

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Speaking of Love

**A discourse analysis
of single women's and men's talk
about hetero-sexual relationships
in their fourth decade.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University,
New Zealand.

Barri Janette Leslie

2005

Acknowledgements

My grateful thanks go to my supervisor, Dr Mandy Morgan. Without her scholarly guidance on the academic task and her womanly support when life threatened to overwhelm research, this thesis would not have been completed.

I also want to thank my family and friends for their multifarious, multifaceted and multidimensional support during my prolonged obsession.

With considerable awe I thank the women and men who gave of their time and themselves to speak with me so authentically and openly. I hope this analysis has done justice to the trust they placed in me and hope it may contribute to a greater understanding of the dilemmas they face in the contemporary discursive field of love and relationships.

Abstract

In Eurocentric countries unprecedented numbers of heterosexual men and women in their fourth decade now live without partners. Indications are that most would prefer to be in relationships, although not necessarily with children. Yet complex dilemmas face this population as they struggle to achieve goals of relationship while self protecting against failure, desperation and loss. The growing divide between mature single men and women is explicated through analysis of the gendered deployment of mutually exclusive discursive resources. After painful experiences of fictional constructions of *romantic love*, women favour the communicative assumptions and practices offered by the *discourse of intimacy* while men prefer self sufficiency enabled by *individualism*.

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Preface	vi

PART I The contemporary field of relationships

Chapter 1:	Introduction	2
1.1.	Reflexivity	2
	Personal	2
	Professional	3
1.2.	The research population for this project	4
	Fig.1.1. Marriage and divorce rates in New Zealand	4
	Fig.1.2. Proportion never married in New Zealand	5
1.3.	A context of change in relationships	7
	Statistical indicators of change in relationships	7
	Fig.1.3. Family type 1991, 1996, 2001.	8
	Solo parenting and poverty	8
1.4.	The beneficial effects of marriage	9
	Is marriage good enough for women?	
1.5.	If marriage is so great . . . why break up?	11
	Women who break up	11
	Men and breakups	11
	Children and breakups	12
1.6.	Justification for this discourse analysis research project	12
Chapter 2:	Literature Review	14
2.1.	Social constructionist theory	14
	From essential self to language	14
2.2.	Discourse, power and social change	16
	Interpretative repertoires	19
	Subject positions	20
2.3.	Objectives and research questions	21
2.4.	Discourses of security and romantic love	21
2.5.	Gender and the discourse of intimacy	27
2.6.	Love in intimacy is a function of behaviour	33
2.7.	Presence of the security discourse	34
2.8.	The discourse of individualism	35
2.9.	The soul mate discourse	36
2.10.	Summary	38
Chapter 3:	Research method: A challenging & interactive process	
3.1.	Recruiting participants and obtaining informed consent ...	40
3.2.	Interviewing participants and the production of texts ...	44
3.3.	Researcher bias and reflexivity	47
3.4.	Power relations and professional boundaries	48
3.5.	Validity and reliability in discourse analysis	50
3.6.	Procedures for processing data	51
3.7.	A summary of the ethical considerations	53
	Informed Consent	53
	Confidentiality and anonymity	54
	Potential harm to participants	54
	Conflict of interest	54
	Cultural concerns	54

PART II Analysis of texts

Chapter 4: To risk or self protect: Dilemmas in the construction of relationship goals

4.1.	Introduction	...	...	...	...	57
4.2.	Relationship goals	...	...	...	...	58
	The List					61
	Change: The only constant					62
	Summary of relationship goals					63
4.3.	Identity goals	...	...	...	...	64
	To risk or stay safe					68
	Summary of goals of identity					70
4.4.	Parenting goals	...	...	...	...	71
4.5.	Summary of goals	...	...	...	...	73

Chapter 5: Constructing love, relationship and identity: A process of struggle and learning

5.1.	Introduction	...	...	...	...	75
5.2.	Romantic constructions of love and attraction	...	...	...	...	75
5.3.	Alternative constructions of love and attraction	...	...	...	...	79
5.4.	Transcending despondency & desperation: Soul mates	...	...	...	...	85
5.5.	Avoiding despondency & desperation: Individualism	...	...	...	...	87
5.6.	Circumventing despondency & desperation: Intimacy	...	...	...	...	90
5.7.	Intimacy and gendered talking practice	...	...	...	...	92
5.8.	Hey, I'm a man: Individualism and the male sex drive	...	...	...	...	96
5.9.	Summary	...	...	...	...	99

Chapter 6: Doing the business of love: Money, parenting & identity

6.1.	Introduction	...	...	...	...	101
6.2.	Gender, money and relationship	...	...	...	...	102
6.3.	Gender, money and mothering	...	...	...	...	110
6.4.	Gender, money and fathering	...	...	...	...	112
6.5.	Constructing 'Me' as childfree	...	...	...	...	113
6.6.	Solo mother: the controversial position	...	...	...	...	116
6.7.	Good parent/Bad parent	...	...	...	...	118
6.8.	The good old days: security and gender	...	...	...	...	119
6.9.	A lateral shift in the relationship field	...	...	...	...	121
6.10.	Summary	...	...	...	...	122

PART III Conclusions

Chapter 7: Results and discussion

7.1.	Introduction	...	...	...	...	124
7.2.	Summary of findings	...	...	...	...	125
	Goals					125
	Discourses					126
	Interpretative repertoires					129
	Functionality					130
7.3.	Implications for the talking therapies	...	...	...	...	132
7.4.	Implications for social policy	...	...	...	...	133
7.5.	Limitations of this study	...	...	...	...	134
7.6.	Implications for future research	...	...	...	...	135

Reference List	137
-----------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Appendix

A.	Interview Schedule	...	...	...	...	144
B.	Information Sheet	...	...	...	...	145
C.	Consent Form	...	...	...	...	147
D.	Poster	...	...	...	...	148

Preface

Love is in the air
Every sight and every sound

(Song by John Paul Young)

Section 1: Speaking of love

If everything that human beings imbue with social meaning can be read as text, then we are saturated in texts of love from our earliest days, through film, song, print and talk. These multifarious texts may be subjected to multiple readings depending on the social context, life stage and experience of the 'readers'. This project is an inquiry into the interpretations and expectations of love and relationship constructed by single, childless, heterosexual women and men in their fourth decade.

Chapter 1: Introduction first reflexively presents myself, personally, professionally and academically as a participant in the turbulent discursive field of love, attraction and relationship. Next it introduces my population of research interest and their particular advantages and difficulties within their context of social change. Statistical information follows with the intention of elaborating the extent and social depth of the dramatic changes in relationships and marriage in recent decades. The evidence of the current instability of marriage is juxtaposed with the beneficial effects of marriage and the negative consequences of family breakdown. Finally the chosen population is shown to be worthy of research. In order to have accepted the positions they now occupy, mature singles have engaged with and experienced the constraints, freedoms and dilemmas of contemporary relationships, therefore their viewpoints can be expected to produce valuable insights for discourse analysis.

Chapter 2: Social constructionist theory & literature review explores the theoretical literature on language and discourse and its relationship to power and social change. This leads into the specific objectives and research questions for this research project. A review of the literature relevant to those research questions follows. Particular attention is given to the history, evolution and construction of discourses deployed in the contemporary discursive field of relationships.

Chapter 3: Research method: A challenging and interactive process outlines the theoretically embedded design of this qualitative discourse analysis research project. Juxtaposed throughout are commentaries on the variations and deviations which occurred in implementing that theoretical plan with an inexperienced researcher and actual participants, in order to produce original texts for analysis.

Section 2: Analysis of texts

Chapter 4: To risk or self protect: Dilemmas in the construction of relationship goals addresses the first research question by identifying the goals which this demographic group have constructed in the discursive field in relation to the conventional story. It then explores the construction of self-protective alternative goals, fallback positions and dynamics of resistance that might militate against singles in their fourth decade achieving their relationship goals.

Chapter 5: Constructing love, relationship and identity: A process of struggle and learning. In this chapter the discourses which mature singles deploy to construct love and attraction and to achieve their desired goals in the discursive field of relationship are explicated. As people use language purposively and adaptively to achieve social goals, this chapter also explicates the discursive strategies and interpretative repertoires employed to self protect and self enhance in the face of the perceived high risk of failure and the pain of loss.

Chapter 6: Doing the business of love: Money, parenting and identity: Financial considerations permeate the relationship field. They may be as significant as love and attraction in their effects on partner selection, relationship resilience and decisions to parent, especially for men. This chapter explicates the deployment of discursive resources in order to manage financial considerations and minimise their negative effects on the achievement of relationship, parenting and identity goals.

Where possible, throughout Chapters 5 and 6, evaluations are made as to the functionality of the discourses and interpretative modifications employed by participants as they struggle to achieve their goals of relationship and parenting while maintaining enhanced identities.

Section 3: Results and Conclusions

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions The emerging social phenomenon of a growing divide between mature, heterosexual women and men is confirmed and explicated further by this study. Through a 'silent revolution' approximately 30% of contemporary heterosexual women and men in their fourth decade are living in unpartnered situations. Yet their preference is to be living in relationship with each other. This chapter discusses the negative effects on the achievement of goals of the gendered differences in the deployment of the mutually exclusive resources and practices of the discourses of *intimacy* and *individualism*. Recommendations are made for social policy, the talking therapies and further research.

PART I

The contemporary field of relationships

Chapter 1: Introduction

People in the past who failed to mate are not our ancestors.

(David M. Buss, 1994)

1.1. Reflexivity

Personal: Fifty years ago, as a young teenager, I began developing my ideas on love, attraction, gender, sexuality, marriage and family-making. Like a bird constructing her nest, I sifted and sorted, rejected and selected from the discursive material available in the 1950s. I rejected my parents' marriage style, as merely *staying together for the sake of the children*, while presenting a middle-class *happy family* face to others. I would *do it my way*, and do it better.

Instead I selected from the ideas and narratives of *romantic love* embedded in songs, from pop to opera, passionate romantic films, novels, magazine stories and the radio soaps of the time. When I married at twenty-two (precisely the median age for females to marry in the early 1960s) I was completely certain of my position: I had *saved myself for my true love*, I was *marrying for life, before God*, and there was no doubt we would live *happily ever after*.

My attachment to the discourse of *romantic love* proved to be stronger than my attachment to partners. During the ensuing thirty years I liked to believe I was living my life with agency and choice as I pursued my 'precious' of *true love* and *happiness ever after*. That pursuit took me into some dark holes and desperate places: through two marriages, a de facto relationship, hippy tripping, communal loving, back-to-the-earth mothering and euphoric cultic devotion.

While life was never boring, love and lasting happiness proved so elusive that even **my** attachment to simplistic discursive beliefs was eventually seriously shaken. I rejected the Zsa Zsa Gabor/Elizabeth Taylor position of *eight successful marriages* towards which I was heading, and faced the possibility there might be a greater complexity to human relationships than the discourse of *romantic love* proposed. Perhaps when my contemporaries the Beatles sang, 'All you need is Love, dah, dee, dah, dah,' they were as much constructed by the simplistic romantic beliefs of their era as they were constructive of them.

On returning to university studies in my mid-fifties after a thirty-year gap I found that contemporary psychology offered rich new discursive material from which to reassess my self, my relationships and the discursive shifts and narratives of my life.

Professional: I have worked as a private practice counsellor for thirteen years. Frequently during that time I have been confronted with the importance of fulfilling relationships as a dynamic in human wellbeing. Clients experiencing relationship difficulties often present with an emotionally turbulent mix of low self worth, anxiety, grief, depression and a risk of suicide. In particular I have become aware of single, child-free, heterosexual women in their fourth decade as a population in which partner-selection difficulties may be intensified by the discursive construction of their life phase as the time when the female *biological clock* runs down. Many are successful and independent in other areas of their lives, but have a history of unsatisfactory relationships. Their dilemma is whether to settle for a *better than nothing* relationship, or to refuse that position and risk the biological clock running down.

Confusion over positioning in relation to available discourses contributes to their difficulties. Whereas for other significant areas of choice and commitment, such as careers, cars, house and travel, they employ proactive decision making strategies, in choosing a partner they are likely to position themselves in a passive *romantic love* discourse, adopting a *romantic heroine* strategy of waiting to be overwhelmed with passion and euphoria. *I can't say what I want, but I'll know when it happens* is a commonly voiced discursive strategy. However this strategy excludes the possibility of researching and critically analysing prospective partners for compatibility on other important criteria. For instance, similarity of value systems, communication skills, level of education, agreement on gender roles, styles of management of finances and emotions are known to be important for relationship resilience. When a relationship which began with euphoric feelings of romantic love and sexual passion eventually fails, my clinical experience indicates that women clients self-blame inappropriately, and when they present for counselling after a series of abusive or unsatisfactory relationships, their self worth is inappropriately low.

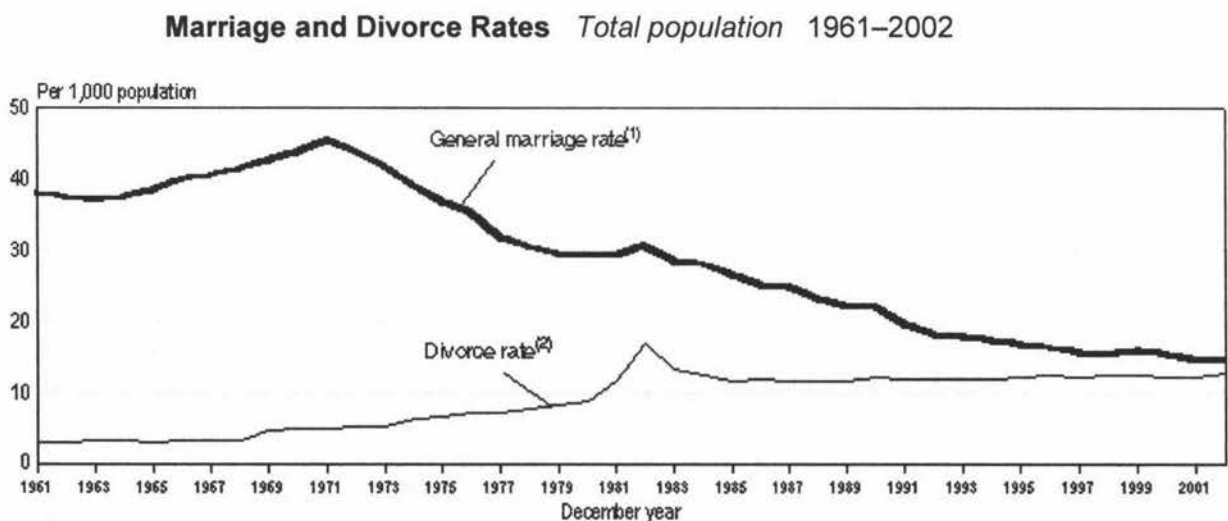
While I have less clinical experience of single, child-free, heterosexual men in this age group, they form the primary population of interest for the women. As such I have listened to many descriptions of their interpersonal behaviour, from the women's point of view. I am interested in complementing that perspective with inquiry into how contemporary men are positioning themselves in relation to available discourses.

The clinical experience I do have of men suggests that in both populations, the partner selection process is similarly dominated by the *romantic love* discourse and both men and women are discursively confused and affectively distressed when the initial euphoria of *romantic love* fades and relationships break up. However there are also indications of gendered differences in the discursive partner-selection strategies they employ, and in the discursive management of distress during the separation process.

1.2. The research population for this project

For this research project I have chosen to investigate the discursive practices of single, heterosexual, childless/childfree women and men between thirty and forty years of age. Certainly there have always been individuals meeting these criteria. However indications from the statistical evidence support my clinical perceptions that this is a demographic group which is increasing at a rate which has not occurred in previous historical periods. This claim is difficult to substantiate as they are not a clearly demarked demographic group in population statistics. Marriage and divorce are legal events, which are readily recordable as they occur. As marriage/divorce statistics have been considered the main indicators of changing patterns in relationships, they are the primary statistics attended to, and are reported annually. See Fig. 1.1. below:

Figure 1.1. (Statistics New Zealand, 2003).



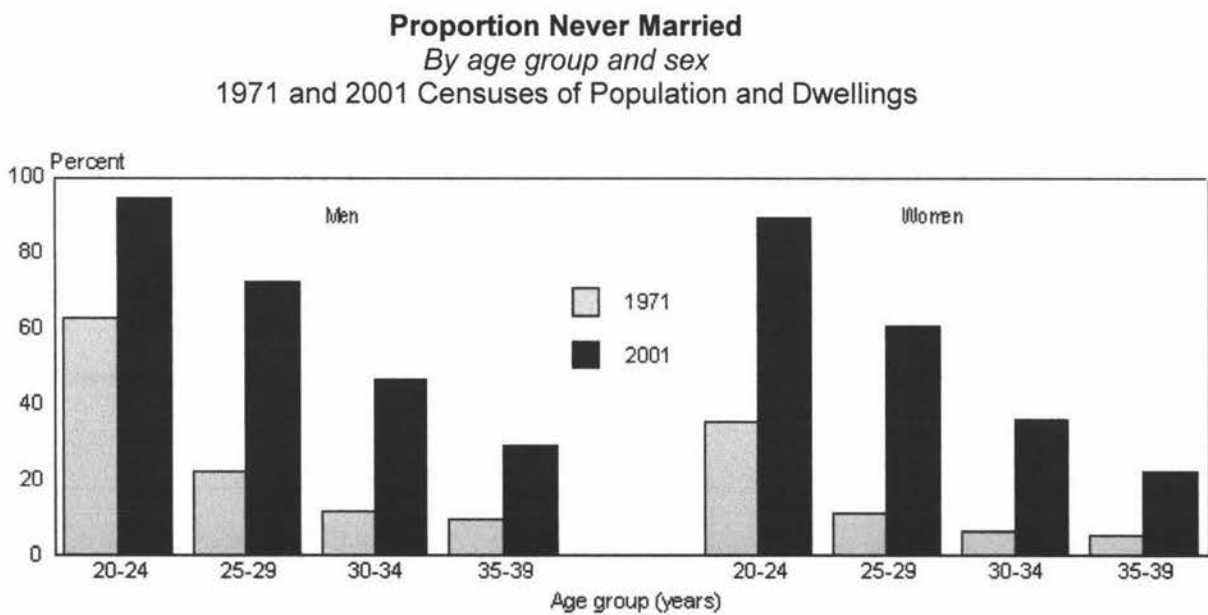
(1) Marriages registered in New Zealand per 1,000 mean not-married estimated population aged 16 years and over.

(2) Orders for dissolution of marriage granted in New Zealand per 1,000 estimated existing marriages.

Note: Rates from 1991 onwards are based on the resident population concept. Rates prior to 1991 are based on the de facto population concept.

Yet a growing proportion of New Zealanders, like their counterparts in Australia, North America and Europe, do not marry, therefore they do not divorce either. The bar-graph below shows a significant trend in the numerical increase of those who have never married. However marriage/ divorce statistics no longer tell enough of the story. The graph below needs to be read with awareness that within those figures are some very different subgroups. For instance five-yearly census figures show that de facto heterosexual relationships increased from 1 in 4 in 1996, to 3 in 10 in 2001. In addition same-sex relationships and unmarried solo parents are groups which are known to have increased. See Figure 1.2. below:

Figure 1.2. (Statistics New Zealand, 2003).



It appears that measuring my population of interest requires estimation and extrapolation from other figures. For instance, one-person households numbered 333,000 in 2001 and half (166,500) of the occupants were 59 yrs or younger. Yet that does not tell all, because many single adults live together in multi-person households.

An analysis of Australian statistics revealed a clear downturn in partnering rates. This means that the decline in legal marriages was not equaled by an increase in de facto relationships in the decade 1986 to 1996. The writers state that: "Men and women now

live apart at rates which could hardly be imagined a decade or so ago.” (Birrell & Rapson, 1998, p.41). For example they estimate that in the 30-34 age group in Australia, 20% of women are living in settings which do not involve a male partner or offspring. Although a small percentage is likely to be lesbian¹, the majority would definitely be heterosexual.

While the relationship crisis has been measured in terms of marriage/divorce statistics and the instability of marriage has been the focus of concern, the increase in the number who are choosing to be, or are accepting being unpartnered is steadily growing. As unpartnered women fall into two groups: the solo mother and the child-free woman, a significant number of partnered and unpartnered women are still involved in family-making. Only about 1% of solo parents are fathers. Therefore most unpartnered men are not involved in live-in, family-making. About 29% of men in their early 40s in USA are unpartnered, which is up from 11.3% in 1970 (Hacker, 2003) and about 33% of 30-34 year old men and 51% of 25-29 year old men in Australia are unpartnered. Birrell & Rapson (1998) call this change in Australian men's social positioning, a quiet revolution.

Therefore, I consider it valid to claim my population of interest is a growing group emerging dramatically in the last two decades of fifty years of relationship turbulence. As the children of the 1960s and 1970s, they are now the second generation of an ongoing relationship crisis. They grew up in a social context which had not occurred previously. It is likely they are constructed by, and in turn are constructive of, that changing discursive field. Given the special position they have chosen or accepted, they are likely to have engaged with, and have insight into, the discursive struggle in which they have been immersed all their lives. I consider their discursive strategies are worthy of analysis.

¹ Shumway (2003) points out that the effects of the parallel social changes in attitudes to homosexuality are generally ignored in marriage/divorce statistics. Most gay and lesbian men and women no longer use heterosexual marriage to hide their sexual preference, therefore they no longer register in the divorce statistics either. As same-sex marriage has not been an option, they have been excluded from the marriage/divorce statistics. Changes in the law will make interesting changes in the statistics. However, estimates at the 1996 Australian Census were that self-identifying same sex couples formed only 1±% of the population (Birrell and Rapson, 1998).

1.3. A context of change in relationships

Evidence of the dramatic changes in the field of relationships is revealed in the burgeoning literature, both academic and popular, on relationships, marriage, divorce, gender roles, family, and children. A crisis in heterosexual relationships has been widely discussed, with questioning of the role and the survival of marriage and family being common themes. Schwartz and Scott (1997) point out that titles such as *The Future of Marriage* (Bernhard, © 1973), *The Family, Marriage and Social Change* (Clayton, 1975), *The Nuclear Family in Crisis* (Gordon, 1972) were already being published in the 1970s. That questioning has continued in succeeding decades with frequently occurring titles such as *The End of Marriage* (Hafner, 1993), *Should We Worry About Family Change* (Lewis, 2003) and *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy and the Marriage Crisis* (Shumway, 2003). The abundance of the literature itself, plus the statistical and qualitative data and the theorising amassing within it, leaves no doubt that for the past four to five decades a significant number of heterosexual adults have been finding that the task of forming satisfying, committed and resilient relationships is problematic.

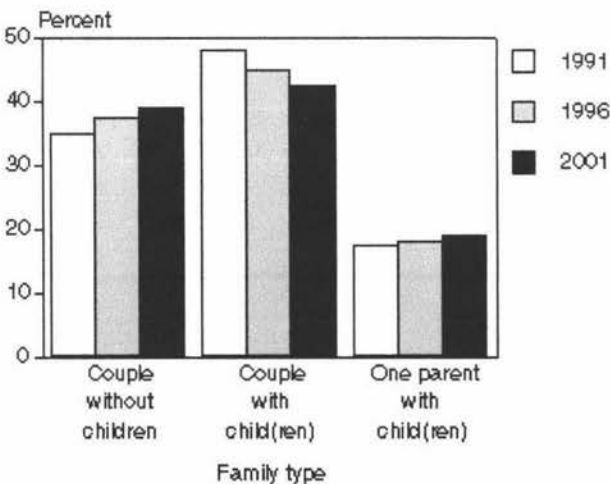
Statistical indicators of change in relationships: Statistical indicators of change in the field of family relationships include the **marriage/divorce statistics** (Fig.1.1. above). The 2001 Census showed 30% of those married 25 years previously (in 1976) have since divorced and just over 1 in 3 marriages involved the remarriage of one or both partners (Statistics NZ, 2003). The **falling birth rate** is another indicator. The birth rate has been steadily falling since the 1970s when concerns about the over-population of the planet produced a pervasive discourse of *Zero Population Growth*. The 1.96 live births per woman registered in New Zealand in 2003 was similar to the 7% below replacement level (2.10 births per woman) being experienced by most OECD countries (Letablier, 2002; Pool & Sceats, 2003; Statistics NZ, 2003).

