children legitimised by marriage. The nuclear family became analogous to a newly-imagined Holy Family (Gillis, 1996) that rendered obedience to a male head both natural and spiritually inalienable. This model gained greater ideological hold as increasing mechanisation separated the public and domestic spheres, legitimising male economic privilege and female disadvantage that continues to be apparent in twenty-first century gendered workforce patterns and income differentials.

Marriage has been described as "a vow of togetherness" (Scruton, 2006, p. 19), the purpose of which is to ensure social reproduction, the socialising of children, and the transmission of social capital. Based in heterosexual desire, it regulates sexual expression, fosters the accumulation of property (Lantz, 1982) and is suggested to have a civilising effect on men who otherwise may exhibit dangerous antisocial behaviours that threaten the social order (Wilcox, 2006). In an argument for the institution of marriage, Wilcox (2006) noted that the married in the United States enjoy more than 1,000 rights and benefits denied to the unmarried. His explanation for its weakened popularity is that availability of contraception has reduced the role of marriage as the only acceptable avenue for sexual activity.

Prior to the twentieth century, “love” was understood to be a complex mix of instrumental and affective components (Cancian, 1986), involving physical expression, cooperation, economic production and complementarity as well as describing internal emotional states (Gillis, 1988). The separation of the workplace from the domestic sphere also split the affective and instrumental components of love into corresponding feminine private and masculine public domains (Lantz, 1982). The effect was to strengthen gendered social organisation by privileging the public unemotional goal-orientated workplace, from which women were increasingly excluded, over the domestic where work is performed for love rather than financial reward and love as manifested by marriage is the epitome of women’s achievement (Cancian, 1986). The twentieth century saw love more closely defined by its sexual element, with marriage more an intimate interdependency than the social and practical contract of previous times (Langford, 1999). This idealisation of love underpins current ideology of the family and its status as the primary unit of social organisation.

The family continues to be thought of as the repository of all social, emotional and intellectual gratification, the site of the perfect romantic relationship promising emotional warmth and stability, and the source of financial and societal security (Bickerton, 1983; Chandler, 1991; H. James, 2006; Langford, 1999; Penman & Stolk, 1983; Schwartzberg, et al., 1995). Yet, despite its ideological dominance, anxiety about the family is constant and protection of its status fierce although it might be more accurate to locate the anxiety in perceived threat to patriarchy. While contemporary marriage, or less formal romantic union, is framed and desired as an all-embracing partnership, it is a patriarchal presence in that partnership that affords the status. To be otherwise successful, including with child-rearing, does not have the same value if achieved outside the patriarchal model. Indeed, it is to be devalued, thought inherently flawed (Hepburn, 2003b; Scruton, 2006).

2.2 Wellbeing Studies

The social sciences in general have responded to this anxiety by institutionalising the split between the feminine and masculine, including in psychology where it was reflected in the polarisation of cognition and emotion, or rational and irrational modes of behaviour (Billig, 2002). They have also developed a body of knowledge about health, happiness and economic benefits for the married, measurably more so for men (e.g., Brehm, et al., 2002; Flood, 2005; Gardner & Oswald, 2004; Gray, de Vaus, Qu, & Stanton, 2010; Hahn, 1993; Michael,

Berkman, Colditz, & Kawachi, 2001; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Wilcox, 2006) against which the single-again and, to a lesser extent, the always-single compare unfavourably.

Verburgge (1979) and Murphy and colleagues (1997) authored two very influential papers, both of which initially found always-single women to be the healthiest of all marital groups. However, to ensure consistency with "the conventional pattern of higher morbidity among the never married, compared with the married" (Murphy, Glaser, & Grundy, 1997, p. 163), both authors aggregated populations of always-single women in the general population with those requiring institutional care, so reducing the overall health status of always-single women to below that of their married peers. Verbrugge (1979) suggested non-institutionalised always-single women's health reflected contentment with their status and expressed surprise at the deleterious effect of marriage breakdown on women's health.

A higher incidence of ill health among the single-again is a common finding in wellbeing studies, attributed to (i) risky lifestyles associated with the distress of their marital situation, (ii) pre-existing poor health that caused their marriage dissolution, and (iii) lack of caring and economic benefits of cohabitation (Murphy, et al., 1997; Verbrugge, 1979). Gardner and Oswald (2004) reported enhanced risk of premature death for widows, a population found to have higher risk of late life dementia if widowed at mid-life, than their already susceptible unmarried peers (Håkansson et al., 2009; Helmer, 2009). Contradicting these findings, a protective effect of living alone came from the Nurses Study (Michael, et al., 2001) and from an Australian report on loneliness (Flood, 2005), with the protective effect strongly associated with active engagement with community, family and friends.

A robust relationship was found between previously-married women's premature mortality, illness susceptibility and a range of distress indices that measured self-reported high stress levels, low social role value and low self-worth, the negative impact of which was exacerbated by low incomes (Gardner & Oswald, 2004). This research did not consider attitudes to marriage as a variable although negative effects of marriage dissolution might be expected where individuals accept the ideological values governing social control and regulation ascribed to marital status and where adjustment of their social role was involuntary (Anson, 1989; Davidson, 2007; Thoits, 1992). That is, failure to retain, or resume, membership of an in-group with high social value would have greater deleterious impact on individual wellbeing for those unable to adapt to its loss.

In Australia, a survey of groups at extreme ends of a subjective wellbeing (SWB) index found that those with high scores were characterised as having high household income and an intimate partner (Cummins, Walter, & Woerner, 2007). Those at the low end were unemployed with very low income, and were not cohabiting, unless with dependent children. The exception was, contrarily, high wellbeing of widows including those on low incomes. The authors emphasised that no one characteristic could determine group members' wellbeing status, two or more working synergistically were needed. An earlier report from this source noted the high wellbeing status of financially strong lone dwellers (Cummins, Woerner, Tomyn, Gibson, & Knapp, 2005) and that "negative effects of separation and divorce can be substantially reduced by a decent household income" (Cummins et al., 2005, p. 54). Financial security was also cited as a determining variable in married couples' wellbeing along with good health, both thought more likely to be found in marriage (Stack & Eshleman, 1998).

Partners provide the strongest support unless none is forthcoming, when lack of support from the person from whom it is most expected is the most damaging to personal wellbeing (Cummins et al., 2005). Contrary to other findings (e.g., Flood, 2005; Michael et al., 2001), the always-single were found to have less support than the married, and from fewer sources, a finding possibly explained by the results not being disaggregated by gender. Perhaps supporting notions of social role adherence, the wellbeing of separated people remained highly dependent on their current or, surprisingly, past partner. It was noted that, unlike their female peers who were suggested to be more resilient, living alone adversely affected men's wellbeing. Although the nuanced results in themed sections of the reports made overall summary very difficult, marriage was strongly supported as optimal for health and wellbeing with commentary such as "Living alone is a poor option for people younger than 66 years. It is likely that people with low wellbeing live alone either because they have recently broken from a relationship or because they cannot find a partner to live with them" (Cummins et al., 2005, p.86) and "What seems more clear is that not having a partner in middle-age is generally quite catastrophic for personal wellbeing" (Cummins et al., 2005, p. 87). Yet subsequent discussion of a U-curve in the always-single wellbeing data suggested purported reduced wellbeing of the unmarried at midlife may reflect the normative nature of coupledom during reproductive years that excludes the independent from mainstream society. The report makes explicit that single-living should not be thought due to personal deficit.

A similar conclusion could be drawn from a meta-analysis of SWB research that identified methodological limitations in the corpus, such as “the almost exclusive reliance on cross-sectional correlational designs with inadequate tests of causal hypotheses” (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999, p. 277) or lack of independent corroboration of SWB. While noting that demographic variables contribute, at most, 20% of variance, a positive relationship between marriage and SWB was confirmed. However, that “the effects of marriage on SWB depend on how typical one’s situation is in one’s age cohort” (Diener et al., 1999, p. 291) again points to the impact of compliance with an ideologically mandated couples culture on individuals’ subjective assessment of wellbeing.