The trend for women to delay motherhood until their third decade, or to not have children at all, is reflected in the **falling fertility rate**. On average, New Zealand women are now having children five years later than their counterparts in the early 1970s. The median age of New Zealand women giving birth is now 30.2 years, compared with 28.3 years in 1993 and 24.9 years in the early 1970s. In 2003 women aged 30–34 years had the highest fertility rate (Statistics NZ, 2003). Women in my target population now fall within the period of highest fertility for New Zealand women, yet they are also approaching the declining years of their biological fertility. This is likely to be an important factor in their consideration of their positioning.

Although heterosexual couples with children continue to be the most common **type of family**, they are not immune from the turbulence and complexity of contemporary relationships. As 1 in 3 marriages involve the remarriage of one or both partners, many children in two-parent families will have experienced the distress of family break-up and reconstitution (Statistics NZ, 2003). Experiences of being a child in a reconstituted family may influence the ways in which my target population construct love, marriage, gender and relationship (Wallerstein, 2000).

The established dominance of couples with children is now rivalled by the increase in couples without children, see Figure 1.3. below. Some of that increase will be a factor of the aging population, but a proportion is likely to be younger childless/childfree couples delaying, deciding against, or unable to have children. This suggests that the childless/childfree position is becoming a socially accepted discursive choice.

Figure 1.3.: Family Type, 1991, 1996 and 2001 (Statistics NZ, 2003)



Solo parenting and poverty: In juxtaposition to the other two groups are the 2001 Census figures, showing that 31% of New Zealand children live in one-parent families. Birrell & Rapson (1998) describe the choice of most women with children to leave their marriage, as a one-way ticket to poverty. The proportion of children in solo parent families below the poverty threshold rose from 18% in 1988 to 66% in 2002 (Ministry of Social Development, 2003). Children brought up in poverty are disadvantaged short and long term on most measurable dimensions such as physical and mental health, longevity, education and socio-economic status (CPAG, 2003).

The solo parent position has been excluded from this research project, so clearly my participants have not chosen or accepted this position. Never-the-less consideration of this option may have an impact on discoursing subjects in my research population.

1.4. The beneficial effects of marriage

The fact that growing numbers of women and men are positioning themselves outside traditional marriage is particularly interesting when juxtaposed alongside the complementary research into the beneficial effects of marriage. A review of the multi-disciplinary literature through the 1980s and 1990s reveals consistent findings of the beneficial effects of a quality, non-abusive marriage. These benefits include improved health, longevity, wealth and happiness. The quality and endurance of a marriage is a good predictor of beneficial effects in later years. While good quality second and third marriages can bring a great deal of happiness, they contribute less protective effect than a first, long-lasting marriage (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Wilson & Oswald, 2002).

Although cohabiting is increasingly a choice, indications are that it contributes some, but not all of the protective effects of marriage. Possibly the difference may become less significant as cohabiting becomes more socially accepted and legally protected (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Wilson & Oswald, 2002).

Is marriage good enough for women? Since the 1960s feminist writers have questioned whether marriage is beneficial for women. Research in the 1960s provided the basis for an influential, best selling book *The Future of Marriage* by sociologist Jesse Bernard (1973) and a paper, *Sex, Marital Status and Mortality* by Walter Gove (1973, cited in Waite & Gallagher, 2000) which described higher rates of mental illness for married women. Waite & Gallagher critique Bernard's perspective that 'marriage is good for him but not for her'. They suggest the research findings of the 1960s have not been endorsed over the succeeding decades for three main reasons.

Firstly, the original studies did not distinguish marriage from mothering, largely because at that time most married women were also mothers and most single women were not. Later research showed mothering, especially of babies and young children, to be a stressful factor in its own right (Steil, 1997). The statistics above indicate that women and men are distinguishing partnering from parenting and positioning themselves accordingly.

Secondly, the criteria for mental illness in the early studies distorted the results. Depression was included as an unspecified category. Clearly Post Partum Depression, (associated with the mothering, but not necessarily marriage), increased the female/marriage/depression statistics, while Substance Abuse (currently a male dominated mental illness factor) was not measured at all (Gough & Peace, 2000). Thirdly there have been many changes for women over the ensuing 30 years, including changes in areas Bernard and other feminist writers recommended, such as access to education and employment, greater participation in family decision-making, and increasing social support for leaving abusive marriages (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Currently while both women and men benefit from marriage overall, there are variations in the specific domains of benefit. Health is the domain where men benefit most, with married individuals living an average of three extra years. When the figures are broken down further, married men show greater gains over single men, than married women show over single women. It is theorised that marriage lowers stress by sharing responsibilities and worries. In addition, married men eat more healthy food and abuse alcohol and nicotine less (Wilson & Oswald, 2002).

Wealth is the area where married women experience the greatest benefit, by enjoying greater financial support and security than single/childfree women or solo mothers experience (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Across the many countries and cultures which have been studied, married workers consistently earn between 10% and 20% more than those who are single. This figure holds after many other influences are factored out, such as age, education and gender and the possibility that the more healthy, competent and able are the ones who marry. The marriage/wage effect strengthens over time, suggesting that marriage is more a cause than an effect of higher income (Wilson & Oswald, 2002).

Happiness is the domain where both benefit. After allowing for many other factors, including mental health at the start of the marriage, good quality, non-abusive marriages significantly enhance mental health and happiness for both men and women and reduce the probability of later depression (Wilson & Oswald, 2002).

1.5. If marriage is so great . . . why break up?

It is accepted in the literature that most divorces are initiated by women (Birrell & Rapson, 1998; Fletcher, 2002). Some statistics indicate up to 70% of divorces are initiated by women (Hacker, 2003). If marriage is so beneficial, the actions of

approximately a quarter of married women are counter-indicated. Why are so many women delaying marriage and childbirth and leaving their marriages? Why are so many women with children choosing to become solo mothers with all the blatant financial and social disadvantages of that marginalised position? The popular image of the departing husband, bored with his wife, is not supported by the statistics or the explanations given in interviews by divorcing men and women (Hacker; 2003).

Women who break up: First of all, women who leave blatantly abusive marriages, account for a proportion of the statistics. There is increasing support, both practical (in terms of women's refuges, and legal and financial assistance), and discursive (in terms of public education programmes about breaking cycles of family violence), so that eventually most women do leave violent marriages (Hacker, 2003). Violence, abuse and gender power are likely to be factors considered by my population of interest.

Secondly, women's and men's expectations of marriage are different, because women's expectations have increased. That women contribute more effort to relationships in terms of unpaid labour and emotional support has been well documented (Birrell & Rapson, 1998; Dempsey, 1997; Steil, 1997). Nowadays many women expect a more equal sharing of responsibilities, emotional support and intimate communication. Without that they are more likely to leave. Men express more satisfaction with marriage if their physical needs are met, including their physical sexual needs, so they are often surprised when their wives declare an end to the relationship (Hacker, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). This is despite the fact she has been declaring her dissatisfaction for a considerable length of time. Research into women and men arguing explicates how men devalue women's opinions and concerns by dismissing them as emotional and illogical (Mapstone, 1995, 1996, 1998).

Men and break-ups: Taken by surprise as they appear to be, their distress over relationship break-ups is recognised as a significant factor in the high rates of depression and suicide amongst teenage boys and men (Kposowa, 2000; Lester, et. al., 2004). Research in Australia (which like New Zealand has a high rate of male suicide) shows recently-separated men are up to six times more likely to suicide than married men, and separating males aged 30-54 years are 12 times more likely to suicide than separating women (Cantor & Slater, 1995; Crawford & McDonald, 2002).

The other likely target for male violence as a response to loss and pain is the partner who has initiated the separation. The periods of leaving, and having recently left, are

known to be the most dangerous stages for women trying to extricate themselves from relationships with violent men. In fact more women are killed by their former partners than by current partners (Anderson, et. al., 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

While women are likely to seek help and emotional support from friends, doctors, counsellors, religious and marriage guidance groups, the dominant discourse of the male culture seems to be that men should be stoic and *soldier on* in silence (McCarthy & Holliday, 2004). Men rarely reveal their emotional vulnerability to male friends so they deprive each other of social support at times of loss (Coates, 2003). Men are also reluctant to use support services because they believe such services are really for women and that counselling doesn't work (Crawford & McDonald, 2002).

Children and break-ups: The literature on the long term effects of divorce on children involves a complex interplay of many factors. There are a number of dynamics which affect children adversely: such as violence and conflict, poverty, transient school attendance, unhealthy or over-crowded housing, inadequate medical attention, inadequate social and family support networks, unaccepting step-parents (Kerr, 2004; Schwartz & Scott, 1997). A child may benefit from being removed from the stress of violent interactions between parents then suffer the effects of poverty. Up to 70% of separated fathers in New Zealand pay the absolute minimum required which is \$13 per week towards each of their children's care (McLoughlin, 2003).

An unexpected effect Wallerstein (2000) found in her longitudinal study of 130 children of divorced parents was that as adults two thirds decided not to have children themselves. They feared either not parenting well enough, or breaking up and putting their children through the distress they had experienced themselves. Wallerstein's study indicates that the meanings constructed from childhood experiences and observations of gendered parental roles and practice are likely to be additional influences in the discursive positioning of this population of interest.

1.6. Justification for this discourse analysis research project

Government statistics on marriage, divorce and birth rates over the past 40 to 50 years, show decisive evidence of rapid social change. Empirical social science research has confirmed and elaborated that social change through the description and measurement of historically recent adaptive social practices, such as: delayed marriage, cohabitation, serial-monogamy, solo parenting, falling fertility rates and child-free adulthood. In addition, evidence of male suicide, and the damaging, long term and life threatening effects of poverty in many solo-parent families, distinguish the period as one of social

crisis. It is a crisis I consider to be in need of further discursive explication as a basis for the consideration of constructive social and personal interventions.

I have selected discourse analysis as the preferred method for this research project. My choice of discourse analysis is supported by the argument of Tuffin & Howard (2001) that the choice of method should follow directly from the understandings the researcher holds about the nature of the social world and how we come to know it. I have described how social constructionist psychology has enabled me to reassess my life and the changes in the social world around me with a new understanding, for which I am very appreciative.

Social constructionist theorising posits that at times of turbulent social change an active, intentional process of struggle is occurring between discoursing participants. Some of those participants are proponents of a dominant discourse. In opposition and critically analysing and resisting that dominant discourse are those who propose counter or reverse discourses. Out of that struggle new 'truths' are constructed and made accessible, and new patterns of social relationships are developed (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1982; Weedon, 1999). Therefore discourse analysis is a particularly suitable research strategy to use in the explication of discursive positions enabled within these historical conditions of social change and crisis (Burr, 1995).

The population of research interest I have identified appears to be a demographic group whose expansion is enabled by the emergence of new discursive positions and possibly the exclusion of others. I consider them to be a group worthy of, if not demanding of discursive investigation. Emerging at the epicentre of the crisis as they have, they are likely to be sincerely engaged in the discursive processes of construction and deconstruction, selection and rejection of currently available discourses. Therefore analysis of the discursive processes being employed by members of this group has the potential to contribute usefully to the current body of knowledge about the contemporary crisis in relationships.

Chapter 2:

Social Constructionist Theory & Literature Review

If love is a duty, as it was conceived in the traditional view of marriage, then in principle anyone is capable of performing it. If love is something that befalls one, as the discourse of romance would have it, then whether a couple loves is beyond their control. It is the premise of the discourse of intimacy that love is something that happens between lovers. While it is partly a function of who they are as individuals, it is also a function of how they behave in relationship.

(David Shumway, 2003)

2.1. Social constructionist theory

From essential self to language: Until recent decades the study of the individual was regarded as the proper field of investigation for psychology, and social psychology occurred as the study of the behaviour of individuals in social situations and social relationships. The prevailing conceptualisation of this object of study was of a bounded individual, with essential qualities, whose goal was to be self actualised and agenic. Representative of this conceptualisation of generic modern man was the common injunction to be true to one's self (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1973, 1985, 1989, 1991).

During the 1970s and 1980s this conceptualisation was challenged as a privileged, white, male, Eurocentric construction. Challenges came from feminism, from Afro-American and other minority groups, and from key social psychologists (Gergen, 1973; Hollway, 1981, 1984; Sampson, 1978). In the face of a postmodern view of self as a multiplicity of viewpoints, all that from a modern, positivist, empirical perspective had been regarded as objective reality and discoverable truth became open to deconstruction and reconstruction from diverse perspectives (Burr, 1995).

The organising principle in this fluid process of construction of our selves and our social world is understood to be language. However the conceptualisation of

language has also been involved in an ongoing process of deconstruction and reconstruction. Social constructionists no longer view language as a passive tool for interpersonal expression of thoughts and feelings. Rather, language is understood to have an active orientation and a performative function (Burr, 1995; Harré, 1989; Burman & Parker, 1993; Potter, 1996).

The work of Potter and Wetherell (1987) on attitudes showed that rather than using language to express coherent, stable internal attitudes, people use language adaptively to achieve desired social effects. In particular, skilled 'discourse-users' employ language to self enhance, to have their version of events prevail and achieve social acceptance and validity, or a 'warranted voice' (Gergen, 1989). The view of language as a social performance constituted a dynamic challenge to traditional communication theory which had been widely accepted for several decades. Most textbooks on communication presented a familiar diagram showing one head in profile speaking a message encoded in words across a space, to the receptive, listening ear on another head. Poststructural critique through the 1970s challenged the fundamental conceptualisations implicit in this theory and model of communication (Crotty, 1988).

Barthes, Derrida, Lacan and Foucault were major contributors to the deconstruction and reconceptualising of the signification processes. Whereas the traditional model privileged speech and the presence of speaker and listener over writing, Derrida argued that writing, or the trace, or the text, is the precondition of speech. In pursuing this argument both Derrida and Lacan used an expansive, Freudian conceptualisation which goes beyond the word and the technical task of putting script on paper, to include 'text' arising from intrapsychic conscious and unconscious processes, including dreams and metaphor (Crotty, 1998; Sarup, 1988). Anything which human beings imbue with social meaning from art and photos, to clothes and buildings can be 'read' and analysed as text (Burr, 1995).

Prioritising 'text' over speech and presence, enabled a reconceptualisation of the receiver as a reader likely to be absent, or positioned in a different time and social context from the author, and operating more as an active, critical and creative interpreter than a passive receiver. Barthes described this new author/receiver relationship in which authors necessarily let go control of who reads and interprets their texts, as 'the death of the author' (Crotty, 1998; Easthope, 1990).

In addition to texts being reinterpreted by an active receiver, the structuralist assumption that there is a fixed and unified relationship between the signifier and the signified in making up the sign in the signification process was also challenged. Whereas Saussure conceived of a signifier and sign in a fixed relationship, like the two sides of a leaf or a lens, Derrida's deconstruction of the sign revealed a relationship of 'différance', of dynamic movement between signifier and signified (Crotty, 1998; Sarup, 1988).

Deconstruction of another crucial structuralist assumption, that the meaning of the sign is transparent, revealed an autonomous signifier with a systematic reality of its own. The same sounding word can stand for different meanings within the same language and across different languages. Infants demonstrate playing with the sounds and signifiers of language without linking them to signifieds. Therefore signifiers have an arbitrary, not a natural or necessary connection to a particular signified. It is only by convention they are linked. In situations where we have not learned the convention we are likely to feel alienated and anxious (Easthope, 1990).

To summarise, with the poststructuralist reconceptualisation of the text and the signification process which makes up the text, communication becomes a process of inevitable approximations and non-correspondences. The signifier and signified both have an autonomy of their own. A text can be read in contexts beyond those the author intended, so interpreting signs will inevitably be influenced by the readers' contexts, both internal and external, and the discourse in which they are situated (Crotty, 1998; Easthope, 1990).

2.2. Discourse, power and social change

Foucault was one of the major influences in the process of reconceptualising language. He explicated the dynamic role of language in enabling and constraining knowledge, reality and subjectivity through a public process of discoursing (Davies & Harré). Foucault defined a discourse as a set of statements or ideas that construct an object, such as 'the self', 'masculinity', 'love' or 'marriage'. The discourse or cluster of ideas then becomes the framework within which explanations are sought (Ramazanoglu, 1993). The discourse is governed by implicit sets of rules and historically variable ways for specifying knowledge and what is accepted and spoken of as truth in any particular social time and context (Foucault, 1982).

To illustrate, in the area of gender difference in heterosexual relationships, Wendy Hollway (1984) identified and described three discourses. The *male sex drive discourse*, which prioritises a male biological drive to reproduce the species. Clustered around this premise, other ideas gain acceptance and are assumed to be true: that there is a primeval need in males for pursuit and penetration; that male aggression is natural and essential; that male aggression is attractive to females. The *have/hold discourse* gathers around it a set of traditional Christian ideas which give value to monogamy, partnership, family life and duty. Acceptable sexuality is assumed to be heterosexual only, and to be linked to reproduction. Women are constructed as either non-sexual wives and mothers, or dangerously sexual prostitutes and mistresses. Clustered around the post-pill *permissive discourse* are assumptions that sexual freedom and satisfaction for both males and females is entirely natural and should be enhanced, not be repressed. In the *permissive discourse* the sexual needs of individuals are given priority over the social function of sexuality as a dynamic of relationship.

The first premise of discursive theory is that power is constituted in discourses, and is not something that can be acquired, seized or held by persons, groups or systems. The power of a particular discourse resides in the extent to which its associated ideas are accepted and pass for 'truth', and its premises and logic are taken for granted, while the ideas excluded from that particular discourse are devalued (Foucault, 1982; Hollway, 1981; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Weedon, 1999). A common resistance to and criticism of Foucault's first premise is, if there is no power invested in persons there can be no possibility of acting with agency. As Burr (1995) and Harré (1989) point out, inhabiting separate bodies as we do, we feel ourselves to be 'I' who is the bearer of personality trait, the holder of attributes, the experiencer of emotions, drives and motivations, and the actor in the dramas of our lives. This conceptual difficulty in response to Foucault's first premise is addressed in the following premises.

The balancing feature of the second premise makes social change possible through agency as humans are capable of critically analysing the discourses which frame their lives. Out of that analysis agentic persons claim or resist dominant, counter or marginalised discourses according to their preferred outcomes. Intentional change is achieved through a dynamic, interactive struggle between dominant and counter discourses. Through that process marginalised or repressed discourses may be reopened and modified, or new discourses and alternative identities may be

constructed. This view sees people as simultaneously constructed by discourse and using it for their own ends (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1982; Weedon, 1999).

A corollary is that when individual and group agency is completely stifled, where freedom to resist is absent, a relationship of constraint or slavery, rather than power, occurs. While power in its most primitive form may involve violence, Foucault's definition of a power-relationship requires that the subject of an action must also be capable of action. A possibility of resistance and freedom is a requirement of a power-relationship. Therefore the power of discourse is deployed through power-relations where the capability of critically analysing, choosing, and claiming or resisting dominant, counter or marginalised discourses is implicated. Power-relations are inherent in all types of relationships, including economic, sexual, gender, racial, political or knowledge relationships, whether those are between individuals, institutions or systems (Foucault, 1982; Weedon, 1999).

The effects of power are historically more productive than restrictive and repressive. As power is inherent in a relationship of discourse, there is inevitably struggle between the proponents of the dominant discourse and those who propose counter discourses. Out of that struggle new 'truths' are made accessible. Eventually, new discourses are constructed, or marginalised discourses are re-constructed, and through the persistence of discoursing proponents, the set of ideas implicit in the new discourse prevail and achieve social acceptance and validity. As new patterns of social relationships are developed, and new social systems are established, a paradigm shift occurs into a new era or episteme. An episteme is a complex, long-lasting field of discursive relationships such as the Romantic, the Modern, or the Postmodern eras (Foucault, 1982; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Weedon, 1999).

Power can come from below and from different sources. It is not uniform in its structure. Thus historically there have been many demonstrations of power being transferred from the hierarchically privileged position of the 'monarch' by the intentional struggle and action of the citizens, or in democratic systems when those occupying power positions are replaced (Foucault, 1982; Weedon, 1999).

Power relations are both intentional and non-subjective. As power is in the discourse, there is no exterior, powerful subject manipulating the discourse. Rather 'discoursing subjects' are part of the 'discursive field'. Discoursing is an active, intentional process with active participants employing strategies of struggle or

confrontation to obtain desired ends, gain an advantage or marginalise opponents. This is closely related to the conceptualisation, that there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives as set out in the discourse (Foucault, 1982; Weedon, 1999).

From an essentialist perspective contradictory, but for Foucault consequential, is his contention that where there is power, there is resistance. Yet this resistance is never exterior to a power-relation because, with reference to the first conceptualisation, power always occurs within a discursive relationship. The emphasis here is on the relationship. Discursing subjects are discursively acting on those who are also capable of action: of choosing, rejecting, and constructing positions within the discursive field (1998; Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1982; Gergen, 1991; Weedon, 1999).

Power arises in local centres, whether countries, institutions or families. However for particular, local manifestations of power to become established in sustained ways, they must become embedded in the structures of those local centres. Power relations function in the social, economic, religious, legal and political institutions and systems of particular local societies (Foucault, 1982; Weedon, 1999).

Interpretative repertoires: Potter (1996) defined 'interpretative repertoires' as flexible modifications of the more durable Foucauldian discourses. Potter and Wetherell (1987) initially conceptualised interpretative repertoires to describe the tool-kit of devices or resources individuals employ to justify preferred versions of, and participation in particular events, to fend off criticism, and to achieve maximum social acceptance. While individual accounts display considerable variability and inconsistency, individual speakers select from a limited repertoire of interpretations which are located in the social discursive field surrounding them (Burr, 1995).

A well explicated example of discourse modification or interpretative repertoire occurs in the work of Edley & Wetherell (1999). In discussing their possibilities for family life in the future a group of young men initially positioned themselves as incompetent at housework. Next they proposed that now that men and women are equal and can make career choices free of gender constraints, the one who earns the most should work and pursue a career, while the one who is best at child minding and house work should be the homemaker. Therefore, they would be beyond reproach for being sexist if, for reasons of efficiency (highly valued in a

competitive, capitalist culture) they occupied the traditional masculine position of *breadwinner/highest income earner*, (a socially valued position). In addition, for reasons of efficiency they would not do the socially-devalued, unpaid housework because they are not good at it.

Another example is a modification of the word intimacy. As constructed in the talking therapies, intimacy is a verbal process of sharing confidences to achieve interpersonal feelings of warmth and closeness. However in a common slippage it is often used to mean sexual relations (Shumway, 2003; Steil, 1997).

Subject positions: The concept of 'positioning' was proposed by Davies and Harré (1990) and is used in discourse analysis to explicate the manner in which human subjects may be produced by discourse while simultaneously being discourse-manipulators (Burr, 1995).

Every discourse, whether dominant, counter or marginalised, offers a limited number of locations, viewpoints or positions within its discursive field for discoursing subjects to occupy. Simultaneously each discourse constrains other positions which are contradictory or subversive of its construction of knowledge, reality and subjectivity. Subjects may accept or refuse any discursive positions on offer, however choosing to occupy a particular subject position is a social act that has social effects. Occupying a particular subject position makes available a particular set of rights, and requires a set of duties and obligations (Morgan & Coombes, 2001).

In social relationships subjects are contained, or positioned, by the language used by themselves or others (Gillies, 1999). An advantage of the construct of positioning is the flexibility it offers as "a dynamic replacement for the more static notion of role" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 362). Given that people employ language to self enhance and achieve desired social effects, having a range of possible positions enables individuals to have fallback positions if they lose their footing in their preferred position. Therefore, during the course of an individual's narrative or conversation, there may be considerable slippage within one discourse as well as across different discourses (Edley & Wetherell, 1999).

2.3. Objectives and research questions

Acceptance of the view that language has a performative social function gives rise to research questions about the purposes, devices and rhetorical skills of people's language, so that texts become the object of study, rather than people (Burr, 1995). The research questions for this project give priority to discourse, asking about its construction in relation to its function.