Social engagement and intimacy are well understood to be significant factors for individuals’ health and wellbeing (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2002; H. Lee, Jang, Lee, Cho, & Park, 2008). However, intimacy is more likely to be defined as a marital relationship than that with a platonic confidant (e.g., Brehm et al, 2002), and the link between happiness and marriage assumed rather than demonstrated. For example, a regularly-cited paper seeking to explain a reduced correlation between marriage and happiness concludes “it is still not certain that marriage ever typically had strong positive effects on the personal happiness of married person in the United States, *but it probably did*, and if so, those effects *apparently* have waned considerably in the last few years” (Glenn & Weaver, 1988, p. 322) [emphasis added] before nominating an ideological shift to individualism as the cause. Failure to differentiate between marriages of high and lesser marital satisfaction masks a higher incidence of depression reported by wives, and husbands, in unsatisfactory marriages (Earle, et al., 1997; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; JM Ussher, 2011). Where disparities are found favouring always-single women’s happiness, these are explained as a corollary of wives’ disappointment in a marriage that fails to comply with egalitarian sex role performance (G. Lee, Seccombe, & Shehan, 1991), presumably subscribed to by wives but not their husbands. Such failed expectations and disinclination to support patriarchal gender relations are thought responsible for women’s increasing reluctance to marry (J. Lewis, 2001). Another factor may be a reduced “economic imperative to heterosexuality and marriage” (Rich, 1980, p. 634), more prevalent in earlier times when marriage offered greater financial comfort for women than was possible from income levels thought appropriate for women living independently (Burns, 1986; Delphy & Leonard, 1992; Hahn, 1993).

Disagreement is evident between supporters and doubters of marital advantage about the degree to which again- and always-single people enjoy social support and engagement, the former conflating lone living with loneliness. With solitary pleasures defined as a cultural sin (Pamuk, 2007), the ascription of loneliness has a markedly moral significance to do with how individuals should be living and when they should feel lonely (Wood, 1986). Despite evidence that women living alone report no significant difference in support and friendship to that of their cohabiting peers (Flood, 2005), their domestic situation in itself signifies distress to marriage proponents. Yet the behaviours important to intimate friendships are similar to those of romantic relationships (Oswald, Clark, & Kelly, 2004), with, arguably, friendships more likely to satisfy emotional need (S. E. Taylor et al., 2000) than a possibly unattainable conjugal ideal (Gillis, 1985; Langford, 1999). Of greatest significance for their wellbeing may be a sense of mastery and control over their lives enjoyed by those who have chosen to live independently (Keith, 2004).

Possibly because of the design limitations mentioned above, SWB studies rarely discuss factors that may mitigate findings of marital advantage. For example, the adverse effects on women's well-being brought by marital dissolution are comparatively short-term, associated with the immediate effects of their changed status (Feldman, Byles, & Beaumont, 2000; Mastekaasa, 1994). One study found that two years after their divorce women reported less depression, less anxiety, less alcohol consumption, fewer health problems, increased pride in their financial and emotional independence, and greater happiness than before (Morrow, 2000). Less positive outcomes of coupledom include a "broken heart" phenomenon that sees elevated mortality immediately following the death of a spouse (Jagger & Sutton, 1991; Shek, 2003) implying an interdependence that carries risks along with benefits. For the unhappily married, the purported benefits of marriage are replaced by misery and adverse health status (De Vogli, Chandola, & Marmot, 2007; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Another study found long-term adverse effects including feelings of social isolation for older divorced women who remarried, more so for those who did not remarry or who had been widowed (Gray et al., 2010). However, the authors interpreted the greater wellbeing for the woman who did not remarry as a process of "habituation" (i.e., a numbing of the distress), rather than evolution to independence.

The authors of a report of an eight-decade long study of health and longevity found "a huge difference" (Friedman & Martin, 2011, p. 117) when their findings of the impact of

in/ter/dependence were further analysed by sex. It seems that "women who could thrive in a good marriage tended to stay especially healthy, but many of the rest were better off single" (Friedman & Martin, 2011, p. 119), describing advice that marriage was necessary for longevity as flawed, incomplete and its role in health severely distorted if used as an independent variable. For example, women who divorced and stayed independent enjoyed greater longevity than those who remarried, as did the always-single.