There are four research questions: What are the relationship goals, in terms of their construction and function, for men and women in this demographic group? What are the dominant and counter discourses available to men and women in this demographic group in achieving their relationship goals? Which interpretative repertoires enable modification and variation of the more stable discourses? Are these discourses and interpretative modifications functional in enabling participants to achieve their relationship goals?

David Shumway (2003) in his recent book, *Modern love: Romance, intimacy and the marriage crisis*, presents a compelling analysis of three discourses which are active in the field of love and relationships. I have used his analysis of the discourses of *security*, *romantic love* and *intimacy* as a basic structure for this study because it supports my understandings, and provides a 'logic' by which to make sense of the changing statistics and literature on love, attraction and contemporary relationships. In addition there is enough flexibility in the structure to enable the investigation of my specific research questions, and the modifications and discursive resources employed by my particular population of interest.

2.4. The discourses of security and romantic love

An historical survey of the evolution of Euro-American discourses concerning marriage and relationship shows that the major discourses have been present in some form for several hundred years. However the acceptance and dominance, or rejection and exclusion, attributed to each discourse have varied according to the function they served in each historical period. The extent to which a particular discourse passed for 'truth', and its premises and logic were assumed, or devalued, depended on the social, economic and political values, tasks and problems of the era (Foucault, 1982; Shumway, 2003).

Prior to and during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries life was harsh and one's kinship group was the social institution which provided the resources, support and

insurance required for individual safety, survival and care of the young and old. Marriages were usually arranged by parents with a primary intention of securing land tenure and strengthening the extended family, economically and socially. Political advantage was an additional consideration for the nobility. Therefore the dominant discourse related to marriage was one of *security* (Hafner, 1993; Maley, 2003; Shumway, 2003). While their children's individual preferences were considered, personal desires were regarded as secondary to the wellbeing of the family group (Hafner, 1993). The *security* discourse emphasised the permanence of marriage over the fluidity of affections (Maley, 2003).

Change occurred slowly until by the seventeenth century in Britain a very successful marriage could be expected to achieve the *security* goals, with the fortuitous bonus of a compatible companionship between husband and wife. An important assumption was that the husband's area of responsibility was management of the finances and political interests of the family, and the wife's domain was management of the home and physical and emotional interests of the family (Shumway, 2003).

While the *security discourse* was dominant in our early history, it was not absolute. *Romantic love* had a place, but that place was predominantly outside marriage. Whether as fact or fiction, stories of unrequited love have long been celebrated in our literature. The theme is familiar in stories of the adoration of the knight for his Lord's Lady, or of youthful Romeo and Juliet, passionately loving across kinship boundaries (Hafner, 1993). Stories of infatuation occur in all cultures, even when arranged marriages are the norm (Buss, 1994; Fletcher, 2002). However rather than ending in marriage, love stories occurring when the *security discourse* is dominant, often end in the suffering and death of the lovers. These stories serve to marginalise the discourse by presenting *romantic love* as a painful misfortune to be avoided in favour of the *security* of the family and its culture and traditions (Maley, 2003; Shumway, 2003).

Associated with the development and growth of western capitalism was a complex mix of changing values and discourses around religion, usury, insurance, ownership Darwinian science, competition, and social mobility. Collectively these served to prioritise the individual (Maley, 2003; Tawney, 1938). The *discourse of romantic love* enhanced this new *discourse of individualism* by offering a justification for the right of individuals to make choices different from familial and societal expectations

and obligations. It enabled individuals to be upwardly mobile and cross previously rigid socio-economic, kinship, religious and racial boundaries (Lewis, 2003; Maley, 2003; Shumway, 2003).

Over time *romantic love* was reconstructed from a painful experience to be avoided, into a valued experience to be welcomed. The narratives developed happy endings and *romantic love* was allocated the social function of mate selection which had previously been performed by parents. This is a peculiarly western construction of experiencing, thinking, writing and producing texts about love (Jackson, 2001; Schwartz & Scott, 1997). By the nineteenth century, when *capitalism* had become the dominant economic discourse, the link between romance and marriage was in place and twentieth century Hollywood cemented it firmly (Shumway, 2003).

As the dominant discourses of capitalism constructed people as resourceful and competitive individuals, the established power relations changed. Where marriage had previously been the cornerstone of the kinship group (the institution which accrued land, property and resources), under capitalism these roles were taken over by other institutions. The openly economic and social security function of marriage was devalued, and marriage was gradually personalised, or reconstructed to enhance the functions of personal wellbeing, happiness and sexual satisfaction (Maley, 2003; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Whereas to openly *marry for money* had been the accepted practice within the *security discourse*, it was now devalued as a shallow motive for mate selection. Instead the 'essential' qualities of prospective partners, rather than their inherited wealth and status, were the accepted reasons for attraction within *romantic love*. Thus the newly dominant discourse was favoured and endorsed by the middle classes in particular (Hafner, 1993; Maley, 2003).

When marriage was the cornerstone of the social edifice, divorce threatened *security* by disrupting family lineage and lines of inheritance, therefore strong prohibitions were required (Maley, 2003). Despite the many social, legal and religious taboos in earlier centuries, annulments of marriage had occurred as exceptional events involving aberrant individuals. Failure to consummate marriage, infertility, or infidelity, were all threatening to the security of family and lineage. Therefore divorce for these reasons could be justified to strengthen and protect the dominant *security discourse* and its social institutions, by excluding individuals who occupied these threatening positions (Shumway, 2003).

The shift from marriage constructed as a social institution, to marriage as a quest for personal happiness, devalued a corollary of the *security* discourse, *duty to family*. While that assumption was no longer given importance as a rationale for forming and sustaining relationships, the right of the individual to make life-enhancing choices was promoted (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Whereas marriage had been more binding on women because of their economic limitations, with increasing rights to earn money and own assets, marriage began to be constructed as a choice rather than a rule (Israel, 2002). Women were enabled to reject unhappiness and abuse as too high a cost to pay for maintaining the security of a marriage. As legal, economic and social prohibitions on divorce relaxed through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the rate of divorce increased until between 1910 and 1940 the divorce rate in USA doubled (Israel, 2002; Maley, 2003; Waite and Gallagher, 2000).

The immediate post-war years of the late 1940s were chaotic with a high rate of divorce: many marriages hastily formalised before servicemen left for overseas did not survive. However the 1950s was a decade when marriage rates for men soared to the 90%+ range. There was a shortage of heterosexual men. Thousands had been killed and thousands of survivors returned to their home countries with war brides. The resettlement benefits of housing and employment which were offered to married returned-servicemen provided incentives to marry (Israel, 2002). After having asserted their competence in industry, commerce and the professions during the war effort, women were vigorously 're-feminised'. While married women were exhorted to return home and have babies, single women (of whom there were many) were relegated to jobs married men did not want (Israel, 2002). As in the historical cycle when *security* was dominant, women's magazines, news media and government policies asserted a *woman's place is in the home* (Maley, 2003).

The social order must now reassert itself. That is our job. That is our purpose. Those who follow their own paths, no matter how worthy, those who do not participate in the reconstruction of the society, to marry, to bear American children, must be labeled 'Selfish'.

(The Daughters of the American Revolution, 1947. Cited in Israel, 2002, p.175)

Briefly the *security* and *romantic love* discourses shared a fragile balance of power. As an antidote to the cruel war years, *romantic love* offered euphoric happiness leading to the *security* of marriage and family (Shumway, 2003). However this time around, *security* was vested in the suburban nuclear family, rather than the extended family of the feudal estate or village (Israel, 2002).

The 1950s quest for safety and happiness in marriage proved illusory and by the 1960s the divorce rate began increasing again (See Figure 1.1. p.1-4). The fragile balance between the two major discourses of *romantic love* and *security* was unsustainable. Whereas *capitalism* and *romantic love* were complementary discourses, both were incompatible with marriage enabled by the *security* discourse, with its cluster of corollaries such as *a woman's place ...* and *duty to family*. As discussed above, two centuries of capitalist discourse had seriously undermined the discursive assumptions of the *security* discourse, as well as the sequences of social, economic, legal, religious and political institutions which supported marriage (Foucault, 1982; Maley, 2003; Shumway, 2003).

Throughout its long history, the *romantic love discourse* has offered a variety of alignments with marriage. It has portrayed love outside marriage as either sinful and dangerous, or ennobling and desirable. It has described chaste, courtly love, adulterous passion, or accounts of challenge-laden courtship which culminates in marriage (Lewis, 2003). However the story of an ongoing marriage cannot be told within this discourse, because *romantic love* stories are triadic in structure. They consist of ecstatic moments when the lovers meet, interspersed with people and events conspiring to keep the lovers apart: an oppositional father, a malevolent seducer or a competing rival. These emotionally intense *romantic love* stories, embedded in capitalist cultures, end when the threat is resolved and the lovers can marry. They purvey the expectation that the passion of *romantic love* will continue beyond marriage, but they do not depict how this happens (Shumway, 2003).

The romantic dramas of the 1950s endorsed women's greater expectations of marriage. In the Foucauldian sense that within repressive discourses are the seeds of counter-discourses, women escaped the social fragmentation and alienation of the suburban, nuclear family by re-imagining their lives as narratives in which they might play strong, central and active roles, and their dreams might be realised (Weatherall, 2002). Separated from the traditional support systems and intimacy networks of their extended families and female friends, suburban women looked to their marriage partners to fulfil their emotional and social needs. A new expectation for marriage to provide *intimacy*, a special closeness founded on verbal openness, was seeded in this personal and social alienation. Yet there was no available discourse, no historical precedent, and no mainstream institution to support marriage being practised in this way (Shumway, 2003; Steil, 1997).

Without doubt the 1960s was a decade of discursive struggle and turbulence on many fronts. Marriage, as commonly constructed in the 1950s by the unstable alliance of *romantic* and *security* discourses, attracted vociferous feminist critique, particularly about the effects of marriage on women. Levels of depression were high for married women, the addictive anti-depressant, valium, was widely prescribed, and 'suburban neurosis' widely discussed (Friedan, 1963; Schwartz & Scott, 1997). Feminist critique of gender-power relations delivered a withering assault on a basic assumption of the *security* discourse, that women and men should have clearly defined roles (de Beauvoir, 1953; Friedan, 1963; Greer, 1970).

The *romantic love* discourse attracted similarly vigorous criticism for offering women grossly circumscribed positions. In the 'Cinderella' position goodness and passive acceptance of victimisation is rewarded eventually with rescue by a prince. In the 'Beauty' position women are given full responsibility for transforming privileged and abusive male behaviour through the power of pure, female love (Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000). Shumway (2003) maintains we learn about *romantic love* from fiction.

It was in this climate of critical analysis, disillusionment and social change that the pre-war divorce rates began to recur. In earlier centuries occasional divorce and annulment of marriage had been employed to strengthen the dominant *security discourse* and its social institutions. In contrast, frequent divorce amidst the discursive turbulence of the later decades of the twentieth century had the opposite effect: threatening rather than protecting, the social institutions of family and marriage. Significant numbers of people resisted marriage and experimented with other forms of 'relationship', such as cohabiting, open relationship and serial monogamy. Statistics discussed in Chapter 1 show that, while heterosexual marriages are still preferred, experimenting with and choosing other forms of partnership is a continuing trend in the 21st century (Hacker, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

By the 1960s, in Foucauldian terms, the available discourses of *security* and *romantic love* could no longer be considered sufficiently functional to sustain the social institution of marriage in its known forms. There was an urgent need for the construction of new discourses to enable relationships capable of meeting the needs of children, women and men (Shumway, 2003; Steil, 1997).

2.5. Gender and the discourse of intimacy

The new *discourse of intimacy* was reconstructed from two sources. Firstly, out of women's ancient cultural practice of using talk to share problems and exchange mutual support (Coates, 1996). Secondly, out of the 'talking therapy' that developed from Freudian psychoanalysis and Rogerian client-centred therapy (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). From these lines of experience with talk, the *discourse of intimacy* has been constructed with the specific function of strengthening couples and families (Shumway, 2003; Steil, 1997).

Discourse theory understands people to be constructed by discourse while using it for their own ends (Burr, 1995). When women socialise together they are likely to tell each other about the personal events, troubles and feelings of their lives.

Women commonly have a best friend to whom they tell everything. They expect and hope their partners will behave like their best friends, and are often frustrated and bewildered when they don't (Coates, 1996, 2003; Morgan & Coombes, 2001; Phillips, 1996; Smith, 1990). It was natural therefore that women turned to each other to talk about their relationship difficulties: to their best friends, to women's groups, and to the growing numbers of 'talking therapists' (Steil, 1997).

Women have been influential in the development and prevalence of psychotherapy, particularly couples and family counselling. Firstly, as client/consumers, women have presented their urgent and specific need for help with couple and family relationships. Secondly, while notable men have been influential in the theoretical development of the 'talking therapies' it is unarguably a domain in which notable women have been influential and constructive as well. Virginia Satir was one who through the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s via her therapy, lectures and books, promoted a warm, intimate style of communication which was very different from the cultivated emotional-distance of her male predecessors (Satir, 1964, 1972). Thirdly, as professional practitioners of psychotherapy, women have had a pervasive influence simply by being in the majority. Feminist practitioners since the 1970s have critiqued the entrenched mother blaming and patriarchal notions of family in historical family therapy. In particular they have drawn attention to the abuse of gender-power through family violence, incest and rape in heterosexual families (Goldner, 1992; Herman, 1992; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001).

The literature on gender is multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional and so vast that it is hardly possible to sustain a comprehensive gaze. Therefore research tends to

cluster around particular areas: gender as a subjective experience; as a discursive construction; as a social structure or institution; or as a socially situated interaction (Thorne, 2001). Gendered difference is an area of research beset by ideological controversies and researcher-positioning. Whether researchers construct gender as biologically determined, or as a cultural category for distinguishing and maintaining difference, has a strong influence on research findings. Although gender-differences are salient in our daily lives, they cannot be understood in a social and cultural vacuum separate from other determinants of social identity such as ethnicity or religion (Unger, 1992). An example of the revision of a biological assumption emerged from a major international study of mate-preferences co-ordinated by Buss (1994). Pre-marital female chastity was expected to be a universal hetero-male preference, biologically embedded in order to ensure genetic inheritance. However the study showed men and women in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries gave virginity very little value, whereas premarital, female chastity was highly valued in Asian and Middle Eastern countries.

When the history of research in the area of gender difference is thoroughly reviewed and analysed, it is clear there are greater within-gender variations in cognitive and social abilities than between-gender variations (Franzoi, 1996; Unger, 1992; Weatherell, 2002). This is such an ubiquitous finding that feminist researchers such as Unger have called for a halt to gender-comparative research, in favour of explicating the social and cultural construction of the wide range of within-gender differences. There is considerable evidence for the social construction of gender difference (Edley & Wetherell, 1995; Harris, 1995; Hollway, 1984; Weatherall, 2002).

An important progression from the 1950s *romantic/security* alliance is that in the *romantic/intimacy* alliance the available gendered positions are less constrained: women can work, have money, and pursue education and careers. Decades of feminist effort has grounded a discourse of *gender equality* in the public consciousness in which, ideally, 'post' feminist women and men would share the responsibilities, power and pleasures of life in enhanced.

In the second wave of feminism, there is acknowledgement that rather than being oppressive by definition, marriage at its best 'may also be unique among current social arrangements in its potential contribution to human wellbeing' (Gergen, M & K, 2003, p. 469). There is acknowledgement of the complexity of relationships (Chodorow, 1995; Crawford, 2004b) in 'that power can work both ways and that

'patriarchy' is not directly responsible for all the destructive forces in relationships, whether hetero- or homosexual' (Hollway, 2004, p. 321). Individual autonomy, or being one's own person, does not necessarily exclude considering someone else's needs and interests and caring for them. In contrast to the 'crisis', 'mismatch' and 'growing divide' literature, research into co-operative, two-income families indicates many are happy, healthy and thriving (Barnett & Rivers, 1998).

Gender equality, or what Hollway (2004) calls 'mutuality' is a corollary of the *discourse of intimacy*. In promoting *verbal intimacy* between partners, most writers of self help relationship manuals appear to assume equality in intentions, resources and practice. This assumption is not congruent with some practices deeply embedded in the general population. Massive evidence regarding domestic violence (Anderson et. al., 2003; WHO, 2002) the unequal distribution of unpaid housework (Dempsey, 1997), and the financial imbalance between men and women (Burgoyne, 2004) reveals that gender-equality is far from being a lived reality.

A number of contemporary researchers have focused on the complexity, or the dilemmatic 'betwixt and between' positioning in many contemporary heterosexual relationships (Edley & Wetherell, 1995, 1999; Jackson, 2001; Mapstone, 1995, 1996, 1998). In contrast to the politically correct rhetoric of gender equality, some incongruent and oppositional male-privileged practices have been shown to be common and resistant to change (Dempsey, 1997; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Towns & Adams, 2000). In order to rationalise and justify continued adherence to hetero-male-privileged practices, interpretative repertoires or discourse modifications have emerged (Mapstone, 1995). Dempsey has identified five discursive strategies commonly used by men to maintain their privileged position in the unequal distribution of unpaid housework and parenting. First is 'mucking up the job and pleading helplessness' (1997, p. 204). Other strategies of resistance are: waiting to be asked; ignoring requests for help; expressing sympathy but doing nothing; and promising help but not delivering.

Similarly some proponents of the *intimacy discourse* employ interpretative repertoires in reproducing discourses of traditional masculinity and femininity. For example John Gray (1993), a popular self-help writer, whose book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* topped the American best-seller list from 1994 to 1998, constructs a particular non-communication style as essential and healthy

masculinity: he will want to withdraw to his cave for a while and not talk about it and not ask for advice, because he wants to fix the problem himself (Potts, 1998).

Most writers of self help books, including John Gray, assume the majority of their readers will be female. As the 'emotional work' of relationship change tends to be placed on women, the popularity of these books is somewhat surprising (Potts, 1998). In her critical discourse analysis of Gray's work and the immense popularity of self-help relationship manuals for women, Crawford (2004a) employs the social constructionist assumptions that any text is open to multiple readings and that within repressive discourses are the subversive seeds of counter-discourses. She suggests that:

...the texts afford ways for their users to challenge the dominant discourse and begin to articulate counter-discourses that facilitate marital negotiation. At least some of the appeal of these self-help materials may be that they afford opportunities for women (and men) to examine the balance of power in heterosexual relationships.

Crawford, 2004a. p.66.

In her review of the literature on gender and language Weatherell (2002) counters lingering notions of an essential hetero-male deficiency in language ability. Conversely some Euro-American studies show that heterosexual men's and women's talk is likely to be constructed to achieve different social and cultural goals. Women's talk is predominantly constructed to enhance relationships: to establish equality, to encourage intimacy, and to be protective of the feelings of others (Coates, 1996; Fishman, 1983; Mapstone, 1995, 1996, 1998). Men's talk with few exceptions is designed to establish heterosexuality, to distinguish themselves from other sexual orientations and confirm their privileged social status. To serve these functions their talk is constructed predominantly to exclude feelings, to mask personal vulnerability, and to exhibit toughness, competitiveness and achievement (Coates, 2003; Sattel, 1983; Smith, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1983).

The difficulty created at the interface of this socio-cultural difference is that *intimacy* can only occur in a relationship where there is safety and mutual respect (Steil, 1997). If one participant in a conversation confides vulnerable information about herself, as is a common heterosexual female cultural practice (Coates, 1996, 2003), and the other tells a story of his achievement in succeeding over significant difficulties, as is a common heterosexual male cultural practice (Coates, 2003), the

power-imbalance of a confessional relationship is created. To construct an intimate relationship equal willingness and skill in verbal self-disclosure is required.

Birrell and Rapson (1998) critique the assumption that any imbalance of power will somehow equalise as skills in intimate verbal communication improve. Rather they suggest that the marked difference in readership may be increasing the gender gap by raising women's expectations further. For *intimacy* to have any impact on what they call "the growing male/female divide", widespread change would need to occur in male cultural practice. A difficulty with the gendered cultural practice perspective is that the abusive behaviour of the perpetrator, in interactions such as rape, may be excused (for thinking 'No' meant 'Yes'), or the victim may be blamed for deficient cultural practice (for not saying 'No' clearly) (Giora, 2001; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999).

Waller (2002) agrees that because of male cultural practice, few men contact the *intimacy discourse* directly through self-help, relationship manuals. However she suggests change is happening gradually as men engage with interpersonal discourse through men's groups, anger and substance management programmes, family court mediation, work-place staff relationship programmes, and talk with female partners and friends.

Harris (1995) also points to a gradual change in the social constructions of masculinity. He discusses a list, which has been generated by the men's movement in the USA, of 24 gender-role messages commonly heard by men in the latter half of the twentieth century. He identifies fifteen dominant and traditional 'classical man' messages, none of which enable interpersonal vulnerability through verbal intimacy. The fifteen are: the Adventurer; the Best; Breadwinner; Controller; Hurdler; Money Maker; Playboy; President; Self-reliant; Sportsman; Stoic; Superman; Tough Guy; Warrior; Worker. Harris discusses the marginalised but subversive presence of nine non-traditional messages constructive of a more relational, caring and communicative postmodern man: Like my father (if the father was nurturing of the son); Faithful Husband; Good Samaritan; Nature Lover; Nurturer; Rebel (questions the system); Scholar; Technician and Law Abider.

The 'normal-is-healthy' assumptions of male cultural practice are currently undergoing considerable questioning, research and discussion. Brooks (2001) is one who discusses ways in which traditional constructions of "masculinity" may prevent men from accessing full physical and mental wellbeing. He proposes that rigid

adherence to powerful strictures of male conduct inclines men to adopt non-emotional and non-communicative interpersonal stances and behaviours that are not ultimately in their own, or their loved ones, best interests.

The first wave of advice books attempted to reawaken romance within marriage. This was despite two counter indications: that belief in the efficacy of *romantic love* derives from fiction, not psychological research and that *romantic love* flourishes where there is mystery, unavailability and challenge (Shumway, 2003). In contrast *intimacy* 'works with' the fact that excitement declines as familiarity increases and seeks to strengthen relationship by deepening mutuality through communication. Two assumptions of the *intimacy* discourse are that a relationship can be 'worked on', and that change is possible through 'emotional work'. Through self-revealing communication, *intimacy* offers mature love that will last longer than the passionate euphoria of new love (Steil, 1997). These lasting forms of love are referred to in the literature as companionate love, or consummate love (Sternberg, 1988).

Commitment is another crucial construct clustered with the *discourse of intimacy*. Commitment provides a rationale for staying in the relationship and doing the 'emotional work' of communication rather than moving on 'when the going gets tough'. In contemporary western society traditional social institutions no longer function to keep couples together. Meanwhile assumptions of passivity in *romantic love* make couple relationships vulnerable to the unpredictability of 'Cupid's arrow': love 'happens', lovers 'fall in love'. Finding 'the right one' is the priority goal, rather than 'staying together for the sake of the children...' so *romantic love* can be used to justify affairs, or moving on to the [next] *one true love* (Lewis, 2003). In *intimacy* however, extra-marital affairs are constructed as pathology (commitment phobia) or as an indicator of the lack of communication within the primary relationship (Innes-Kent, 1998). Commitment is constructed as an active decision which requires skilful interpersonal behaviours to strengthen resilience and keep the couple together.

Reminiscent of the 1950s *romantic/security* alliance, the two discourses, *romantic love* and *intimacy*, co-exist in a tension with each other. Again *romantic love* is allocated a valued but limited position as the initial stage of attraction and bonding in the process of developing a mature relationship. As the intense emotion of *romantic love* inevitably wanes, it is assumed that the practices promoted by the *intimacy discourse* will take over, and talking, sharing and communicating will develop an even more rewarding emotional closeness (Shumway, 2003; Steil, 1997).

2.6. Love in intimacy is a function of behaviour

The discourse of *intimacy* proposes that love is an interactive process occurring between lovers. While it is partly a function of who they are as individuals, it is also a function of how they behave in relationship. As discussed above, intimacy cannot occur in gendered relationships characterised by domination and control and where freedom to resist is compromised (Steil, 1997). The word love, which is written, sung and talked about as though its meaning is transparent and universally agreed upon, is sometimes constructed to have an interpersonal meaning of caring actions towards the loved person (Chodorow, 1995; Djikic & Oatley, 2004).

On the other hand love is sometimes constructed as an intra-psychic experience, which in extreme relationships may be used to justify violence or staying in violent relationships (Anderson, et. al., 2003; Burr, 1995; Goldner, 1992). For example, the words '*I love you*', familiar as they are, can and do carry very different meanings for different people. For some they mean a generous and spacious: I care for you and will do all I can to contribute to your wellbeing, while at the other extreme they may justify a possessive control: Because '*I love you*' I want you with me all the time. Upsetting me by talking to other men, wearing low necklines, or not answering your mobile phone instantly, would justify me calling you a slut, or pushing and shoving or beating you up. Between these extremes are innumerable interpretations of what '*I Love you*' might mean.

Many women in relationships which are not necessarily physically violent, but which involve control or verbal abuse in the name of love, experience the bewilderment and pain of betrayal when they realise they were conned by those words. The more they had struggled to occupy a Beauty-like position, practising love, forgiveness and understanding, the more they incurred multi-dimensional abuse and socially constructed themselves as inadequate (Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000).

While some women continue to accept a position of passivity, feminist discourses about gender equality and female worth continue to construct an alternative position, enabling women and girls to refuse the offered position (Jackson, 2001; Rocco, 2004). However in practice, such a refusal can be dilemmatic and problematic for heterosexual women. 'No' may still be constructed by the listener to mean 'Yes', or may trigger the need-to-reassert-power of the rapist (Kitzinger & Frith, 1999). To speak may attract further abuse, while to choose silence may be constructed as compliance (Morgan & Coombes, 2001).

2.7. Presence of the security discourse

In performing the social function of mate selection, *romantic love* is constructed to give priority to the personal qualities of the beloved over their socio-economic status. Yet analysis of Australian men who are partnered or not, found their economic status was highly significant (Birrell and Rapson, 1998; Maley, 2003). A man who did not earn an adequate *breadwinner* income was less likely to be partnered. Successful men were most likely to be in stable relationships or to repartner relatively quickly after a break-up. Over the ten years of their survey, the gulf between successful and unsuccessful men increased as the employment situation in Australia worsened (Birrell & Rapson, 1998).

One perspective on these statistics is that despite the overt sanctioning of *romantic love*, the marginalised *security* discourse is continuing to exert a covert presence in women's selection of partners. Another perspective gives consideration to the limited resources many hetero-men offer to relationship. For example, a man who limits his range of contribution to a traditional repertoire of resources such as breadwinner, lover, sportsman and stoic, offers little to the mutuality of the relationship if he loses his breadwinner position. By increasing his range of contribution he might be more attractive to women (Birrell Rapson, 1998). Additional contributions could well include equal initiative and skill in household help and child care, where women are likely to be contributing many unpaid hours over and above their paid work (Dempsey, 1997; Waite & Gallagher, 2000) and relationship enhancing intimate verbal communication (Steil, 1997; Waller, 2002).

For women nowadays, it is not marriage, but having a child which endangers their *security*. If a woman has children she will inevitably spend some time out of the workforce, even if only for basic maternity leave. Once back in the workforce she will probably work part-time for significant periods, be offered or accept less promotion, and generally earn less than if she were childfree (Maley, 2003; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). There is an increasing separation of marriage and parenting (Waller, 2002). This increasing separation is described by Lewis (2003) as a more profound shift than the separation of sex and marriage in the 1960s.

Women also have insufficient protection for their unpaid labour (Burgoyne, 2004; Dempsey, 1997). There is evidence that hours spent in unpaid housework negatively affect output and promotion at work. Single working women spend about 25 hours a week on housework. For married, childfree, working women that

increases by about 6 hours a week. For married women with children their second job of housework takes up a massive 37 hours per week (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). When women cut back on paid work to care for children and family they are gambling that their marriage will last. Although they may have invested in their husbands' careers, women only enjoy the benefits of men's higher earnings while the marriage lasts. The risks of divorce have changed married women's behaviour profoundly, so that they invest less in their husbands' careers and more in their own. They invest less in children by having fewer, or none at all (Dempsey, 1997; Lewis, 2003; Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

On the other hand women who don't have children risk very little by being married. A woman who marries and remains childfree is more likely to enjoy all the emotional, sexual, financial and physical advantages of marriage described in Chapter 1. In addition some women report benefit to their careers from their husbands' support, input or connections (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

2.8. The discourse of individualism

As described in section 2.3. of this chapter, the discourses of *romantic love* and *individualism* have a long historical association and each has enabled the ubiquity of the other. *Individualism* in particular is deeply embedded, and highly valued in western capitalist philosophies and social power relations (Foucault, 1982; Lewis, 2003; Maley, 2003).

In the field of relationships, *individualism* has supported the Euro-American assumption that the basic social unit is the nuclear family, **my** family, rather than the extended family of collective cultures. However there has also been a fundamental tension between *individualism* and *romantic love* when the desired outcome is a lasting, committed, family-making, relationship (Lewis, 2003). Allied with *romantic love*, *individualism* is as likely to produce passionate affairs, serial monogamy and short term cohabitation, as it is to produce a lasting, committed, family-making, relationship (Hacker, 2003; Lewis, 2003).

Disentangled from its long association with *romantic love* and linked instead with the *male sex drive*, or the *permissive* discourse, *individualism* enables all forms of uncommitted, unpartnered, and childfree relationships (Hacker, 2003; Hollway, 1984). The separation of many men from the traditional responsibilities of parenting and providing for their children and families is increasing and has been described as

Men's Liberation (Hacker, 2003; Waller, 2002). However stances that concentrate exclusively on individual autonomy and personal freedom to find expression and pleasure, at the expense of recognising bonds of mutual care and support identify only half the picture (Hollway, 2004). Missing is the freedom to enjoy the pleasure of profound, intimate and consummate love and relationship (Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Sternberg, 1988).

Alternatively, in a British study Roseneil (2003) found that the pain of breaking up a marriage or a cohabiting relationship may result in disillusionment about *romantic love*. Then rather than reinvesting in conventional coupled relationships, both men and women often consciously construct lifestyles that meet their needs for connection with others while preserving their individual autonomy and independence. Friendship networks are constructed for caring-support, intimacy and affection, without personal boundaries being infringed, and without the emotional risks involved in sexual/love relationships. These highly valued support-networks may be a combination of friends, children, family, a non-residential partner or an involved-father/friendly-ex. Roseneil suggests our intimate lives are being transformed as both women and men increasingly value individual self-fulfillment and independence.

2.9. The soul mate discourse

A more recent modification of the *romantic love* discourse is the seductive assumption that there is a 'right one', a *soul mate*, for everyone. The early collaborative constructions of this discourse appear to have occurred within the social structure of American mystical New Age spirituality: an amalgam of Eastern and Western spiritual-religious concepts, including reincarnation. In the texts produced by Edgar Cayce, an influential psychic in the first half of 20th century, reincarnation of souls was presumed to be a universal operational dynamic. *Soul mates* are assumed to meet repeatedly over many lives, to develop their relationships and learn from each other. Richard Bach, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, Thomas Moore and film actress Shirley Maclaine are popular American New Age writers who have elaborated the *soulmate* discourse since the 1970s (Braden, 1996; Moore, 1994). The expanded discourse includes constructions of a co-worker or karmic teacher who helps one achieve a life task, or learn an important lesson.

However, relevant to this study is the construction of the *soulmate* as a 'twin soul' or 'other half' who is destined or fated to reappear as one's life partner (Braden, 1996).

In my first readings of some popular constructions, the discourse appeared to be an American, commercialised, pseudo-spiritualisation of the *romantic love discourse*, offering passivity in mate selection and emotional intensity as the indicator of *happiness-ever-after* ... 'some day my prince will come' reconstructed as 'some day my soul mate will appear'. In this sense the *soul mate* construction first appeared to me to be a response to widespread disillusionment about *romantic love* which offers hopeful comfort that 'all is as it is meant to be', while maintaining the status quo.

There appears to be little academic analysis of the *soulmate* or *soul mate discourse* to date. Yet as an indication of how pervasive this discourse has become, my recent internet search on the Amazon.com website produced over 60,000 books, while a search on Google produced over 900,000 websites. Further perusal of some of the sites showed a range of modifications of the discourse being used. Some internet dating sites, including Christian sites, ignored the reincarnation assumptions and emphasised the *one true love* assumptions. Another recent modification is to offer a psychological perspective to those seeking their *soul mate*. Rather than being an esoteric abstraction, *soul mate* from the psychological perspective is constructed as two persons sharing many common traits. After opening in 2000, <http://www.eharmony.com> claims to be "the fastest growing relationship site on the web". It offers a combination of Christian principles and values, along with state-of-the-art matching on 29 psychologically researched factors for relationship resilience, all presented in a *soulmate discourse*. In their book *The Love Compatibility Book: The 12 Personality Traits That Can Lead You to Your Soulmate*, Hoffman & Weiner (2003) offer a step-by-step method for isolating personality traits significant in relationship compatibility. They suggest relationship success is more likely if there is commonality on four or more of the following traits: need for companionship, idealism, emotional intensity, spontaneity, libido, nurturance, materialism, extroversion, aestheticism, activity level, subjective well-being, and intellectualism. This approach encourages a more active, informed, responsible and conscious participation in mate selection than is enabled by the *romantic love* discourse. Another assumption of the discourse is *soul mates* may come into one's life promote new learning. Susie and Otto Collins (2001) state on their website: <http://www.soulmaterelationships.com> that *soulmates* come together to help each other to heal, learn and grow in 'Conscious Relationship', rather than to 'live happily ever after' as in the *romantic love* discourse.

Now, after more considered readings of *soul mates* texts, I think the discourse may have the potential to be powerfully subversive of *romantic love* by enhancing the learning and emotional-work assumptions of the *intimacy discourse*. Whereas *romantic love* cannot tell the story of a marriage/relationship (Shumway, 2003) perhaps an alliance of *soul mates* and *intimacy* would be able to accomplish that in dramatic and interesting ways.

2.10. Summary

In social constructionist approaches language is viewed as the organising principle in the process of construction of ourselves and our social world. Human beings use language actively and performatively to achieve desired social effects: to self enhance and to gain acceptance for our point of view. Language also has a dynamic, public role in constructing discourses, or ways of specifying knowledge and the accepted 'truth' of any historical or social time and context.

Through a review of the literature, five discourses have been identified as particularly relevant to the research questions for this study. The marginalised discourse of *security*, the dominant discourses of *romantic love* and *individualism*, and the counter discourses of *intimacy* and *soul mate* are commonly employed in constructing the range of available positions in the contemporary relationship field.

The *discourse of security* has a long history. It was clearly the dominant, relationship discourse in Europe, prior to the eighteenth century and it continues to be the dominant discourse in collective cultures. Although currently marginalised in the relationship fields of Euro-centric cultures, the effect of *security* continues to be noticeable in privileging higher-income men over low-income men in their access to positions in relationship. In addition, the effects of the *security discourse* are noticeable in further privileging partnered men over their female partners in the unequal distribution of unpaid work in the home.

In conjunction with the construction of capitalist discourse, *romantic love* and *individualism* challenged the dominance of the *security discourse* through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until they became established as the dominant discourses in western societies in the twentieth century. Both prioritise the individual's right to seek personal pleasure and happiness over responsibilities to family and children. Through the fiction of Euro-centric cultures, *romantic love* promises happy-ever-after relationship outcomes, once 'the true love' has been

found. Yet the alliance of *romantic love* and *individualism* is seriously deficient in constructing how this could happen in a sustained marriage.

Intimacy and *soul mates* are late twentieth counter-discourses currently being constructed and modified to address the marriage crisis of the past four decades. As such they are competing for dominance with the *romantic/individualism* discursive alliance. Both discourses emphasise assumptions of commitment, learning, relationship-work and depth of communication, to maintain marriage when the initial intensity of passionate attraction fades. Both also are being modified to enable informed partner-selection by matching on the psychological dimensions most likely to produce resilient relationships.

The range of contrasting, and at times contradictory positions offered by the discourses of *security*, *romance*, *intimacy*, *individualism* and *soul mates* is likely to be confusing. On the other hand, the choice of so many positions may enable singles to be prepared for all eventualities by having self-protective, fallback-positions available should they lose their footing in their preferred, goal-achieving position (Waller; 2002). In the following chapters analysis of the texts produced from taped interviews will reveal how the thirteen participants in this research project, slip and slide through the contemporary field of relationships, accepting and rejecting from the many discursive positions on offer.

Chapter 3: Research method

A challenging & interactive process

How should we deal with the fact that our accounts of how people's language use is constructed are themselves constructions?

(Potter & Wetherell, 1987)

This chapter describes the planning of a qualitative discourse analysis project with theoretical cohesion in order to produce texts for analysis. Juxtaposed is the process of enacting that research plan with a multi-served researcher and participants, either gratifyingly present or frustratingly absent.

3.1. Recruiting participants & obtaining informed consent

After gaining approval for the project from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, the next step was to find participants willing to be interviewed. In planning the project I intended to have 16 participants in all, with equal numbers of men and women. As described in Chapter 1.2. participants were to be single, heterosexual, childless/childfree, between 30 and 40 years of age, and New Zealand citizens or long term residents. The latter requirement was to ensure that cultural, educational and socio-economic diversity was embedded in New Zealand society and not transient. However, because of the small participant population, those belonging to minority or subgroups were not considered to be representative of those special groups. Therefore they have not been identified in the results or discussion, as belonging to those groups.

I approached the local newspaper hoping for a free or low cost notice. The response was enthusiastic and a meeting with an interested reporter resulted in a half page story (Jellard, 2003). All of the eight women participants and two of the men were recruited directly through this article, and a third man was recruited indirectly, through networking by one of the women.

All contacts who expressed interest were sent an Information Sheet explaining the interview procedure and the ethical protections of consent, confidentiality and anonymity (See Appendix B). Potential participants were sent a Consent Form (See Appendix C), to sign and return to the researcher if they agreed to participate in the study. A stamped addressed envelope for that purpose was also included in the package.

Participants were asked to meet the researcher at the designated venue. Each was given either a \$10 petrol voucher, or a \$10 note, according to their preference, to cover their travel costs. A counselling room at a counselling centre was chosen for its privacy, quietness and balance of professional and comfortable ambiance. Participants were asked to allow two hours to cover time to arrive and settle-in, for the interview and debriefing. Participants all had the option of a half hour debriefing time after the audio recording equipment was turned off, during which any concerns and questions arising from the interview were addressed with the researcher.

All the women who received the information package returned the Consent Form promptly and made an appointment over the phone when I rang them, and all but one kept the appointment without any problem. One woman forgot her appointment time, but rescheduled when I rang her and kept the next appointment. In short, the interviews with the eight women were accomplished efficiently and with an economy of effort on my part. Of the five men who participated, four asked to be rung again to be reminded nearer their appointment time, after having made the initial appointment over the phone. Normally I do not agree to do this for counselling clients¹, but because of my increasing slippage into a position of 'desperation' about engaging men in interviews I complied with these requests, and rang each of the four men again closer to the appointment time. Most of them asked a number of questions about the interview, particularly about what questions they would be asked. My assessment of the overall feeling of these additional conversations was of the men needing reassurance. In short the process of involving the five men in the project took far more time and energy than involving the eight women.

Many friends, colleagues, neighbours, family and participants who had already been interviewed knew of single men in their circle of contacts who fitted the criteria, so in all about 20 information packages were passed on to potential participants this way. This

¹ Ringing the day before an appointment is a service some counsellors and other professionals, such as dentists offer, but such calls are typically made by an office assistant.

networking, which I considered to be well targeted, led to only one more male participant being recruited. One explanation which was fed back to me was: He says he's too shy.

Finding the full number of men was proving to be more difficult than I had anticipated. I next made up a poster and arranged for about 15 copies to be displayed on the notice boards of the North Shore City public libraries, several community houses, supermarkets and university notice boards (See Appendix D). One man was recruited from responding to a library poster, and one from a university poster.

Due to my difficulty in finding eight male participants, I extended the age limit when two of these male volunteers turned out to be 42 and 43 years of age. I considered this flexibility was acceptable because there is general agreement in the literature on mating preferences that in most cultures there continues to be a preference for men to be at least a year or two older than women (Buss, 1994). Therefore I considered the texts derived from these two older participants would be compatible with this research project, rather than deviant in the sense of being in a different life stage with different goals and expectations for their lives (Potter, 1996).

A number of information packs were sent out to men who had agreed by phone to participate, but who did not in fact return the consent form. I tried changing my strategy, thinking that perhaps in male business practice a follow-up phone call was expected. When one volunteer who had rung in response to a poster and agreed to participate, had not returned his consent form after two weeks, I rang him. However when I asked to speak to him, I was kept waiting. Then loud laughter broke out in the background and eventually I was told he could not come to the phone. By this stage, as well as being desperate, I was positioning myself as deficient as a researcher and designer of the project, so that was the only follow-up call I made.

One of the consent forms which was returned, arrived in a sealed plastic bag covered in official-type stickers. It had apparently been held at the NZPost Security Department for three weeks, for forensic testing, because of a noticeable amount of blood on the envelope. It all began to feel rather bizarre and outside my comfort zone.

A sixth male participant did keep an appointment after explaining over the phone he would arrive cross-dressed. As the interview progressed I realised his understanding of the

purpose of the interview as research was so minimal that I could not ethically consider his signing of the form indicated informed consent. He appeared to be hoping I would assist him in finding a female partner who would accept his cross-dressing. I did not include the audio tape from this interview in my analysis, in consideration of my aim to elaborate regular patterns of discourse and practice within the discursive field occupied by my chosen population (Potter, 1996).

I was certainly taking the difficulty of finding male participants very personally. After all there are a number of books, several of them New Zealand books, based on interviews with men talking about their lives (Gray, 1983; Smith, 1990). However, when I read: *Men talk: Stories in the making of masculinities* (Coates, 2003), I realised that in asking men to talk about their 'experiences of love and relationships', I was possibly asking men to participate in an activity which was on the margins of their accepted cultural practice. In her analysis of conversations involving men, Coates found first that men rarely discuss women, (except in an objectivised way as 'hot' or not), second they rarely discuss feelings, and third, they rarely tell stories of failure and loss. In contrast, in their cultural practice women talk about men a lot, tell each other stories of loss and failure and share their feelings of joy or pain (Coates, 1996, 2003). Perhaps one of my female participants pinpointed my difficulty when she said:

F2: I guess a lot of guys think love is 'girly' . . . and it's not a real thing . . . it's not a real thing like oxygen that you need, but I think you do... I think a lot of men are put off by the thought of it. You know, you go to a movie and the mooshy stuff comes on, and they groan or they don't want to watch. It's so pathetic.

With these perspectives I stopped constructing the reluctance of men to participate as deficiency in myself, and understood their need for reassuring attention before the interviews. After all I was not asking them to participate in general interviews about 'their lives' or about 'what it means to be a man in New Zealand' as other interviewers had done (Gray, 1983; Smith, 1990). I was asking them to talk about **love**. Gwendoline Smith described finding her male interview subjects by going to pubs, inviting selected men to participate, and giving them her name and phone number. In mentally rehearsing adapting this option to my project, by saying, I want to record an hour long interview with you talking about love and relationships, I realised the risk of triggering power-relations in sexual discourses was too great. When the Massey University Human Ethics Committee

required me to consider researcher safety, I took the matter lightly. I assured the committee, and myself, of my confidence and experience in managing interviews, but I did not seriously consider that engaging male participants in the project would be problematic.

However this shift in my position to one of appreciating a resistance in male cultural practice to talking about love and relationship, came too late to enable me to devise a strategy for producing more men who were willing to be interviewed. I had expected and planned for difference in the discursing practices of women and men, but I had not anticipated that the difference might be so radical as to exclude male participants. Grateful as I was to the women for their very frank interviews, a major point of the research project as I had conceived it was to find out about male voices and male positioning in the relationship field.

Time became an issue, and with stress, health and work concerns impinging on my life I seriously considered giving up. With support and encouragement from my supervisor to persist, I settled for final numbers of, eight single women, aged between 30 and 40 years, and five single men, aged between 30 and 43 years. However the experience of encountering this marked gendered difference so early in the project made salient for me the importance of making even a small contribution to its ongoing explication.

3.2. Interviewing participants and the production of texts

Although so much effort went into finding participants, in social constructionist research, texts are the object of study, rather than persons. Anything which human beings imbue with social meaning can be 'read' and analysed as text, from paintings to clothing (Burr, 1995). I was aware of texts which appear occasionally in a range of media about 'the new career girl' or 'the new liberated man'. My perception of such texts is that they oversimplify these new social positions. The major contribution of these texts is that they reconstruct old positions like 'spinster' with enhanced social value. Yet when juxtaposed with my understandings gained from counselling-clients in this demographic group, such texts do not explicate the complexity of the dilemmas faced by mature singles. Therefore I chose to generate new texts for analysis.

A semi-structured interview is frequently used as a strategy for gathering talk and producing texts. As I considered that I was experienced, confident and competent in one-on-one professional situations, I chose to generate texts for analysis through this method. In a semi-structured-interview the researcher prepares a set of questions to focus the interviewees' attention on the themes which are the interest of the research project. While a few questions may be closed and designed to elicit specific information, most of the questions are open-ended and designed to encourage interviewees to range over the topic and reveal subject positioning (Potter, 1996). For the Interview Schedule, see Appendix A.

Other researchers have described a process of adhering closely to the interview questions initially. Then, as researcher-confidence grows and some lines of inquiry founder, while other lines of inquiry open up, researchers describe becoming more flexible in ranging over the discursive field (Waller, 2002). This was my experience as well. In this way the resulting texts are co-constructed with the participants and a number of the themes and discourses which emerged quite strongly, such as *desperation* and *soul mates*, were introduced by the earlier participants. These themes then became part of my questioning in later interviews, although I did not formally add them to my printed Interview Schedule.

The interviews were audio taped. Any initially intrusive effects of recording the interview were easily minimised by allowing a warming up, conversational period to acclimatise and relax participants after turning on the equipment, and before introducing the research themes (Potter, 1996). This was not a difficulty at all, because I think people are very familiar with recording equipment and technology these days. The very personal information, and perhaps less socially admirable information, did not emerge till later in the interviews. However I consider that was more a function of the interactive process of building trust, than of the technology.

As unpredictable dilemmas are likely to arise during the course of such an interview, researchers are advised to have clear, rehearsed, procedural and ethical guidelines for managing the unexpected (King, 1996). I tested the recording equipment (almost obsessively) before each participant arrived, and no problems occurred in this area. A box of tissues and a glass of water were ready beside the participant's chair, and a toilet was readily accessible, and these were used frequently. Several times I noticed, after participants returned from a toilet break, having had some reflective time, they talked even more freely and personally.

While a research interview has different aims from a counselling interview, basic counselling skills are required to develop enough trust for interviewees to share personal values, experiences and intra-psychic processes with a stranger. The fundamentals of counselling skills, first described by Carl Rogers (1951), are warmth; empathy rather than sympathy; genuineness; giving the interviewee positive regard; employing active listening skills with comfortable, attentive eye contact, facial expression, body language and auditory affirmation (King, 1996). The interviewer needs to be alert to the power of non-verbal communication to influence the participant's responses, either to encourage elaboration of experiences or perspectives, or to silence. Even subtle responses such as raised eyebrows, may be interpreted by the interviewee as endorsement or as disapproval (King, 1996; Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1996). The interviewer also needs to be alert to the psychodynamic processes which may occur during the interview, especially transference from the interviewee to the researcher and counter transference from the researcher to the interviewee, of parenting, authority and enmeshment issues. Clear boundary setting, honesty and a debriefing review of the interview are important here (King, 1996).

These are areas in which I am trained, so I assessed myself to be competent enough to take on interviewing for research. However, when, during an after-work appointment, my first male participant talked about his survival strategy after coming out of prison for the third time, the building suddenly felt very empty. I resisted the impulse to ask what he had gone to prison for, remembering there is a social code in prison circles not to ask if the information is not offered. I also thought it was not information relevant to my research questions and therefore it was preferable not to risk frightening and distracting myself from conducting the interview. Instead I chose to check out and be reassured by his eye contact and body language which was task-focused, appropriate and not threatening.