Rather than marriage *per se*, it seems likely that associated wellbeing is determined more by the degree to which individuals subscribe to the couples culture and their ability to resist systemic devaluation of their lifestyle choice should this deviate from patriarchal prescription.

2.3 Ideological Adaptation

Integral to capitalism's growth is its increasing dependence on women's labour and commodity consumption (Mohanty, 2003). Liberated from inevitable domestic servitude by contraception, education and vocational availability, Western women have increasingly entered the paid workforce and assumed independent consumer status. Concomitant with capitalist growth has been the emergence of a neoliberal ideology that privileges the market, privatisation, deregulation, consumer choice and individual autonomy over community. While the coexistence of individualism and family values may seem antagonistic, it could be argued that, functionally for capitalism, the family is an individual marital consuming unit rather than an extended network of DNA-linked relationships. Further, discourse of choice, diversity and individuality has been coopted in the service of consumption and is manifest in the range of domestic arrangements, such as blended or same-sex unions, rendered acceptable by their approximation to the heterosexual nuclear family (Budgeon, 2008; McRobbie, 2009).

The rise of neoliberalism, and an associated increase in women's financial independence that supports their self-sufficiency, has seen marriage redefined as a romantic partnership of equals, evolved from previous models of wife as subordinate helpmeet to husband provider. Patriarchy's response to women's elevated status, however, has been to exploit and subvert the advances made in the past decades (Faludi, 1992).

One strategy to perpetuate patriarchal gendered relations has been cultural hypersexualisation, an inflated discourse that pervades all public space. Romance and the search for love have declined in competitive potency against the rise in women's educational and vocational

aspirations (Rudman & Heppen, 2003). They have been replaced by a discourse that defines sexual attachment as a physiological necessity rather than capability and sexual activity a recreational pursuit, guided by media depictions of sexual performance (aka love) that privilege male power (Cancian, 1986). Evidence from the medium of popular music includes increased sexual display by female performers, through pornographic imagery, over the past decade (Levande, 2008). Lyrics across all genres are dominated by themes of male power and the objectification of women, with women's identity linked to sexual attachment to the extent of self-devaluation to maintain that attachment (Bretthauer, Zimmerman, & Banning, 2007). The irony, at a time of their greater participation in society, may be that women have internalised the male gaze as an organising behavioural principle, now believing that their pseudo-masculine attitudes about recreational sex are self-generated, signifying equality and freedom (R Gill, 2003). Yet models of current feminine and masculine sexual behaviour may be no more than an adaptation of the gendered patterns of social organisation that maintain patriarchal authority and interests. If there is less financial need for the independent woman to seek masculine support, hypersexualising the social world provides an alternative mechanism for keeping the female gaze on coupledom, and the status it affords (Hollway, 1984). It also perpetuates continued subordination of women (Levy, 2005) through, particularly, independent women's compliance with this definition of freedom that pathologises sexual restraint (McRobbie, 2009), signifying a very limited liberation (Foucault, 1980).

In her review of theories explaining the omnipresence of sexuality in contemporary Western culture, Attwood (2006) lists a series of signifiers for women's sexual expression: *sex is stylish, a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of body work, self-expression, a quest for individual fulfilment* (Attwood, 2006, p. 86). Women's sexual desirability, circumscribed by cultural markers for appearance and behaviour, has become an important measure of their value; their disinhibition a product of aspirations to an adult status still defined by masculine standards (Levy, 2005). As Gill (2003) reminds us, definition of women's heterosexual expression remains the province of men, even as demonstrating their lust-worthiness remains the province of women (Levy, 2005). The sexual desire of women deemed unattractive by appearance or age, or a preference for celibacy, attracts the negativity found, for example, in the earlier extracts from popular fiction.