When in the later stage of the interview he described going home from the pub with solo mothers and staying on without sharing costs ... justified because solo mothers are 'damaged goods' ... my interviewing skills were tested. What was going on 'behind the face' and 'between the ears' (Harré, 1996) was a turmoil of reactions from years of poverty, solo mothering and experience of gendered dominance and control practices, as well as my feminist positioning. Amongst the internal turmoil, the thought, 'This is fantastic research material to be catching on tape', enabled me to keep my footing as a researcher.

As he was leaving I wished him well in my normal way and he beamed and said, Oh, you women...as though he had charmed another one...I think he went home lighter, as though from a confessional... and I went home profoundly exhausted and had an early night.

One learning from this experience is that, although in counselling I frequently hear extreme stories of what human beings do to other human beings, counselling clients attend because they have decided to seek help to make a change. This enables me to occupy an active position of skilled professional helper, with thoughts such as: We agree this is not good, so what can we do about it? However in the research situation, there is no agreement to be a change agent. I was caught unprepared, in that I could not occupy my familiar pro-active position. Yet I was actively resisting slipping into an available passive position, which had produced burnout early in my career, of: 'This is terrible and it shouldn't be happening'. After this experience with M1, no matter what I heard, I was far more prepared to keep my footing in the researcher position with: It's a privilege to be positioned so that I can capture this particular perspective in text.

3.3. Researcher bias and reflexivity

Whereas in empirical research design, researcher input is traditionally reduced to a minimum, and verbal instructions are standardised in order to eliminate bias, in qualitative research there is an integral relationship between the researcher and the research, so reflexivity is required (King, 1996). A discourse analysis interview usually takes 60-90 minutes and is free flowing and interactive between interviewer and interviewee. A different interaction might be produced by another interviewer or by the different contextual influences of another day, resulting in the production of a different discussion and text (Reissman, 1993).

Therefore in discourse analysis, investigator-influence is articulated as an intrinsic part of both the collection process and of the rich, contextually, situated data which results. Researchers are required to declare their relevant history and values, as well as specific interactions which affect the discursive direction of the interview (King, 1996; Reissman, 1993). However, while for the interviewee anonymity is assured, personal information about the researcher becomes public. Therefore King recommends that the guideline for checking the appropriateness of reflexive sharing is: to what extent will the personal information expand understanding in the research area (King, 1996).

Certainly I find reflexivity dilemmatic with a number of themes to consider and balance. Am I being self indulgent in talking about myself? Am I engaging inappropriately in female cultural practice by sharing personal, sad stories from the past (Coates, 1996) which, in an academic or professional context might be interpreted as incompetence or personal instability? Perhaps it would be more skilful to employ language to self enhance, in the hope of achieving a 'warranted voice' (Gergen, 1989).

However, returning to the guideline set by King (1996), I consider my reflexive sharing in Chapter 1, demonstrates the way in which I have come to understand my life and relationship experience in terms of discourse. That understanding in turn enables me to listen, anticipate and inquire into the discursive resources and practices of others, and to have some awareness of those I resist, or don't have access to because of my life experience. With specific knowledge of my resistance to, or lack of access to discursive resources, I am enabled to construct more appropriate choices for myself. For instance, in the example above, I was able to discursively construct a 'researcher' position in order to stay present to information which was simultaneously being resisted by my feminist, impoverished solo mother and counsellor positions within my multi-faceted 'self'.

In doing reflexivity for this Chapter 3, I have been guided by the consideration that a possible future audience for this text could be fledgling researchers like myself. There is ample warning in the theoretical literature, about being prepared for the 'inevitability of the unpredictable'. Such warning does not necessarily indicate how that might be accomplished. An anecdotal narrative, such as the 'damaged goods' story above, might be instructive about how to discursively manage resisted text, in order that the function of research might be accomplished in practice

3.4. Power relations and professional boundaries

Another area which needs careful consideration is the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, because of the issues of power, trust, autonomy and responsibility. Here Estelle King (1996) recommends the interviewer/interviewee relationship is considered to be a professional one in which both participants are involved to serve the research. She suggests striving for a balanced, reciprocal, exchange relationship in which the sharing of information and knowledge makes participation worthwhile. In exchange for sharing information, the interviewee stands to gain: new information and feedback, opportunities to

make a valued contribution to the larger picture, to reflect on past experiences and enhance current understandings. The interviewer needs to respect the interviewee and be sensitive to their life relationships and commitments outside the interview (King, 1996). It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure this experience/event clearly does not serve the purposes of a personal relationship. In a wide ranging discussion of the issues of power relations which can arise, King discusses the extent to which the professional status of the interviewer is played up or down. The participant needs to feel safe in investing trust in someone who is knowledgeable and competent, but also needs to feel s/he is valued and respected for the knowledge s/he is contributing. On the other hand, in an hour of focused, and at times, affect-laden sharing some slip-ups are likely to occur, so an open stance in which the interviewer is positioned as fallible and human assists in recovery. This needs careful thought because however the interviewer positions herself will make a lasting impression (King, 1996).

The debriefing half hour after the recording equipment was switched off, was a useful and essential time for completing the interview. In at least one case recording was terminated because the participant had broken down in tears, so a major function of this, and other debriefing periods, was stabilising emotions before participants went out the door and back to their lives. A number of participants had shared vulnerable information about themselves of which they were not particularly proud, so it was important to affirm these participants for their honesty and reassure them of the usefulness, as well as confidentiality, of their contribution. It was important to say goodbye in such a way that there was not an expectation of future contact.

None of the women contacted me after the interview. However two of the men contacted me by email to add to issues that had been discussed in the interview. In the counselling situation if this occurs it is possible to suggest another session, or to refer on. A possible difficulty in establishing closure in the debriefing session was that each participant was asked if s/he wanted to receive a summary of the results. This may have suggested an opening that further input was possible. Another possibility was that sharing more personal information about themselves than they normally share, may have triggered a similar vulnerability to that which needed reassurance before the interview. Sattell (1983) described persistent input from male participants after taping couples talking, which she interpreted as an issue of power and a need to control. Whatever the reason, it was not a serious problem. An email in response thanking them for participating, acknowledging

their concerns and suggesting professional sites to follow-up appeared to complete the relationship.

3.5. Validity and reliability in discourse analysis

The traditional empiricist approaches to statistically establishing validity and reliability are not workable in discourse analysis, yet the two concepts remain important in social epistemology (Morawski, 1997). Jonathan Potter (1996) discusses four important considerations, in order to show that validity and reliability checks and balances are inherent in discourse analysis. Those four considerations are: deviant case analysis, participant's understanding, coherence, and reader's evaluation. He explains that while the general aim is to elaborate regular patterns of discourse and practice, the explication of **deviant** participant positioning serves to highlight and confirm the dominant pattern. Paying close attention to **participant's responses**, during the analysis process, especially in conversational texts, provides another check.

Examples from this research project would be participants M1 and M6. While my immediate consideration when M1 shared he had recently completed a third prison term, was that he might have a different agenda for the meeting from mine, all the minimal cues of eye contact and body language were in no way threatening. His verbal contributions indicated he had an understanding of the project and the purposes of research. Lack of money was an important issue for him and he had constructed participating in the research as a free opportunity to possibly add to his personal resources in his attempt to reconstruct his life. On the other hand, with M6, all the minimal cues of body language, plus the content of his verbal contribution indicated that he did not understand the research purposes of the interview. He had come to the interview hoping to be helped to find a partner. Also in juxtaposition, his contribution highlighted that all the other participants had understood the primary purpose of the project and had contributed appropriately.

Generally qualitative work is conducted with small groups, so **coherence** or validity is confirmed through a cumulative effect of building on the insights of earlier work. As extensive excerpts of the textual data are presented in the analysis, **readers evaluate** the researchers' interpretations from their own range of competencies. In addition it is suggested that research which does not meet these criteria tends to be ignored, while projects incorporating these interactive components are likely to stand and be built on.

This building-on process can provide a rich source of material for quantitative research as well (Potter, 1996). This principle of 'building-on' within qualitative research and between quantitative and qualitative research appealed to me and provides a justification for presenting such an extensive survey of statistical information in Chapter 1, when this is intended to be a qualitative research project.

3.6. Procedures for processing data

The raw data consisted of the audiotape recordings collected in the individual interviews. The thirteen resulting audiotapes were transcribed by the researcher and the resulting transcripts constituted the sample of data for discourse analysis. Participants were identified by code numbers on the tape label, in the transcriptions and in this thesis. The same coding system will be used in any further publications. No names, pseudonyms or identifying features will appear in any reports or publications which result from this research project.

Audiotapes were stored in a secure cabinet during the transcription, analysis and writing up processes. They were erased when the research project was completed. Audiotapes and transcripts were accessible to the researcher and her supervisor. Participants had access to their own transcript if they initiated a request to do so. No participants made such a request.

As part of the debriefing participants were offered the opportunity to ask for further information at the optional debriefing session. Participants were each offered a summary of the research findings at the completion of the research project. All expressed interest in receiving a copy of the summary. Written, signed confirmation of audiotape deletion accompanied the summary of research findings which was sent out to participants.

Theorist/practitioners in the field all agree the processing of discursive data is labour-intensive and time-consuming, and needs to proceed in orderly steps, none of which can be skimmed over. Michael Billig (1998) emphasises the importance of multiple and active listenings to the many hours of recorded data while it is still in auditory form, in order to become saturated with the discursive data enriched as it is at this stage by vocal tone and emphasis (Billig, 1998; Gill, 1996; Potter, 1996; Tuffin & Howard, 2001). At a minimum as

the researcher, I heard the original interview, then listened to it again while typing the transcript, which took many hours. Further listenings occurred while checking the transcriptions for accuracy.

During this stage Potter (1996) recommends incorporating the standard transcription markings developed for conversation analysis, to highlight significant non-verbal emphasising by tone and/or timing. During these active listenings the researcher is advised to be alert not only for evidence of expected themes, but also the unexpected and counter-indicated themes (Tuffin & Howard, 2001). Also as advised the audio-tapes were kept available, and frequently used for additional cross-checking of themes as the analysis proceeded (Potter, 1996). Some participants spoke slowly and clearly and this eased the process of transcription, but other participants spoke rapidly, or mumbled the end of sentences and this made transcription very difficult, frustrating and time consuming (Gill, 1996; Potter, 1996; Billig, 1998).

The recommended procedures were clearly to read and re-read the transcriptions/data while looking for interesting features and developing intuitive hunches, next to index the transcriptions for themes and discursive features, and then to categorise and code relevant pieces of text (Tuffin & Howard, 2001). I began with the tape-transcript for F2. As the main discourse she employed in her interview was the *romantic love discourse*, the resulting text was closest to my expectations and to my reading of the literature at that stage. While checking the text on the computer screen against the tape for accuracy, I found myself dragging over sections of text that were clearly manifestations of the *romantic love discourse*, then saving those sections in red so they would stand out when I returned. It wasn't long before some other discourses stood out and I saved them in other colours. I was simply playing with possibilities at this stage, but a basic colour-code developed. I followed through with this code on the next on-screen transcript and developed it further with additional colours for other discourses.

As the first few on-screen transcripts became more colour-filled, like coloured maps, the black sections became salient, leading to the question, What's going on here? These were the areas which were harder to categorise, often because they were unexpected. This led to considerable re-thinking, reading new areas of the literature and adding further lines of questioning to the later interviews. The *soulmates and individualism discourses* showed up unexpectedly in this way, as did the themes of pain and desperation.

As the colour-coding proceeded the next step emerged: copying and pasting same-colour sections into new files for analysis. Preliminary written versions of the analysis required continual critiquing, reorganising and redrafting. Remaining flexible was important as some of my expectations of discoursing and subject positioning, offered accepted and refused were not realised. Instead the discursive resources and positioning employed by participants emerged in some unexpected and surprising ways (Billig, 1998; Gill, 1996; Tuffin & Howard, 2001), which are elaborated in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

As well as influencing the data collection process, Catherine Reissman (1993) describes how the investigator can influence the process of analysis, either by interpreting the story for the readers, so as to eliminate ambiguity and variation, or by allowing the story to emerge from an ambiguous process of social interaction. Again appropriate researcher reflexivity is required and this is elaborated in the following chapters.

Theorised variations of conversation, narrative and rhetoric have produced different, but overlapping epistemologies and each makes a contribution to high quality discourse analysis (Potter, 1996). From conversation analysis comes understanding of the importance of detail and the sequential organisation of discursive interaction, while rhetorical analysis highlights the relationship between opposing argumentative and persuasive positions, and narrative analysis investigates the contribution of explicit and implicit story telling and anecdote in discursive positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; Gill, 1996; Morgan & Coombes, 2001; Potter, 1996; Reissman, 1993).

3.7. A summary of the ethical considerations

Informed consent: Participants were all volunteers who responded to distributed information sheets, advertising or networking. An **Information Sheet** was made available to prospective participants and an opportunity was provided to have any questions answered, after which a **Consent Form** was signed. Before interviewees consented to participate they were fully informed as to: (a) the nature and purpose of the interview and the research, (b) the procedures being employed, (c) the uses to which the data and research will be put and to whom it will be available, and (d) the content of the research (MUHEC, 2003; NZPsS, 2002).

Confidentiality and anonymity: Research participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in subsequent reports of the interviews. Occasionally during the interviews the participants' first names were used to assist in minimising the power differential, developing trust and enhancing the production of enriched dialogue. In order to achieve confidentiality and anonymity, names were replaced by code numbers and any identifying features were modified as the tapes were transcribed into texts. Codes were made up of an M or F (male/female), and a number indicating chronological order of being interviewed. (MUHEC, 2003; NZPsS, 2002).

Potential Harm to Participants: As the dynamics of power, trust, autonomy and responsibility permeate the interviewer/interviewee relationship, the researcher/interviewer assumed full responsibility for establishing a professional relationship which was not personal or exploitative. For interviewees the in-depth nature of an hour long interview can be experienced as intrusive. This risk was covered by explaining the opt-out clause: that participants were not obliged to answer all the questions and could terminate the interview if they wanted to. In addition the optional half hour debriefing was available after the interview to discuss any concerns that might have been triggered and to ensure participants were all emotionally stable before they left the interview room (MUHEC, 2003; NZPsS, 2002).

Conflict of Interest/Conflict of Roles: As discussed above my awareness grew of the difference between the discursive positioning of researcher and counsellor and how this creates the possibility of a conflict of interest. A counselling role requires intervention towards influencing change. In research the researcher is required to: either minimise influence, to be aware of and declare influence, or to factor researcher-influence into the study. Positioned as a researcher I mostly tried to practice active listening and to minimise influence during the interviews (MUHEC, 2003; NZPsS, 2002).

Cultural concerns: Codes of Ethics relevant to psychological research in New Zealand require researchers to be aware of New Zealand's commitment to biculturalism as established in the Treaty of Waitangi, as well as to be sensitive to other cultural groups and the increasing social diversity in New Zealand (MUHEC, 2003; NZPsS, 2002). This study is not specifically aimed at explicating relationship discourses available to Maori, or members of other cultural groups. The small numbers would also limit the possibility of

generalising on cultural grounds. I maintained a preparedness to adapt interview protocols to acknowledge and respect whanau, at the request of any Maori men and women who volunteered to participate in this study. Although two Maori men participated in the study, no such requests were made.

The possibility of multi-cultural diversity is implicit, though also constrained by the requirement to be New Zealand citizens, or long term residents. This constraint excludes transient persons with prior commitment to another country or culture, and attempts to ensure that any cultural diversity occurring in the study is embedded in multi-cultural, heterosexual relationship possibilities in New Zealand.

As this particular research project is narrowly focused on single, heterosexuals in their fourth decade, by definition the diversity of lesbian and gay relationships is excluded and age is also constrained. While dramatic changes have also occurred since the 1960s, in the ways lesbian and gay relationships are socially constructed and practised, as elaborated in chapters one and two, the particular focus of interest for this project is how hetero-sexual women and men are positioning themselves in relationship to each other. That will be further elaborated in the following chapter with the analysis of the texts produced as described in this chapter.

PART II

Analysis of texts

Chapter 4

Chapter 4: To risk or self protect Dilemmas in the construction of relationship goals

The relational bond takes on a life of its own, becoming the 'we' or the 'us' that holds us in its thrall ... This 'we' is also a commitment that is full of risks. By entering into this frame, one is daring the loss of self in a relational gamble.

(Mary Gergen, 2003)

4.1. Introduction

As the point of entry into this analysis section of the thesis, Chapter 4 addresses the first research question: What are the relationship goals, in terms of their construction and function, for men and women in this demographic group? Identification of goals establishes the guidelines from which Chapters 5 and 6 will address the other three research questions about the availability and functionality of the dominant and counter discourses and interpretative repertoires available to this demographic group.

An ubiquitous narrative constructs societal expectations for the goals and sequencing of our lives: a child is born; develops into adulthood in the care of loving parents; falls in love and marries. The young couple give birth to children and so on. Diverse plots emerge as people craft alternative goals in relation to that conventional story. As the story assumes heterosexual men and women in their fourth decade are partnered and engaged in parenting, my population of interest are all contrarily positioned in relation to socially-valued expectations (Reissman, 1993).

To explicate that contrary positioning, this chapter investigates the diversity and fluidity of the goals mature singles construct in order that the dominant story need not be taken for granted. It explicates how language is deployed to self enhance throughout the process of reassessing and resetting goals as they struggle to direct the plot lines of their lives towards their favoured outcomes. Particular attention is given to how language is deployed to ease the binary tension implicit in decisions over whether to opt for active or passive goal-achieving strategies.

At the time of the interview more than half of the participants had varying degrees of emotional involvement with a particular person: entangled with a married lover, separating from a former partner, or forming a new relationship. However, at that particular time all the participants considered themselves to be single. Twelve of the thirteen had already experienced significant heterosexual relationships which ranged in duration from a few months cohabiting, to 6, 11 and 15 years.

4.2. Relationship goals

Despite the deviations in the plots of their lives, all participants aligned themselves with the story by stating a preference for being located within a fulfilling relationship in the future. In contrast only four of the eight women and two of the five men identified parenting as one of their goals. Several, especially the four women who wanted children, preferred the full conventional story. Both F4 and F7 expressed disappointment that the story had not 'happened' as expected. From this passive viewpoint they were accepting the single/childless position reluctantly, for now:

F4: I want a long term relationship, not necessarily marriage ...with children ...I guess I'm a bit disappointed ...I know it's possible for me to have a satisfying relationship ... and I guess I'm a bit disappointed that **it hasn't happened** to this point in time ...

F7: ... I would love to have been married by my mid-twenties, because I left school with that, OK, I'm going to university, I'm going to get married, life's going to be fine ... but **it didn't happen** that way ...

Some participants were not actively looking for a partner for a variety of reasons: recovering from a painful relationship breakup or another personal crisis, being focused on career, study or finances all entailed accepting being single now:

M4: I'm on the rebound having only two months ago been dumped... to be honest, what I'm looking for now is a fling and some fun... in the long term though... **I don't want to be alone**

F8: I am really looking to spend the rest of my life with somebody, but at the moment I seem to be bogged down careerwise and various other things ...but I'd imagine that in maybe a year's time I'd be more open to having a long term relationship.

After a mental health crisis M5 had been immersed in psychotherapeutic discourse through a lengthy recovery programme. He then pursued tertiary study to improve his 'breadwinner' possibilities:

M5: I know now I can talk things out... that any problems can be sorted out. I know I'm loyal...I've shied away from having a relationship. I've been shy about approaching a woman. Now I'm not. I think **within a year I will be in a relationship**...

As F7's preferred goal of being married in her 20s had not happened, she set a new goal of postgraduate study which then became her immediate priority:

F7: I do want a long term partner, but I'm not actively looking at the moment ... with my study I am too busy to have a relationship right now.

Sometimes participants had questioned the conventional sequencing of the story and prioritised other goals. Although her early 20s was the median age for a woman to be married during the 1950s to the 1970s, F8 exemplified the trend of recent decades towards a later median age, when she considered her early 20s to be too early to foreclose on other goals (StatisticsNZ, 2003):

F8: I've been out with guys that wanted to get married and have kids and I was only in my early 20s ...and I thought well, I'm not even sure I want to do that...and I certainly don't want to do it now... I haven't been on my OE yet.

Sometimes the person seemed to be right but the timing was wrong:

F8: When I was in my late 20s, I had a really good relationship for a year. I'd just come back from my OE and was planning to settle down and he was the opposite. He'd lived quite a settled life and wanted me to go around the world with him for three years. So certain relationships would have worked out only **the timing was wrong**.

F3: Well there was chemistry and he really did love me but **the timing wasn't right.**

Although he was one of the two men who acknowledged a goal of parenting children, M2 had left a six year marriage several years before the interview because the time was not right for him:

M2: I've done the marriage thing. I've been in that situation ... and it wasn't her fault, again, there was nothing wrong with her as a person, or as a lover, or as a friend ... everything was fine ... but she wanted to have the kids and I just couldn't give her what she wanted at that time.

However for a variety of reasons, some of the participants, like M1, F2 and F6 below, viewed finding a partner as an immediate concern:

M1: **Always looking**, yeah ... Overall I think I'd be better off in a relationship or a partnership. I know I'd find life a lot more easy going.

F2: That really is **my ultimate goal** to feel that [in love feeling] ... So that's why I'm single because I want to be free to find that again.

F6: ... I didn't want to settle down early. I had no interest until quite recently, probably just in the last maybe four years I've been thinking, 'Yeah I would like to be settled down'. So it's quite a new feeling ... Although I wanted maybe longer term or more stable relationships earlier, I didn't want to get married or have children or anything, whereas **now I would.**

Yet all of the participants had experienced, or observed in others, the potential in relationships for discomfort, abuse, and the pain of breaking up. As a consequence none of the participants wanted to risk relationship at any cost. F5 had left a six year marriage which began idyllically but became controlling and abusive:

F5: At the moment actually **I would prefer to be on my own rather than just fall into any relationship** where I am not a hundred percent happy. I wouldn't have said that a couple of years ago, but I suppose as you get older you get wiser... I really don't want to do something for the sake of doing it...

Now 'older and wiser' they were more cautious in their risk-taking and concerned to learn from their experience. A common strategy was to define and look for 'the right person' in the hope of reducing the risk of pain in the future:

F7: I would like to get married in the next two to three years but in saying that I would rather wait for the right person to come along, so... I would rather take it slowly...

F3: I actually felt a bit sad but maybe it was feeling a bit sorry for myself because it would be nice to find that right person...

The List: In order to recognise the elusive 'right person' each participant had given thought to the construction of a list of preferred or essential criteria a potential partner would need to exhibit. While most had not gone so far as to write down their lists, they were readily able to itemise their important criteria which they had derived from their interpretations of past experiences. F3 had felt dominated and put down during a 4-5 year marriage, so being treated with caring and respect was an important item on her list:

F3: I want someone who is my equal [ie] who treats people the way I do myself... is **caring and treats you with respect** ... but also not a doormat ... someone who can stand up for themselves, and thinks about the other person as well.

F1: Their interests were just so below average...they might play tennis but there was nothing intellectual about them ... they had no understanding of anything really deep and...I found out in the end... I would rather have **someone who can communicate and talk about things at your level** than someone who just has a superficial interest in everything around them.

M4: My previous relationship...was more cerebral if you like... she was never stunning... but I respected her as a person and formed an intense friendship with her ... before we actually became lovers.....

Now I'm ... looking for a hot young chick ... that would be kind of nice, that's kind of the ideal ... to have physical beauty by my side ...

M5 had not had any significant relationships so he had constructed his rigorous list from observing the painful experiences of others and from his experience with psychotherapeutic discourse:

M5: She has to be strong... stand up for herself ... if she's got her own professional career that's good. If she's sporty and creative, ... I've got five building blocks for my life which are sports, music, business, my family and healing... they are all interconnected, so someone with interests along those lines. I'm actually looking for a Maori lady... somebody who can understand where I've come from... She's got to have her own interests as well ... not always clinging to each other ... I like quietness. I like **romance**...I'm well travelled... somebody who **knows herself and who's passed the stage of playing games**...we don't need each other ... **loyalty** ...I believe in marriage forever...somebody who will encourage me along the way as well and vice versa... Somebody who chases after her dreams, she doesn't subsume her dreams for me. I've seen that happen too often.

Defining the criteria by which to recognise 'the right person', serves the function of minimising the risk of the pain of loss, the shame of failure and the demeaning of identity in the future. However a serious dilemma occurs if the list prioritises intensity of feeling which had misled most participants at least once already:

M2: It's a shame because I felt it was going to be a long term, very much a deep and sparks-all-the-time sort of relationship. Not just from a physical point of view, but also from a mental point of view. It was very deep and very interesting ...

F1: The only one I felt 'in love' with was the one I see at the moment, and remember we are really just friends. When I first met him, we were really, really besotted with each other ...our minds met in a manner of speaking ...but he's got 'problems' and when he starts ...I get really annoyed and embarrassed. He's got a lot of good qualities...but at the end of the day I would never marry someone like that.

The effectiveness of this active, self-protective strategy of rigorously defining 'the right person' is challenged by a countering perception that change is inevitable.

Change, the only constant: Breaking up is viewed as so ubiquitous in today's world that investing one's self in relationship constitutes a gamble which is quite outside personal control:

F6: I'd like to be in a stable relationship ... with somebody you could trust and depend on to be there, but I also think it's sort of unrealistic in today's world ... and it's not necessarily the people in particular, it's the way things are now, and people go through jobs, they change jobs, they're always looking for new excitement ... it's an acceptable culture and that's how relationships are, although we still want the fairy tale: the long-term, stable relationship.

Mature singles found it difficult to identify any factors which can be counted on to ensure a relationship is happy and lasting. One cannot trust one's own perceptions, even trained perceptions. Even couples that give all the socially endorsed signs of being solid may still break up:

F3: I have one friend who is still married, but she's not happy ... and a girlfriend ...whose marriage is breaking up ...and I thought that was pretty solid ...

F6 first positioned herself as a psychologist with expertise in assessing people and the signals and indications they give of behavioural change:

F6: What makes it really difficult for me, is that because of my job, all I do day in and day out is observe people and make judgements on what they're doing and why they're doing it and put in interventions to assist them in shaping their behaviour ... so to go out with three guys who were all text book boyfriends, very attentive and looking after me in all the ways I would like to be looked after by a guy ...

Yet even an expert in human behaviour who has in addition verified her perceptions with friends can be taken by surprise:

F6: ... after all that they turned around and said: This isn't working and each one was at a time when I really didn't see it coming. They'd been so... if they said, I'll ring, they always rang, if they said they'd take me out to dinner.... There was no indication in all three relationships that it was coming... and I don't think I do major denial or anything, I mean everybody else around me ... my friends would say, Wow, you're so lucky, you two are so happy. So other people around me were giving me the same feedback that everything was good ... so all three felt quite out of the blue.

When juxtaposed, the two oppositional perceptions produce a passivity-inducing dilemma. One may proactively construct a list to ensure past mistakes are not repeated. Yet if relationships can end with no indications and for no comprehensible reason, perhaps a long-term, stable relationship is merely an 'unrealistic', 'fairy tale' in today's world. Therefore why dare to take the risk?

Summary of relationship goals: While the statistical picture presented in Chapter 1 reveals an increasing number of women and men between 30 and 40 years living in unpartnered situations, this analysis of relationship goals suggests that is not their preferred position. Rather while mature men and women are increasingly accepting being single, they are likely to have preferred goals of being in relationships in the foreseeable future. However, relationships are preferred only if they are fulfilling and meet specific, even rigorous criteria. Mature singles construct their criteria for satisfaction from their observations of parents and others in their families of origin, from their own experiences, from observing the relationships of friends, from talking with friends and from psychological and psychotherapeutic discourse. By learning from these sources and adapting their strategies accordingly, mature singles hope to reduce the risk of pain in the future. Yet it is difficult to identify any reliable

indicators which guarantee long-term, relationship stability. Therefore the risks entailed in investing their selves and their identities in a relational bond constitute a gamble and produce serious dilemmas in their construction of goals.

4.4. Identity goals:

Occupying the available single position requires devising ways to accept that the preferred position is currently unavailable. The participants struggled with the tension created by this contradictory positioning. All of them had given considerable thought to the complexity of the dilemmas confronting them. First, should they reconcile their personal and social expectations of themselves with the position they had come to occupy, or should they attempt to remedy that position in favour of achieving their goal of relationship (Davies & Harré, 1990)? If they decide to remedy their single positioning in favour of achieving their relationship goals, should they actively look and risk being perceived as 'desperate', or passively wait for the right person to come along?

F7: I do want a long term partner... but I'm not actively looking at the moment, partly because I believe that if you are actively out there and looking, you can often be perceived as being **desperate** which I think tends to detract people rather than to attract them ...

The tension was greatest for the women who wanted to have children. On one hand they felt increasing pressure to find a suitable partner. On the other hand societal messages stressed the importance of masking what they want in order not to appear 'desperate and frighten a man off':

F4: There's a big 'No, No,' around saying you want a committed relationship and babies ... you don't want to appear **desperate** and frighten a man off if you tell him, That's what I want ... that's what magazines and society generally tells you to do.

Although women's magazines may construct desperation as a position likely to be occupied by women, M4 considered men also risked occupying this 'losers' position:

M4: Sometimes I am just bar-flying and wallowing in **desperation** ... **desperation** is not attractive... it's trying to pull people to you more than they want to be ... people start to back right off... it's neediness and it destroys ... like a lady that I hang out with... she wants more of me than I am prepared to give ... and it makes you back

away... being desperate is like self fulfilling losers... it fulfills the losing side of you because people don't find it attractive... I think most people like character and strength in people they want to be with ... neediness is ugly... everyone is desperate, but it's how you portray it ... how you control it, that allows other people to read it, or not ...

'How you portray it', 'how you control it' requires masking goals and excluding vulnerable feelings in order to fashion a cool 'Sex in the City' type persona. F4 perceived that persona to be a male-driven construction. She and her women friends have discussed this persona and tried to adopt it because the alternative position of being needy is 'not alright':

F4: It's not alright to be needy, especially in the early stages. A lot of it is putting on a persona ... to assume a male attitude towards relationship... 'Oh yes we want to spend time'... 'Oh yes we want a sense of humour'... With my women friends... we've discussed that not-appearing-too-needy and how we've observed... men have treated us in the past... we try to adopt some of that 'this isn't really that important to me ...

M3 exemplified that cool, 'this isn't really that important to me' 'male attitude':

M3: I don't need to have a girlfriend. I could go the rest of my life without a girlfriend easily enough ... it's probably more in my favour because I know I can afford to live and I don't have any responsibilities. There's less stress ... in a way there's no stress ... I think it's whether you want to have a partner ... I went [to a club] one time... and I didn't like it because it felt like a meat market... I ended up talking to a guy the whole night and these women wanted to dance and I wasn't interested...

In contrast to this description of his self-sufficiency and disinterest, M3 was about to travel to the Philippines for three months in order to further a relationship he had begun on the Internet, because 'I feel more stable with her':

M3: I have got a girlfriend at the moment. She's in the Philippines... I feel more stable with her than with somebody over here... In the Philippines you get married and you stick at the marriage and it's very hard to get a divorce... over here it's so easy to get divorces and leave... over there the family is on your case if you do that.

Security, consistency, stability ... these were the factors M3 prioritised on his list:

M3: Security... reasonably happy... a consistent relationship... not one that's going to chop and change so I'm not going to feel insecure in it...

With security, consistency and stability he could achieve both his relationship and identity goals, so it was worth the effort and expense to reach out to another culture where he considered his priorities were more valued than in New Zealand.

For mature singles to acknowledge their priority goals and actively pursue or accept an offered position in relationship, necessarily entails risk. Not achieving the goal may mean facing personal and social constructions of shame and failure:

F4: Was it painful? Oh yes... and whether or not it was a sensible idea there is still that sense of failure ...

Achieving, then losing, may result in grief or 'heartache', the emotional pain of rejection or loss:

M4: ... since my recent girlfriend went and I had to go back to living alone, it's just killed me living like that. I just can't stand the sight of walking into my apartment and being by myself in the evenings. It has taken some real adjustment ...

Three other participants also described the depth of pain, grief and depression in the terminology of death:

M2: I went into deep depression for quite a long time, at least a number of months, and that was sort of when I looked at ending it ...

F2: I've been on an emotional roller coaster ... I have had therapy, I've been extremely depressed and I'd rather be dead ...

F3: Yes it was very painful. It feels like a grieving process. You feel like someone has died. You have to go through all those stages.

The dilemma of recovery is whether to prioritise staying-single-and-safe, or whether to pursue or accept the goal of relationship and risk experiencing pain and heartache again. Certainly some adjustment or recovery time is needed before taking the risk again:

F3: One relationship I regret letting go of three years ago... I don't think I was really ready for another relationship. It takes a few years to recover from a broken marriage.

Yet sometimes staying in a relationship is devastating to one's identity and leaving is a relief. Some of the participants had accepted or chosen relationship believing they had found their 'true love', only to find they were subjected to a range of abusive behaviours. Through verbal or physical assault they experienced being controlled and demeaned:

M3: I've actually split off with the person because I wasn't happy...the behaviour... was...very bossy and demanding and ... talking down and being treated like a child...

F5: ... that actually scared me ... the feeling I'm with somebody and they own me ... because he did think he owned me ... he was quite controlling ... I was a car and he had number plates on me. That's the way I felt. He didn't like going out with my friends very much, and if I did, then he would go through periods of ignoring me. Once he ignored me for up to two weeks...because I am such a talking person I couldn't understand that and I used to get so frustrated it would bring out a side of me that I didn't know and didn't like ... towards the end I wasn't standing for it, and unfortunately I'd get a bit pushy when I felt backed into a corner...like a bird in a cage...

F3: Well I let myself be a door mat and...he was a very strong sort of person, therefore he was treading me down and I was losing self-esteem...

F2: Well I regret that there were three men that hit me ... and it wasn't until at the end I said, No, and it never happened again after that point ... but obviously I kept taking it ... I remember seeing a psychiatrist or a psychologist when I was in my early 20s to do with childhood abuse and that made a huge difference to my self-esteem ... and I thought I'm just not taking this any more ... I don't deserve it ... It had an effect ... Wow!...I thought I deserved it.

M3, F5, F3 and F2 left the above relationships because the collaborative constructions and the positions they were allocated were contradictory or demeaning to the identities they wanted to construct for themselves. Whether abandoned or abused, these experiences are often so devastating that strategies for reducing the risk of reoccupying that painful position may be given priority. These dilemmas of risk or safety were apparent in the active-passive positioning of M4 who was still recovering from a painful breakup after an intense nine-month relationship:

M4: I'm a little undecided at the moment if I'm looking because ... I'm on the rebound having only two months ago been...dumped by a girl ... and I don't mind saying, breaking my heart ... Rationally I'm not looking, but on the other hand if the right sort

of person comes along I think you are a fool in a way not to grasp the opportunity if you felt that it was right ... so Yes and No. That's the answer isn't it. Most people I feel are always looking for a relationship, because at the end of the day they are probably the most meaningful things you have in your life ... but they are also capable of being the most hurting and damaging.

The slippage in his footing is emphasised by his use of pronouns. He uses the first person when discussing the 'rebound/not looking' position he is currently occupying then slips into the second and third person when talking about the unoccupied relationship position. His pronoun slippage serves to distance him from meaningful, committed relationship because he is currently, actively looking for 'a fling and some fun' for the short term. However he had also declared, 'in the long term though... of course I don't want to be alone' so the second person pronoun acts to position him passively as available for relationship 'if the right sort of person comes along'. His use of the third person validates his willingness to accept relationship eventually as it is a universally accepted, although risky part of a 'meaningful' life.

To risk or stay safe: Similar dilemmas over adopting risky versus safe, active versus passive strategies are demonstrated by following M2's descriptions of his slippage in discursive positioning and practice through the relationship field over a period of about two years. As has been noted he first experienced six years of stable marriage, which he devalued as 'the marriage thing':

M2: I've done the marriage thing. I've been in that situation ... and it wasn't her fault, again, there was nothing wrong with her as a person, or as a lover, or as a friend ... everything was fine ...

Then he was faced with a dilemma over having children, but he perceived the risk to be too big 'at that time':

M2: ... she wanted to have the kids and I just couldn't give her what she wanted at that time.

He did not actively claim the marriage although 'everything was fine', nor did he take on the challenge of moving on to the parenting stage of adult life. He passively let the not valued 'marriage thing' end. Next he actively chose, but was rejected by a woman he was passionately 'in love' with:

M2: I have had **what I'm looking for** ... certainly with one person and I found everything was very compatible, and just everything was so much easier, life was easier. It was very nice, it was a very warm feeling, it was very intensive and it was a lot more **what I'm looking for** ...

After being rejected by her, he experienced several months of powerless, suicidal depression:

M2: I went into **deep depression** for quite a long time, at least a number of months, and that was sort of when I looked at ending it ...

This was followed by a period of passively 'passing time' in serial monogamy, 'waiting for one relationship to end' then moving on to the next:

M2: I got into a stage a little while ago where I became... like a serial monogamist. I was **just waiting** for one relationship to end and going straight on to the next one.

After profound self-questioning, M2 took charge of his life to some extent. He actively constructed his own wellbeing as his safest and preferred goal, rather than relationship:

M2: I was like, What am I doing? I was **just passing time** with these people instead of having a meaningful relationship with them, so instead of me going to the hassle of having all this heartbreak and these problems, I thought I might as well forget it and stay on my own... **I just want to be happy and contented with what I am** and where I'm going...at this stage.

While he said, 'I might as well forget it' he could not quite do that, so he passively retained relationship as an unclaimed goal with an 'if' construction:

M2: ...**if** I do get into a relationship ...

Simultaneously he was somewhat active in constructing his list of criteria for any new relationship: a relationship should contribute to his happiness, contentment and his identity of 'what I am'. The relationship would need to be 'free and easy', otherwise staying in the single position offered greater protection from passively experienced dis-ease, stress, hassle and heartbreak. Staying single also offered individualistic freedom from actively doing 'hard work' to claim a relationship:

M2: I want it to be free and easy, and not too stressed out or hard work, ... a nice and easy cruise along... I just want to be happy and contented with what I am and where I'm going...at this stage, I'm not too concerned about getting into a relationship, or wanting one ... I'm more just cruising and seeing what happens?

While making occasional active forays into the relationship field to claim his preferred goal, M2 slips back to his principally passive approach to dilemmas by almost giving up on relationship. This approach was familiar to M3, who considered giving up on relationship and preferring the safer, single position was a common choice for men with a history of broken relationships:

M3: ...not only me, but a lot of guys around about my age [43] ... don't even want to have relationships any more because of the trouble they've been caused while they were in relationships.

His indication that relationships are constructed as 'trouble' to be avoided by 'a lot of guys' in this age group is likely to be a significant factor in the silent revolution of increasing numbers of mature single men (Birrell & Rapson, 1998; Hacker, 2003)

Summary of goals of identity: For mature singles the relationship field entails considerable risk to positive constructions of self. Not achieving the goal of a fulfilling relationship may produce interpretations of failure and shame while occupying socially-devalued, feeling-saturated positions of loss and pain. That pain may be excruciating enough to produce constructions of death as a desirable option.

As described in Chapter 2, it is well established in social constructionist theory that people use language adaptively to achieve desired social effects, such as to self enhance, to have their version of events prevail, and achieve social acceptance and validity. It is a pervasive view amongst both men and women that it is important to hide vulnerable feelings in order to avoid being seen as 'desperate'. To achieve these goals mature singles are likely to employ strategies of 'acting cool', as though a relationship is not important to them, even when it is.

While functional in achieving social goals of self-enhancement and personal goals of self-protection, it seems likely that these strategies conflict with successful strategies for achieving relationship goals. While 'playing hard to get' has long been constructed as a common-sense strategy for increasing desirability, especially for

heterosexual females, Hatfield, et. al. (1973) found signals of selective availability were more likely to be attractive to potential partners. Therefore strategies of 'acting cool' to self protect may not be functional in achieving their goals of relationship.

4.4. Parenting goals

The second part of the conventional story involves having children, parenting and family-making. Here more than half of the participants had constructed major deviations from the conventional story. While four of the eight women, F4, F5, F6 and F7, hoped to have children, the other four, F1, F2, F3 and F8, had decided not to, for a range of reasons. Of the five men, M1, M3 and M4, had decided against having children, M5 wanted to have a large, loving and supportive family, and M2 was still considering the possibility of children some time in the future. For the four women who wanted children, the ticking of the biological clock injected an unwanted urgency into their already seriously conflicted decision-making dilemma:

F4: As I get older, what I want changes ... children weren't so important to me when I was 25 because there seemed to be lots of time to do that ... it was more ... terribly important to build a relationship with somebody before you started to contemplate having children, whereas now at 35 I don't have the luxury of that much time ...

F5: For me now time is running out ... I want to have children and I am 30. I know I've still got 10 years but I don't want to leave it that long ... I mean I know your fertility drops quite drastically after 35 ... so at the moment its kind of like, Hurry up wherever you are!

F7: I am not getting any younger and the biological clock is starting to tick loudly ... not as loudly as for some of my other friends, but I think as I go through my thirties it will start to become more of an issue.

F6: Sometimes I wish I'd had more information when I was younger about what it would be like now ... I would have made different choices ... like the fertility thing ... finding out fertility declines earlier than I thought and you can't really say you've got till you're 40 ... I might have treated my boyfriends differently ...

All of the participants took the decision to have children very seriously. A common theme in their considerations was their constructions of their experiences of childhood in their family of origin. M5 wanted a large, loving, supportive family beginning with two children of his own:

M5: ...then I would adopt another six. My future wife is going to have to like kids ... I think I can handle 8... from all over the world... From my family background, my parents, brothers and sisters, my uncles and aunties ... every relationship has failed... I've never had a relationship...All through my childhood I was watching and thinking... this is not the way it has to be ... I remember at the age of four my mum getting beaten up by my father. That's something that's stayed with me for life.

F2 and M2 also experienced seriously dysfunctional childhoods. From their own childhood experiences they constructed parenting as a job that needs to be done very well or it is better not to do it at all. Crogan and Miell (1998) found women will deploy counter-indicated strategies in order to resist being constructed as a 'bad mother'. F2 rejected mothering because of the high risk of occupying that position:

F2: I had a horrible childhood and I don't think I'd be very good mother as a result ... I thought when I got to my mid-30s I might change my mind but I've just turned 40...

M2 was determined not to repeat the absent fathering he had experienced himself:

M2: I never grew up in a family environment. I was always with step-parents, aunties, uncles and nanas... My parents split up when I was two ...I went with mum, and dad went the other way, so I spent twenty years following mum all over the place... it's too big a risk for me to bring somebody into the world and then not be there for them. That's the worst thing I could do. I'd rather not have them than not be there for them.

Of the women deviating from the conventional story, the difficulty of the task of mothering and the high risk of being a solo mother were serious concerns:

F3: I don't want to have a child on my own. I see these women and it's awfully hard

While F3 also considered she lacked maternal feelings, F8 preferred her freedom:

F3: I've never had that hormonal maternal urge. I know some women do... but I don't think it would bother me too much if I didn't have a child ...

F8: I've been more focused on career and I've always wanted the sort of lifestyle where I could go out and have a lot more freedom, whereas children sort of stop that.

F1 had been advised against having children by doctors because of two mental health crises when she was younger:

F1: Even my GP would say things like, Have you ever considered a tubal ligation? ... out of the blue he'd say things like that ... I guess the expectation between him and the other one [specialist] was she wouldn't be up to it ... and when you have experts coming at you like that ... you feel as though you are inadequate ...

Two of the men were struggling financially to support themselves and considered the financial responsibilities of supporting children were too great for them. For both, their age was also a factor:

M3: It's not whether we want them or not, it's **financial** considerations ... I'm finding it hard to get work, the last thing you want is to have children because it's more financial responsibility and considering my age as well [43] If I was 30 or 35...yeah, but I'm not

M1: No... the whole thing is a money thing but also age. I think the very last for me would be 40... I don't think I would want to have teenagers when I was 58.

Unlike the other men, lack of money was not the constraining factor for M4, who described himself as having a 'fat wallet':

M4: No I don't really want children. I think I decided that early on and my ex-wife was with me on that ... she didn't seem to want children either ...I've always felt **it would be too constricting**... I felt like I wouldn't have the patience and determination to be so selfless for so many years as you have to be ... you have to sacrifice ... I would feel very committed to doing it well if I made the decision... I have enough morality... not to stuff up by bringing another person into the world and treating them badly.

Like F8, the most well resourced of the women, M4 wanted to use his resources to enjoy a lifestyle of personal freedom rather than take on the responsibilities and restrictive demands of having children.

4.5. Summary of goals

The statistical picture presented in Chapter 1 reveals increasing numbers of unpartnered women and men between 30 and 40+ years. The analysis of goals suggests that while being single is their least preferred position, setting relationship goals and attempting to achieve them is highly conflicted. Experience has shown

that seeking or accepting relationship is a significant risk to emotional and physical wellbeing. The high risk of failure through rejection and separation is constructed as hurtful to suicidal levels. A thematic reason for the high stakes in their relationship gamble is the difficulty of ensuring the 'right person' has been found as feelings of passionate attraction often change. When euphoria fades, staying in the relationship may entail accepting a diminished identity, such as 'a child', 'a doormat', or one who 'deserved to be hit'. The dilemma is that being single may also entail constructions of diminished identity, such as being 'a failure' or 'desperate'.

A protective proviso is that prospective partners must meet their construction of the 'right person'. Yet the high risk of breakup is perceived to be outside personal control. A common construction is of such ubiquitous change that there are no reliable ways of guaranteeing a relationship will last. Therefore mature singles may deploy their discursive resources in reconciling personal and social expectations with being single. This less-preferred position appears to offer richer resources for controlling the construction of self-protective and self-enhancing strategies. Yet indications are that active pursuit of goals to protect identity and personal comfort may produce strategies of resistance to achievement of the preferred goal. While self-protective strategies such as 'acting cool' or passively hopeful 'if it happens' type strategies decrease the identity-risks of 'failure', these strategies may increase long term risks to wellbeing such as being lonely.

Goals for parenting vary considerably. To have children in such uncertainty increases the risk of loss for men and hardship for women. None of the women wanted to occupy the solo mother position. The prospect was so daunting that it was influential for some in their decision not to have children and for others to delay having children until they had found the right co-parent. Yet the ticking of the biological clock added an unwanted pressure. For men financial concerns about their performance as 'providers' and the risk of separation and becoming an absent father were influential in their rejection of parenting. Wanting freedom rather than responsibilities were important considerations for some well-resourced participants.

Therefore it appears that discursive practices of constructing and prioritising goals of personal safety and deploying self-protective strategies are significant in producing the proliferation of mature singles positioned contrarily to the conventional story.

Chapter 5

Constructing love, relationship and identity: A process of struggle and learning

I thought you said she was 'the one'?
Yeah ... but that was two years ago.

Flight of the Concorde: NZ Comedy Duo.

5.1. Introduction

It is clear from the analysis of goals in the previous chapter that mature heterosexual singles find their various plotlines and pathways through the relationship field are beset with dilemmas and dangers. Illusions and double binds abound. Footings¹ firmly claimed may slip away without warning, plunging lovers into the depths of despondency, despair and desperation. The participants had given serious thought to their dilemmatic positioning in relation to their goals and creatively deployed a variety of discursive resources in the hope of achieving their preferred goals safely.

5.2. Romantic constructions of love and attraction

While most participants included the dynamic of love and attraction on their lists of criteria, their constructions varied considerably. Some participants identified 'being in love' as their most important criterion. 'Being in love' is the primary assumption of the *romantic love discourse*. Within that discourse, 'love' and 'in love' are constructed as distinct feelings and the position of 'being in love' is definitely privileged.