Although there is academic debate about whether sexual uninhibitedness reflects a neoliberal discourse of women's choice and freedom or a return to the female objectification feminists identified and contested in previous times (Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010), it is arguably to male advantage that women understand their value to be their sexual attractiveness to men. While the options afforded individuals by neoliberalism to "be anything you choose" ('Jane' in Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010, p. 495) have widened the range of subject positions possible, that of being sexually attached remains mandatory for social inclusion.

2.4 The Independent Woman

Concomitant with privileging the couple has been disadvantaging those living outside its catchment. For example, policy privileging couples and families includes taxation and superannuation concessions and family benefit support that has been described as "a huge transfer of income from people without children to those with children" (Uren & Colman, 2005, p. 19). These include family tax benefits, child care benefits, child care rebate, the baby bonus, a large family supplement, and a multiple birth allowance, although it should be noted these many of these benefits are available to single-parent families. A survey of household income and labour dynamics in Australia (HILDA) reported that couples are least likely to experience poverty; with categories of independent households shown to be most at risk (Headey & Warren, 2008). Working-age lone-person households receive comparatively little financial assistance and a higher percentage of independent working-age women than men were income poor, their situation showing the least improvement between the 2001-2005 comparison years. The elderly and lone mothers, who might be heading a family but whose doing so outside the patriarchal model continues to be socially censured, also experience chronic impoverishment. A subsequent revisiting of respondents found poverty levels of lone-parent families were rising and that they, followed by working-age singles, reported highest levels of financial stress (Wilkins, Warren, Hahn, & Houng, 2010).

Other policy found to disadvantage single women has included the built environment (Chasteen, 1994), discriminatory work practices (Wilkins et al., 2010), salary levels and work conditions (Bellas, 1992; DePaulo, 2007). Discriminatory practices in the provision of goods and services include the single person supplement (or levy) applied to hotel and other accommodation costs, ineligibility of the independent for subsidised memberships where the second of a couple may join at a discounted rate, lower couple or family insurance premiums, and exclusion from promotions rewarding couples or families.

The demand for relationship category is perhaps the most pervasive reminder of the independent woman's socially compromised status. With *married* the default option, the unmarried are regularly asked to self-classify into sub-categories of independence for a purpose that is not always obvious. While such demographic categorisation may be applied to planning and providing social infrastructure, there are many instances where it is irrelevant; for example, when the information sought is actually how many incomes support a household to better assess a credit application, or when age and likelihood of use may better inform consumer research. Social classification may be understood to be a political act, with society's ideological gate-keepers exercising authority over how populations may be divided, who is allocated to which subdivision, and what this might mean for distribution of social resources (Beattie, 2007).

While independent women may be unaware of, even accepting as natural, the institutionalised discrimination described above, they are very aware of that experienced in social settings (see DePaulo, 2007b; Reynolds, 2008). The stigma of singleness is the corollary of a socially dominant ideology of marriage and family as the living arrangement of first choice (R. Bell & Yans, 2008). Independent women invariably report their feelings of exclusion from couples society, particularly evident following the loss of coupled status through separating from, or the death of, a partner (e.g., Amador & Kiersky, 1998; Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002; Byrne, 2008; De Paulo & Morris, 2005; Penman & Stolk, 1983; Stein, 1976).

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the function and adaptability of patriarchal ideology in relation to regulating possibilities for independent women and some of the mechanisms instrumental in its perpetuation. The cultural imperative to couple should see independent women rendered dysfunctional by self-pity, self-doubt and self-criticism (C. Anderson et al., 1994), adversely affected by the pity and patronising attitudes of the interdependent (DePaulo, 2007; La Barre, 1972).

Yet, always-single women in the general population report high levels of health and wellbeing. Many widows choose to remain so (Talbot, 1998) as do many single-again women (de Vaus, 2004b) after the trauma of their relationship ending has passed. What is it that affords immunity to the potentially adverse affects of breaching the hegemonic norms of

dominant ideology, of being a member of an out-group to an interdependent in-group? What might be learned from the independent woman's practice?

The next chapter begins an examination of independent women's practice and experience through description of the methodology used, its rationale and proposed application, to interrogate public, private and academic discourse about independent women.