M2, F2 and M4 had left relationships of 6, 11 and 15 years respectively, which they described as tranquil and harmonious, to look for greater emotional intensity. Both F2 and M4 said they still 'loved' their former partners, claimed them as friends and continued to meet them regularly, but were not 'in love' with them. All three had 'fallen

¹ Davies & Harré (1990) cite Goffman's use of the term 'footing' to describe the shifting of positions within a conversation. It also seems to be an apt image for describing the longer term struggle for location which the participants have engaged in.

in love' with people who were no longer available and each had struggled with the intense emotional pain of rejection and unrequited love. F2 positioned herself as a person with a range of experiences of love and relationship, and as one who read, thought and talked to others about love. She also described herself as a follower of a well known country singer in the USA who she visits annually to listen to his inspirational teachings about love. All of this informed a sense of expertise in her talk:

F2: I have been in love several times in my life and a major relationship I had kind of **destroyed me**, and I felt like I could never **feel** again.

This partner had been violent, and the relationship ended when he was killed in a car crash. Before that extreme experience F2 had had a lifetime of emotional turbulence, beginning with a childhood of multi-dimensional abuse, followed by two other partners who hit her. Eventually she accepted a safe, caring and emotionally stable position in a marriage. Stability, safety and caring are valued assumptions within the discourses of *security* and *intimacy*, but they are not valued within the *romantic love* discourse. As an adherent of the assumptions of *romantic love*, F2 constructed 'love' as 'not enough':

F2: Then I met a very nice man who I got married to...

I went into it knowing I wasn't in love with him but I did love him, and we stayed married for about 11 years ... we just decided to separate ... basically I said to him, Is this enough for you? and he said, No not really, and I said, Me neither...

Despite their 'love', the safe, caring and stable position enabled by the *security discourse* is constructed as deficient, so it is rejected. Doing 'emotional work' to deepen and sustain their marriage, an assumption and practice valued within *intimacy*, was not mentioned, so apparently was not utilised. The loving, caring marriage, which appears to have been the most stable and respectful relationship in her life, 'doesn't really matter' so it is 'easy' to leave:

F2: So we said, We'll just go and do something else. It was that easy ... I love my husband, but I'm not in love with him. I care about him. It's like a brotherly thing ... more a friendship thing ... if I don't see him and talk to him it doesn't really matter. If I never had sex with him again it doesn't really matter.

However the highly valued position of 'being in love' cannot be planned, managed or controlled. Positions 'in love' happen in unpredictable ways. F2, M4 and M2 employed the language and imagery of *romantic love* in describing how 'being in love' 'happens', how lovers 'fall in love' and 'Cupid's arrow' strikes. 'Being in love' is a special, out-of-the-ordinary, 'three months in a life time' experience. Unfortunately it was extremely painful for participants who found they had 'fallen in love' with someone who was already married and unavailable, who left the relationship, or who was 'hard work':

F2: Meanwhile I've fallen in love with someone else who is not available at the moment ... This guy is my reflection. He's like the perfect partner for me ...

M2: It was a deep and sparks all the time sort of relationship...I've had a taste of that...for three months out of thirty years ... I don't think I want to settle for less ... I probably fell in love with her, but... unfortunately for me I'm not that financial, in terms of the expectations she had...

M4: It was: see each other, want each other ... like in Romeo and Juliet ...there was some sort of ... beams of love in the Shakespearean sense... Cupid's arrow ...intense...she was what I was looking for when I left my ex... a party girl... but it was hard work... she was a party girl some days and the other days manic depressive...

Romantic love may be constructed as powerful and transformative. If confronted with shortcomings in the beloved, especially if those shortcomings block the relationship progressing, the lover may slip into the 'Beauty' position with the discursive strategy of 'my love will transform him'. F2 deployed this construction to surmount her difficulty with the passivity of her beloved, which she could not relate to. Although she described him as 'my reflection' and the 'perfect partner for me' she hoped to transform him:

F2: Right from the start he was never happy [in his marriage], but she's very dependent and he has a strong sense of responsibility. He very much bows to other people's pressure in a lot of areas, which I can't really relate to... but out of the situation that he's in, and with me he would experience something completely new, and I would hope that I could teach him there is a better way ... how to grow and be his own person.

Romantic love may also be constructed as powerful and consuming of lovers who are vulnerable and powerless to resist if 'love-struck'. This powerful 'in love' feeling may be constructed as so essential as to be the reason for living:

F2: Being **in love** with someone is like ... they're the one ... There's more intensity of everything ... I can't see any point in living a life without that.

This is an extreme commitment to *romantic love* not demonstrated by any of the other participants. The construction of 'being in love' as 'the reason for living' offers very few positions for those experiencing unrequited love and dangerously limits F2's possibilities for slipping into self-protective, fall-back positions made available by other discourses. In contrast M4 and M2, while continuing to prioritise emotional intensity (M2: 'I want it full, or I don't want it at all') both accepted fallback positions enabled by the *discourse of individualism*. M4 reinterpreted the pain of unrequited *romantic love* by deploying self-enhancing constructions of personal strength:

M4: For me being out and being alone is a test of strength ...if I don't have a friend to go out with, I will still go out... sometimes I feel like a tragic bar-fly but ... I'll do it anyway.

After seriously considering the unrequited *romantic love* position that 'life is not worth living', M2 also reconstructed his positioning in the terms of *individualism* taking on the self-enhancing challenge to one day 'show her what she missed out on':

M2: I went into deep depression for ... at least a number of months, and that was when I looked at ending it... then I decided to go out and start doing other things to take my mind off it, kind of get back on track, and a couple of years later I'm all of a sudden busier and busier...I've just got to get on with my life and become somebody who is actually worthwhile... I suppose, to one day prove... to show her what she missed out on...

There may be a factor of time: M2 had had two years to modify his positioning from suicidal depression, whereas for F2 the rejection was current. Escape from intense emotional pain and loss of a beloved are both acknowledged as motives for many suicides (Lester, et. al., 2004). Extreme commitment to *romantic love* enables self-enhancing constructions of the lover as heroic. Failure can be attributed to limitations in the beloved or social conventions rather than the lover who steadfastly remains true to

love. Embedded in our fictional heritage are the constructions of tragic heroes and heroines, such as Romeo and Juliet and Madame Butterfly, who chose death:

F2: I've been on an emotional roller coaster ... I have had therapy, I've been extremely depressed and I'd rather be dead ...

There are also crazy-for-love heroines, such as Ophelia and Lucia di Lammermoor:

F2: I just ache to see him...any tiniest little bit of contact...anything...which is making me go crazy because I love him. It's everything!

True lovers and truly beloveds are required to be special people, who live life daringly enough to accept the privileged position of 'being in love' when it is offered:

F2: We are **perfect** in every way... It's physical, it's chemical, it's intellectual ... on every level it's a **perfect** fit.

In this case F2's beloved refused the offer of perfect love by deciding not to leave his wife, thereby demonstrating he is not her heroic prince after all. Fortunately *romantic love* also provides an alternative position to suicidal death or craziness by providing a justification for moving on to the [next] 'one true love':

F2: I keep picking myself up ... but I can't give up because what else is there if I do? ...I know it is possible so that is my reason for living now, to find that perfect match.

Hope is offered through the positions of patient suffering occupied by such heroines of *romantic love* as Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, who were eventually rewarded with perfect love and happiness ever after.

5.3. Alternative constructions of love and attraction

In contrast, viewed from positions within other discourses, the intense feelings of infatuation, (which occur in all cultures), are **not** interpreted as 'the reason for living'. During his interview M4 frequently occupied positions offered by the *discourse of individualism*, sometimes with hedonistic modifications:

M4: Love? I think it's like a drug isn't it? In the sense that you want those highs again ... when I was with xx the good days were ... better than E ... you were 'on love', honestly ... drugs are good, but that was better ... and that was quite unbelievable for someone who had had a much more down to earth relationship previously ... I mean x and I had intense times in the first few years, but I don't really recall it being quite like it was with xx.

His use of the interpretative repertoire 'on love' reconstructed his experience of infatuation as exciting but temporary, like a drug high. Another possible interpretation he considered was perhaps it was a *romantic* illusion they co-constructed:

M4: I think we were 'in love' with the idea of 'being in love'... I think it is really hard to draw this line between 'romantic, infatuating' type love and 'true love' that's mature and like a bottle of wine...

Several participants discussed the intensity of 'being in love' as merely the initial, illusory, dream-like phase of a relationship, rather than an indication of lasting 'true love'. Through the 'rose-coloured glasses' of *romantic love*, shortcomings in the beloved are not noticed for six months to a year:

M3: Well it's always good at the beginning of your relationship ... you've just met the person and you're just getting to know them and ... you're happy with each other ... you're seeing whoever it is through **rosy spectacles** and everything's going well. Then as time goes on, maybe six months to a year down the track, you see reality as it is. You might be living with a person and you might not be happy with some of the things that they do ... so this is when the problem starts.

When the 'rose-coloured glasses come off, the problems start and anything can happen. Then lovers are as helpless as when they first 'fell in love'. With no 'how to be married' position available in *romantic love*, they may just as helplessly 'fall out of love' (Shumway, 2003):

F5: But I don't have the **rose-coloured glasses** idea that if I meet somebody that's it for life. I'd like to think it will be, but I know that things are just getting out of control really as far as life is concerned ... and that to me means anything can happen in the future... like **fall out of love**.

F7 constructed the stage of the *romantic* 'rose-coloured glasses', as a dream-like phase characterised by not seeing warning signs and not listening to warnings from others:

F7: It took me six months to get the 'rose-coloured glasses' off and to stop living the dream of being a couple. A lot of people I knew, who also knew him, said, Don't get involved, but I did ... he'd been married in the past and had been so hurt... everybody looking at this person saw that he was just flitting...

Although, or perhaps because, he had a 'Beastly' reputation, F7 accepted the 'Beauty' position and the associated construction of the transformative power of the love of an exceptional woman:

F7: I got so caught up in the dream of being a couple I thought... it will be different for me... I thought that being consistent and loyal with my love would make the difference... and he would change ... he might have flitted with other people but not with me...

Through the painful waking-up process of removing the 'rose-coloured glasses' F7 constructs herself as having learned from her experience and become a wiser person:

F7: ... it caused the greatest pain, but it caused the greatest learning as well...

As learning is characteristic of the *intimacy discourse* it suggests that during her struggle to remove the rose-coloured glasses F7 slipped from the Beauty position offered by *romantic love* to a learning, self-valuing and communicative position offered by *intimacy*. In *intimacy* the analytical strategies of 'the head' are valued as much as the feeling strategies of 'the heart'. In the future she will use her head and 'pay attention' to all the external and internal 'red flags being waved':

F7: Looking back I would be a lot slower to put myself in a situation like that again... at the time it wasn't just my friends, it was his friends too, people that knew him were saying it. So I would be much more willing to listen to people in the future ... and to listen inside me, because inside there was a voice saying, There are some things happening here that you don't actually like ... but I'd think, Oh no it's just me being too picky... whereas now I realise those doubts were actually the red flags being waved. In the future I wouldn't discount what I was feeling and thinking. I wouldn't talk myself out of my doubts... If all the external and internal things were pointing the same way I'd pay attention.

Like F7, all of the participants had an infatuation experience in their personal history which they had interpreted in terms of *romantic love* at the time, only to find that instead of a 'happy ever after' outcome, they suffered considerable pain and disillusionment. Most had reassessed *romantic love* and found it to be illusory, deceptive and not fully functional for achieving their relationship goals. Therefore they had shifted their primary location to other discourses: *intimacy*, *security*, *individualism* or *soul mates*.

While teenage girls and younger women are likely to be saturated in *romantic* assumptions and reluctant to abandon them (Jackson, 2001; Rocco, 2004), in this older age group F2 was the only participant who located herself primarily within the *romantic love discourse* with very little slippage or modification. Yet the ubiquitous experience of infatuation is so powerful and seductive that it demands inclusion and interpretation in each discourse. Participants either retained the *romantic love* construction, allocating it the task of initial attraction and bonding, or they reinterpreted and modified the experience using alternative discursive resources.

F8 spent much of the interview favouring positions in *individualism* and *intimacy* by describing her independence and her expectations of a partner, especially for gender equality. Her refusal of 'a really good relationship' because 'the timing was wrong' (Chapter 4.2.) breaks the rules and obligations of *romantic love*: as Cupid's arrow strikes in unexpected ways, it is always the right time for 'falling in love' (Jackson, 2002). Yet in describing how she would eventually recognise 'the right one' she employed a *romantic* construction:

F8: I don't know that I would really think of it logically...I think if **you** did meet the right person, I do think **you'd** just have to go with your feeling on that rather than sitting there logically thinking, yes, I think he's the right one, he's got this, he's got that. That's certainly what I've always thought, that you would just know without really thinking about it...

'I've always thought', implied her positioning derives from when she was a young girl. The reliance on feeling as the way of knowing with certainty is a common construction from romantic fairy tales and novels which children learn early in their lives (Jackson, 2002; Rocco, 2004). However F8 simultaneously distanced herself from such certainty by shifting from first to second person pronouns, suggesting that slippage into the *romantic* repertoire was not entirely comfortable.

F4 also had constructed a list of criteria to be met by a future partner, yet her strategy for finding a suitable person was to occupy the passive *romantic* heroine position of waiting to be recognised, chosen, or rescued by her 'prince'. F8 and F4 were both educated women with careers who clearly used active and competent decision making strategies in other areas of their lives, yet for this important decision they prioritised the passive *romantic* strategy of young girls, of television, of romantic fiction. To do otherwise would be 'a bit sad':

F4: I will just meet somebody ... It might be at the supermarket, or at the library at college, or I'll go to a party at a friend's house and strike up a conversation with somebody who happens to be single and interested...that's the way it happened from when I was about 13 to about 25 and that's the way it's portrayed on television and in literature...there is something **a bit sad and clinical** in approaching it like a career, through agencies...

From locations in other discourses participants modified and deployed their discursive resources in order to be more functional for achieving their goals. For example, instead of interpreting the ubiquitous infatuation experience as 'being in love' it may be interpreted from other discursive locations as 'chemistry'. Therefore being 'high' on a chemical hit can be exciting for an *individualistic* fling but it is not expected to last. From an *intimacy* perspective, where discriminating selection of a compatible partner is recommended, being overwhelmed by 'chemistry' may be viewed as potentially deceptive, therefore not functional for producing long-term intimate commitment. However, if other criteria are met, then 'a bit' of chemistry is essential:

F3: Physical attraction... sexual chemistry... there has got to be a bit of that...

Even so, from alternative locations sexual chemistry is not constructed as love. From the vantage point of the discourses of *intimacy*, *security*, *individualism* and *soul mates* love is constituted through very different images, narratives and concepts from the *romantic discourse*. Whereas F2 and M4 rejected marriage based on 'love' in favour of 'being in love', F7 and M3 embraced the idea of a marriage based on 'love' constructed as a 'decision' to make a long term commitment to live together and work things through, or as caring actions:

F7: Love to me is more of a decision than an emotion, in terms of it's more of a long term commitment. While you need the emotions ... there is a lot that can be hidden by emotions, by infatuation, by that rose-tinted glasses type of thing. I believe it's more of a decision that you are going to live with someone and work things through ... that's what long term will keep a marriage together. In one sense none of us are compatible. We are all so different from each other, so it's a case of working through things...

M3: ... Love is caring for somebody else... perhaps not putting them first but putting them equal with you rather than taking and not giving to the other person...
... they would be doing their best to try and make me happy and hopefully I would do the same back to them, so we're sort of giving to each other.

A common theme in the texts is the importance of learning through engaging in the field of relationships: slipping and sliding, falling, being terribly hurt and struggling to find a footing before claiming a position in which to stand:

F7: I've learned a lot...definitely... some of them I tended to choose badly or accepted what's come into my sphere which sometimes hasn't been the best choices...some have hurt more than others in terms of the pain I've gone through...some have been almost fly-by-night in that we realized early it wasn't going to work...I think for me I'd like to have a friendship... then out of that friendship it goes a bit deeper...

As described in Chapter 2, Shumway (2003) contends that the construction of the *intimacy discourse* has been influenced by the talking therapies and has been elaborated and promoted through self help books, magazine articles and popular TV programmes such as Oprah and Dr Phil. All of the thirteen participants described a process of learning and changing on the basis of contact with counselling, self help books and magazine articles. Learning is such a commonly expressed idea clustering with the *intimacy* discourse that it can be described as an assumption of that discourse. While *romantic love* is learned through fictional texts, *intimacy*, both verbal and sexual is learned from non-fictional texts:

M4: Yeah I've been wallowing a lot in the down-times in the last few months. I've resorted to cheesy, positive, self-help type stuff to help me move on and I think it's been useful. I always think of it as cheesy and crass and commercial, but the reality is a certain amount of basic tenants can help you move on...

F2: Surprisingly some of the books that helped me most . . . that really don't have any bearing on self-esteem but seem to have had an effect are the *Conversations with God* books ... whenever I feel down I read one of those and it just picks me right up.

M2: I did have quite a bit of counselling from various counsellors... I think in a way they did help me ... I already knew what the problem was... I suppose I just had to tell somebody about it. So yes, it probably helped.

F8: I come from quite a chaotic household with a lot of arguing, so ...I could be a terrible person to have relationship with: yell and scream and carry on. When I grew up and left home and... became more my own person, I never did behave like that...and I don't want to ever find a partner like that... I've read a lot of books about that type of thing ...

The popularity of self-help literature rivals that of fiction (Crawford, 2004a; Shumway, 2003). The range spans academic, research-based information to the simplistic, inspirational teachings of charismatic individuals. That range is also reflected in the cultural practice of women's talk. Participants were active selectors from the range of talk and texts on offer. For example, F2 selected inspirational *Conversations with God* texts, a charismatic inspirational teacher and her romantically positioned sister to endorse her own *romantic* positioning:

F2: My sister ... was engaged to a guy and then she met this other guy and went through the same sort of dramas where he wanted her but ... she was unavailable. He went through the same sort of emotional roller coaster as I am, until she decided to leave the other guy and they've been married nine years now and are blissfully happy together. So she knows what I mean... A lot of people think that love doesn't last but ... they are not talking about the same thing that I am talking about ...

In this situation, talking to her sister strengthened F2's resistance to moving on despite her married lover's clear advice to do so. Her sister endorsed that such special love could produce blissful happiness if F2 continued on the 'emotional roller coaster' while waiting for him.

5.4. Transcending despondency and desperation: *Soul mates*

While F2 with her commitment to *romantic love* and the endorsement of her sister's story was willing to ride the emotional roller coaster, others refused that position. They

wanted greater emotional calm and self protection. F5 and M2 employed the *soul mate* construction that there is a right partner for everyone, in order to give themselves hope, patient acceptance of the single position, and spiritual tranquillity while they waited:

F5: If that man of mine **is here...** the person **I am meant** to get into a relationship with... that gives me **more confidence about being on my own**...[that belief comes from] my years of being into spirituality... I've had too many coincidences in my life which I know aren't really coincidences. I believe you are sent people to help you along and life is a shared journey... I like to keep myself open to the fact that there has been **somebody pre-ordained for me** and I've also been pre-ordained for them... that philosophy really does help me in being on my own...

M2: I'm certainly not in a hurry to find a relationship...it would have to be at a pretty high level. Why settle for second best ... I do believe outside of the living body there's a spiritual connection that binds... the universe together...and when you find that right person it is part of that connecting up. You could call it **soul mate** ... when you find the right person it's a connection outside of what we know at this point of time.

The construction of the *soul mates discourse* which F5 and M2 both employed, privileges passivity with an obligation to wait and trust that the preordained partner will synchronously appear when the time is right.

Other modifications of *soul mates* available on recent Internet sites enable more active claiming and searching for a well-matched partner. These newer modifications offer additional ways of recognising the *soul mate* as well as intense feeling. *Soul mate* seekers are enabled to construct lists, to employ the help of psychological profiling and matching on internet sites, to go speed-dating, and to expect relationship with a *soul mate* to involve mutual learning rather than easy, cruisey, happy-ever-after outcomes.

Thus by giving assurance and hope, while enabling active and psychologically informed seeking, the *soul mate discourse* offers greater protection from desperation than is afforded by *romantic love*. Also by enabling active and psychologically informed partner selection and initial construction of relationship, *soul mates* gives value to assumptions of learning, communicating and doing relationship work. Through coherence with the assumptions of *intimacy*, fascinating new stories of growing and deepening mutuality are able to be told.

5.5. Avoiding despondency and desperation: *Individualism*

Alternatively the *discourse of individualism* offers rich resources for agentically controlling self-protection and self-enhancement by enabling positions for opting-out of the relationship field temporarily. Meanwhile resources are directed towards the more immediate goal of becoming a strong and independent, if not an invulnerable individual. One intention of becoming self-sufficient is to be better positioned to avoid the depths of despondency and desperation. Another intention is to construct a strong fall-back position. If they should not achieve their relationship goal but remain single instead, they will be favourably positioned to have a rich and enjoyable life. M4 was particularly determined to become a 'strong enough character' so as not be devastated again by the pain of loss:

M4: What I learned from my recent relationship was to retain the **sense of individuality** and to be a **strong person** within that relationship...so you still have direction in 'your life' not just in 'our life' ...otherwise if the other person goes, you've lost yourself...without yourself you're nothing...someone else can add but they can't be the core...you have to keep the core of your identity, that's...what makes you tick...

While moving in a contradictory direction from their primary goal, hope for eventual success may be kept alive by constructing strength and independence as qualities more likely to produce a fulfilling relationship in the future:

M4: I need to spend a period of time re-establishing who I am because I lost that in the last relationship...That was probably ... **why she left me**... because **I wasn't a strong enough character**, because I was throwing myself into her as a meaning of life...

The rejected position of 'throwing myself into her as a meaning of life' is another of his descriptions of 'desperation': the 'ugly' 'self-fulfilling losers' position (Chapter 4). Desperation is not strong and not attractive so 'that was probably why she left'. Through his choice of language M4 goes on to individualistically construct being 'rich and fulfilled within ourselves' not only as a 'stage' that 'can' be reached, but as a stage that '**should**' be reached:

M4: I would like to think that you **can** reach a stage where you are happy as an individual ... and you are not reaching out **desperately** to find someone else to give you life

meaning ... having a relationship with another person will make your life richer... but shouldn't we be able to be rich and fulfilled within ourselves... not have to have this dependent, codependent type arrangement with other people? ...or do we have urges ... physically and mentally to be part of a litter, like little kittens hugging onto each other because it keeps them warm...

In contrast to the moral imperative of the self-fulfilled position, to be desperate for relationship is interpreted and marginalised as dysfunctional codependence² or as animal urges. Another man who chose to occupy the cool, not needing, not dependent position enabled by the *discourse of individualism* was M3:

R: Much of our happiness seems to be based in our relationships ...

M3: That's if you're dependent. I'm not dependent and I make my own happiness...
I'm a person that does my own thing... A lot of the time I can do things more effectively without other people... I don't need to have a girlfriend. I could go the rest of my life without a girlfriend easily enough...

Yet both men had also acknowledged preferred goals of relationship, provided their various criteria were met. Therefore this independent, individualistic strategy conflicted with their desire for relationship. Significantly individualistic positioning does not require the denial of sexual needs which are enabled by corollaries of *individualism*: *permissiveness* and the *male sex drive discourse* (Hollway, 1981, 1984). Such strategising appears to be particularly familiar to men. While some women may comfortably occupy positions enabled by *individualism* and *permissiveness*, most women appear to find these individualistic, inauthentic strategies convoluted and bewildering. F4 described how her experiences over time have shown her these strategies do not work for herself or most of her women friends:

F4: Perhaps some women can do that, but most of the women I have spoken to who genuinely like somebody find it very difficult to take it or leave it ...I would like not to have to do that ...

² The voluminous writings on codependency and recovery from addiction and its effects, emerged into popular psychotherapeutic literature in the late 1980s with books such as *Codependent no more* (Melody Beattie, 1987) *Healing the shame that binds you* (John Bradshaw, 1988) and *Women who love too much* (Robin Norwood, 1987). Other therapeutic voices critique the 'Bradshaw' view of human beings as predominantly codependent, addictive and therefore dysfunctional.

She went on to explain how angry she feels about this dichotomy in gendered practice and the way women 'have to do that', how they 'have to pretend' to 'take it or leave it':

F4: Perhaps time has taught me, that if I am going to enter into a relationship where I have to do that, it's not going to work because I can't sustain that and I don't want to and it destroys me when I try to pretend that's how I feel ... It makes me angry ... with ... perhaps myself ... perhaps men ... perhaps society, that I have to pretend about something that an incredibly large number of people succeed in doing. It makes me angry that I have to hide what I want ...

Despite her anger and the endorsement of her women friends that pretending doesn't work, in fact 'it destroys her', she is constrained by the rules and obligations of the *romantic discourse*: 'I have to...' In *romantic love* Cinderella waits with humble and loving patience to be chosen, or not, by the Prince: men take the initiative and set the rules of engagement and women comply with those rules and wait to be chosen. The rules, privileges and obligations of *romantic love* require men to take a risk and declare their interest and women to signal their availability. Traditionally women signalled their selective availability to particular men through strategies such as eye contact, participating in physical proximity, asking questions and laughing at men's jokes. By employing these *romantic* practices women softened the risks men were expected to take (Hatfield, et. al., 1973). However after decades of feminist discourse and struggle, women are less likely to deploy such practices to protect men's egos:

F8: There are still a lot of men out there that are actually like that, which personally I find quite surprising... men have still got egos that still get bruised...

Contemporary women located in positions of *intimacy* are more likely to expect reciprocity at first meetings and early dates, to have turns in conversation, and to have their jokes laughed at as well:

F5: ...if you feel like the guy's aim for that date is to get you into bed then that definitely is not for me... I like to be stimulated mentally and if that's not happening on a date then, yeah I won't go back there but if it's conversation on conversation... balanced conversation ...the key for me is humour... if there is a lack of humour there and I'm making jokes and it's not going anywhere ... then I'm not really interested.

The rules of engagement become confused for all concerned when men (who may well be self protective and individualistically positioned) are still expected to take *romantic* risks, while women positioned in *intimacy* and *gender equality* no longer act to protect men's egos:

F5: ...we go out a lot so there is always the opportunity to meet guys... but I find they just don't approach me... you know... I am very vocal and I feel quite confident in myself... and I don't know if that puts them off but... I've been told in the past by guys that it has... or they just don't want to go there with me because they think I won't be interested... which is the complete opposite... so funny how people's perception works...

For mature singles variously positioned in the discursive field of relationships, the signals are so hard to read that 'the complete opposite' message may be perceived.

It appears that experiences of breaking up relationships which began with euphoric feelings according to the assumptions of *romantic love* are wounding, scarring and damaging. After these experiences most mature singles shift their primary location from *romantic love* to positions made available by other discourses. Men in particular shift to the positions and practices of *individualism*, thereby changing the traditional rules of engagement with women in the relationship field. This means that wounded, individualistically positioned men are less likely to take a risk and declare their interest, preferring to feign self-protective disinterest. Meanwhile they are likely to retain access to some of the assumptions of *romantic love*. The *romantic* interpretative repertoires most likely to be deployed by men are that intense feelings will indicate 'the right one' and 'happiness-ever-after' will just happen and will not require relational work. In contrast women through their practices of reading self help and relationship literature, talking to counsellors, and talking together, are likely to reposition themselves primarily in *intimacy*. Meanwhile they also retain access to some *romantic* interpretative repertoires, in particular that 'some day their prince will come' and they will 'just know'.

5.6. Circumventing despondency and desperation: *Intimacy*

As above F4 occupied the passive heroine position of 'waiting to be chosen' enabled by the *romantic love* discourse. She had experimented with repositioning herself in *individualism* by adopting a cool 'Sex in the City' persona which frequently included first night sex. Looking back she considered: 'it destroys me when I try to pretend that's

how I feel and it makes me angry that I have to hide what I want...' To empower herself in goal-achieving ways in a field she perceives to be male dominated, would require she reposition herself within the counter *discourse of intimacy*. The rules, obligations and rights of *intimacy* would enable her to speak authentically and claim equal power and privilege in selecting and constructing the relationship she wants. During the course of the interview F4 shifted from her dilemmatic *romantic/individualistic* positioning to construct an alternative, equal, active and communicative stance enabled by the rules and assumptions of *intimacy*:

F4: I'd like to establish a dialogue earlier on and declare what I want, if there is some chemistry there. . . and if he runs a mile ... well better now, than in two years time, because I am running out of time ... and I won't be starting a sexual relationship till I think the relationship is going somewhere.

Strong attraction was then reconstructed as 'chemistry' to be checked out through 'dialogue' in order to find out if he would meet the urgent requirement on her list of availability for family-making. In contrast to the romantic rules and obligations that a 'feeling of just knowing' should be followed regardless of doubting thoughts, *intimacy* gives value to the use of analytical and critical faculties.

F2 also experimented with shifting from her *romantic* positioning during the course of her interview. By employing alternative discursive resources she considered the practicalities of finding a partner who met the criteria on her list and who was actually available to her. She considered ideas and strategies made available by the *intimacy discourse*: ideas of being proactive, as well as ideas of equality and similarity:

F2: Yes, I'm single...and although my first choice would be to end up with him, if something else just as good or better came along ...I'm open to that... Obviously if I go speed dating, I can't put 'in love' on my list to start with. All I'm looking for is someone to get to know and see how it goes...I measure everyone against this guy. There's got to be intelligence...sense of humour, sweet and kind...a bit shy. I'm fairly in touch with my masculine side so I probably relate to men who are in touch with their feminine side, so we're fairly well balanced ... small and dark haired... probably between 35 to 45...

However in contrast to F4, she quickly slipped back to the *romantic* position of prioritising feeling:

F2: ...but having said all of that, when you meet the right one it doesn't really matter. It's really just how you click...

To remain positioned in *intimacy* would require she learn from the pain of the past, and place a requirement at the top of her list that any prospective partner would be 'available' before she dares again to risk "the loss of self in a relational gamble" (Gergen & Gergen, 2003, p. 470).

5.7. Intimacy and gendered talking practice

A difficulty for constructing heterosexual relationships within the *discourse of intimacy* is the gulf in gendered talking practice (Coates, 1996, 2003). For the women, talking with female friends and family members was a taken-for-granted theme. Some of the men acknowledged that support through women's talking practice had been very important during periods of crisis, even life-saving:

M4: I have some good friends...probably the best friend that's been helping me in the last few months has been my ex from my previous relationship of 15 years ...I've leaned on her a little bit and she has been good in accepting that role as a friend ... it just goes to show what a good person she is and what a stupid decision I made...

M2: I didn't have any friends at that time, so my sister helped me immensely, actually, she was great. The first few months were horrendous but I'm still here...I'm still living and breathing and that's kind of a win for me but my sister was there when I needed her most.

However M4 and M2 may be unusual in participating in the strategies of talking and reading described above. While they acknowledged the importance of close women in supporting them through their crises, the statistics discussed in Chapter 1 show that with the high rates of male suicide soon after separation, a significant number of men do not survive this common contemporary life passage. M3 acknowledged that without access to women's cultural practice at this time, some men are vulnerable:

R: Do men talk about these things?

M3: It depends how hurt they get ... because they know I've done psychology, they may talk to me ... but society determines they shouldn't talk about their problems. That's why a lot of them go to alcohol ... you're seen as weak if you talk about problems...they won't talk to other males...they might talk to female friends or counsellors... they won't

ring up each other and talk... This is where the problem lies because they don't get it out...they drink it away, or do something destructive... there's more depression for men and the suicide rate's higher ... I had a friend ... he split up with his girlfriend ... a couple of nights later he drank a bottle of wine and shot himself in the head. He was close to us, we all hung around in a group, but he'd moved away from the group, so he wouldn't have had anybody to talk to...it's because of the stereotypes. Whereas a woman in that situation, she'd have somebody to talk to ...other women would be supportive...

The stereotypical constructions of masculinity constrain heterosexual men and limit their access to supportive resources (Brooks, 2001; McCarthy & Holliday, 2004). The 'stereotypes' determine men's talking practice, particularly their support-seeking and support giving practices. Men '**shouldn't** talk about their problems' to other men or they are 'seen as weak'. They 'won't ring each other up and talk'. In contrast, as M3 acknowledged, women would typically talk to 'a friend' in their group who was immersed in a life crisis. It is unlikely a woman would be able to 'move away from the group' as easily as the friend M3 described, because other women would take the initiative to ring her up to listen and enable her to 'get it out'.

During their separation crises, M2 and M4 accepted support made available by the talking practices of women. Yet the rules and obligations of *intimacy* require equal participation and the employment of the skills of reciprocal communication. Therefore both parties are required to practice the talking skills of *intimacy*. Exposing personal vulnerability, doing the communication work of asking questions, and taking turns are just three crucial relational talking skills. Both parties need to act out of an understanding that such skills can be used effectively to engage attention, resolve difficulties and deepen relationships (Coates, 1996, 2003; Sattel, 1983; West & Zimmerman, 1983).

If men are not able to occupy the traditional 'breadwinner' position in relationship, then they need to offer something else women want. A more equal sharing of domestic responsibilities is unarguably one important contribution, but so is intimate communication (Birrell and Rapson, 1998; Dempsey, 1997; Steil, 1997). M2 conceded that not verbally expressing his feelings during his three month intense and ideal relationship may have been an issue in the breakup, which up to that point in the interview he had been attributing solely to her unrealistic financial expectations:

M2: I'd say honestly that I probably fell in love with her, but I didn't actually express that in those words to her, so that might have been another issue as well... but at the same time it takes me a long time to get involved with somebody enough that I'm ready to do that. As an example, I was with my ex for six years, and I never said once to her that I actually loved her, so, I mean that goes to show... she wasn't the one for me.

M2 slipped and slid around what withholding the verbal expression of his love might mean: the time he takes to get involved... but he was married for six years, so it must be she wasn't 'the one'... but he thought his recent lover was 'the one' and he did not tell her either... Whatever explanation he constructed, the self-protective practices of his individualistic positioning functioned antagonistically to the self-revealing practices of *intimacy*. Therefore it was difficult for him to access and deploy verbal revelation of vulnerable feelings in order to enrich his relationship and secure his goal.

After her six year marriage in which talking practice occasionally included her husband not speaking to her for extended periods, even up to two weeks, F5 described her lack of interest in men who did not engage in a reciprocal, balanced conversation:

F5: A **balanced conversation** is not all about them... This is my problem. I allow people to talk about themselves a lot and I prompt them and I ask lots of questions... sometimes when that happens the conversation is about them all night... the conversation was quite unbalanced... now when that happens I'm not interested...

While F5 clearly understood and could describe the reciprocal talking skills, familiar and basic to female cultural practice, which she also expected to occur in conversations with guys, M2 appeared to be mystified about why women 'sort of turn off' when he did not ask about them:

M2: I **don't** go out there to start talking to women to find out what they want, what they need, and all that sort of stuff... you get a feeling when you're talking to them that they're interested in who you are ... but once you start the conversation, they sort of turn off...

Although he conceded he might not 'approach it right', he appeared to construct the problem as too difficult, when all that might have been required was reciprocal conversation. He also implied women required him to **not** be authentic, when authenticity and vulnerability are the cornerstones of women's verbal *intimacy*:

M2: ...that's probably my fault, I probably don't approach it right ... the thing is if you try a different approach with all different women... I am who I am, and I'm changing who I am, but there's no point in me going out and becoming someone who I'm not, so why do I need to change my approach?

M2 chose to make changes to position himself more securely in *individualism* rather than making changes to be more relationally skilful in order to be positioned in *intimacy*. He individualistically expected women to show interest in him. In fact he measured 'compatibility' by the interest women showed in him: 'If...they like the way I talk'. As is common in masculine talking practice with women, he did not return the interest or engage in reciprocal conversational work (Coates, 2003; Sattel, 1983):

If I go up to somebody and they like the way I talk, they like the way I look...obviously there's **compatibility** there...but if not, I'm not going to sweat it. I'm not going to worry about it. I'm not going to go back and try to find different ways of **getting into their heads**....

What women want is perceived to be something beyond normal guys. His construction, 'getting into their heads' is loaded with implications that psyche-specialists of some kind are required for that task. Positioned individualistically he talks 'cool' about the gulf between himself and women, denying that it matters to him: 'I'm not going to sweat it. I'm not going to worry about it. I'm not going to go back and try...' Although devastated and suicidal after being rejected by his previous partner, he had firmly repositioned himself in *individualism* and constructed an invulnerable persona:

M2: Yeah, we go into quite specific depths about **what worked and what didn't**. If something did work, then we'd try and go out and find it. **That's what half our time is spent doing... not actually actively seeking it, but ... sitting back and assessing whether there is a possibility, but ... without actually interacting as such, mainly because the women don't want to talk to you anyway, for whatever reason. It's hard to just sit on a park bench and watch women go by, so it's better to not talk to them at all and just assess whether they would be compatible or not...**

When M2 and his mate go out together and 'watch women go by' they appear to engage in the practice of objectivising women (Coates, 2003). They resist 'actually

interacting' 'because the women don't want to talk to you anyway' and appear to be mystified by the practicalities of intimate communication with women.

5.8. Hey, I'm a man: *Individualism* and the male sex drive

Two and a half years before the interview M4 chose to locate himself primarily within the *discourse of individualism* and from there he made significant choices about the direction of his life:

M4: When I left my first relationship maybe two and a half years ago, I made a conscious decision to be a whole lot more selfish in my life, to try and get what I wanted...

He justified his move to a location in *individualism* or, as he termed it, *egotism* by raising it to the status of the new religion in which being more 'selfish' is accepted practice. Yet there is a hint of slippage in his construction, 'not necessarily a bad thing':

M4: The mind set has changed now and nothing will make people stay in a relationship they don't find fulfilling. In other words they are more selfish. It's more about me and that is not necessarily a bad thing. Egotism is the religion of the 21st century perhaps ...but if there is no God, there is only you ...do what you want! Well, what else is there to do?

Although he had certainly found newness and excitement, his choice to position himself in *individualism* had not produced as much pleasure as he had hoped. In retrospect he viewed his choice of positioning with considerable questioning. However he slipped away from taking personal responsibility for the 'tragic' outcome by twice displacing the responsibility onto 'life':

M4: I definitely wouldn't deny that it was a mid-life crisis type of stuff...I think it's quite classic: older man wants to continue to prove his virility... the macho thing... it's pretty obvious...but it's kind of tragic to be able to so simplistically analyse yourself...but you can't deny the reality and that's I guess what I'm trying not to do... but to see myself warts and all...but tragic in some ways I think, but that's life...

M4: I've leaned on her a little bit and she has been good in accepting that role as a friend, so it just goes to show what a good person she was and what a stupid decision I made in a way...so that's life... and you go with it...

Later in the interview he acknowledged *intimacy* by describing the qualities of an intimate relationship as ultimately what relationships are about, and briefly accepted responsibility for his decision:

M4: We had a long stable history of **companionship** and... I think that's what relationships ultimately are all about after the romantic love phase passes it's all about **companionship** and **support** and **affection** and **love**, whatever that is so...I don't know. Sometimes I regret leaving the first relationship... I mean **that was a stupid thing to do**... all our friends thought we were the best couple in the world...

After each slippage towards valuing the assumptions of *intimacy*, M4 repositioned himself individualistically with imperative statements: 'You **should** just go for what you want in life'. He described himself as 'an educated person in the liberal arts' who had had a 15 year relationship with an educated woman, so he would have been well aware of *feminist discourse* about gender equality and the sexual objectification of women. He was also being interviewed by a rather conservative-looking, older, professional woman. Perhaps these factors informed a slight acknowledgement of the assumptions of *feminist discourse* in his apologetic slippage: 'it seems really crass and shallow', 'I'm not necessarily happy with it', and 'it's not probably a good thing'. However he proceeded to assert a moral rightness for his *individualistic* positioning by saying: 'I'm not sure that **it's right** to fight it':

M4: I left the first one...probably just in the form of a mid-life crisis, looking for something new and exciting and not finding that in a fifteen year old relationship. I'm pretty aware that a lot of what has motivated me in the last couple of years has been pretty **shallow male stuff** really that I'm probably not proud of in the sense of **looking for a hot young chick** ... I know it seems really **crass and shallow** but at the end of the day... that would be kind of nice... the ideal ... to have physical beauty by my side and I know that sounds so **crass**, but I'm just not denying it that **as a man, that's what I want**. And **it's not probably a good thing** because you are basing the choice of the person you want to be with on superficial qualities rather than character ... I'm not necessarily happy with it, but I'm not sure that **it's right** to fight it. You **should** just go for what you want in life ...

Similar deployment of interpretative repertoire occurred in his positioning and his construction of masculinity, that 'as a man' it's not 'right to fight it' and 'you **should** go for what you want'. He constructed casual sex as 'ultimately unfulfilling' and 'not ideal',

however having 'a bit' simply because 'I'm a man' responding to the *male biological sex drive*, is natural. His 'you know' invites the collusion of the interviewer with this construction (Hollway, 1984; Edley & Wetherell, 1995):

M4: ... ultimately a life of casual sex would be unfulfilling... I do want more than that out of life... not saying that I wouldn't have a bit though because I'm a man, you know... it's like... it's the drive, I guess... the biological drive... but it's not ideal to be flinging it around without some special feelings...

Theoretically *individualism* is constructed as gender free and universally applicable: 'you should do what you want'. The fact that in practice and in conjunction with other discourses, the rights of *individualism* have unjustifiably privileged white heterosexual males is a vast field of struggle for feminist, racial, ethnic, cultural and human rights discourses - and beyond the scope of this thesis. However the *male sex drive discourse* blatantly sets up different rules for women and men. By making heterosexual men the subjects of a drive constructed as biological, evolutionary, natural and powerfully irresistible, heterosexual masculinity is privileged over all other sexual identities and any aggressive, predatory or exploitative behaviours are excused. By slipping from *individualism* into the assumptions of the *male sex drive discourse* M4 was enabled to divide and objectivise, then disparage a young woman acting similarly to himself (Foucault, 1982; Hollway, 1984):

M4: I met this 21 year old girl at a pub one night ... she was really young and bouncy and attractive, blonde, cute, it was all good. But I could immediately categorise her as a Westie, skanky ho, if you like. She was a bit cheap in my take . yeah I wanted to hang out with her because she was young and attractive, but at the end of the day I wouldn't really jell with her I mean I'm an educated person in the liberal arts... I know I'm more intelligent than most people ...she came across as a bit of a dipsy blonde and I was OK to hang out with her but just on the club scene... a few drinks and a boogey and that is very flattering for me. but no way I'd ever want to have a relationship with her, even if she deigned to have a relationship with a guy twice her age ...

While he viewed her as attractive, 'all good' and interpreted her presence as 'very flattering', he categorised and insulted her in sexually slanging terms, 'Westie, skanky ho', 'cheap' and 'a dipsy blonde'. Sutton (1995) found the range of sexual slang men apply to women and the frequency of use to be far greater than women apply to men.

M1 also positioned himself within the *male sex drive discourse* and this positioning enabled him to legitimise his derogatory perception of solo mothers as 'damaged goods'. That construction was then deployed to justify his series of short, exploitative relationships with solo mothers:

M1: I'm close to other people who have had similar relationships, whereby the guy may be unemployed and with a solo mother... ...for me, a lot of them come across as... damaged goods... but it's not going to stop me from initially engaging in what potentially could be the beginnings of a relationship, because for me, there's sex involved, so I take my chances ...

His strategy for gaining free board and free sex, could then be excused as solo mothers were already 'damaged goods' and he knew of other unemployed men doing the same.

5.9. Summary

Singles in their fourth decade use a range of available discursive resources flexibly and creatively as they try to solve their dilemmas and avoid the dangers which beset them in the field of relationships. The positions made available by the *discourse of romantic love* have been occupied by all the participants in earlier phases of their lives. Being constructed and promoted through fiction, *romantic love* has been found by mature singles to be deceptive and productive of considerable pain. Therefore most are likely to have shifted their primary positioning from the *romantic love* cluster of assumptions and to have repositioned themselves within the assumptions and resources of other discourses. However because the euphoria of infatuation is so ubiquitous, the experience is reinterpreted and given other functions in other discursive constructions.

Individualism is a discourse which readily enables defensive, self protection by justifying strategies of acting cool and focusing on one's own needs and desires. However some assumptions and practices of *individualism*, such as excluding vulnerable feelings and marginalising hopes for relationship, may be counter productive to achieving relationship goals. Some women perceive the practice of acting cool as a male-driven strategy which they are confused and frustrated by. While some try to occupy positions in *individualism* by acting cool in order not to appear desperate and frighten a man off, other women lose interest and 'turn off' men who are self-focused and do not engage in reciprocal intimate talking practice.

Men who complement their individualistic positioning with interpretations enabled by the *male sex drive discourse*, may be quite derogatory about women, while excusing their own predatory and exploitative behaviour as a natural expression of masculinity (Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Hollway, 1984). While men choosing to occupy these positions may enjoy short term gains, choosing these strategies of relating to women may frustrate their longer term preferences for not wanting to be alone in the future.

Positions enabled by *intimacy* are preferred by women because of their familiarity with their cultural talking practices and because *intimacy* offers women positions of equal value and equal voice. However this preference may be a contributing factor to the growing numbers of unpartnered single, childfree women and solo mothers, as the rules and practices enabled by this discourse are unfamiliar to many single men (Coates, 1996, 2003; Mapstone, 1995, 1996, 1998; Steil, 1997). This analysis suggests that some men find these practices unexciting, and some men find them bewildering and construct them as mysterious and inaccessible occurrences in women's heads.

Soul mates is an emerging discourse in a fluid state of construction. The most established assumption is that there is a preordained partner for each person who will emerge when the time is right. This assumption enables singles to occupy positions of patience and hope, thereby being less vulnerable to sliding into positions of desperation. Other assumptions of the discourse enable informed and active construction of relationship thereby affording greater coherence with the discourse and practices of *intimacy* than *romantic love* offers.

This analysis suggests that the contemporary practice of delaying commitment into the fourth decade may be inhibiting the achievement of relationship goals. Perceptions that there is plenty of time to find lasting love with the 'right one' enables the practice of serial monogamy. However each negative experience which diminishes their identity or traumatises their feelings increases the likelihood that mature singles, especially men, will strengthen their positioning in *individualism*. Constructions that 'I don't need anyone' and 'I am OK on my own' are endorsed by pervasive psychotherapeutic and self help literature which constructs the need for relationship as dysfunctional codependency. By strengthening positioning in *individualism*, codependent constructions may not expedite the achievement of preferred goals of relationship.

Chapter 6

Doing the business of love: Money, parenting and identity

Love has to be given freely and without calculation in order to 'count' as love rather than some quantifiable commodity. In contrast, money is the very essence of calculation; it is all too readily quantifiable and both highly visible and memorable.

(Burgoyne, 2004)

6.1. Introduction

Historically the 'breadwinner' position was made available to heterosexual men by the *security discourse* which prioritises financial resources and family. It offers traditional gender roles to accomplish family-making tasks. As *romantic love* gradually displaced *security* from its centuries of dominance, marrying for love became privileged in Eurocentric cultures and the practice of selecting partners to advance the socioeconomic interests of an individual or a family was marginalised.

Within the assumptions of *romantic love* marrying for money is considered to be materialistic and demeaning: something the Ugly Sisters might try to do, whereas Cinderella waited for true love. While *romantic love* assumes that a princess should be prepared to forsake wealth to live in a hovel, such love is usually rewarded with his transformation back to his true status as a prince who was temporarily under a wicked spell. A covert assumption in fairy tales is that true love favours princes who own castles, over peasants who till the land. Beautiful young women with loving hearts may be rescued from poverty by true love, whereas impoverished young men must perform extraordinarily wise and courageous feats to earn the position of power over the princess, the castle and eventually the kingdom. Therefore while privileging 'being in love' as the basis for partner selection, *romantic love* also constructs expectations of men that they accept the responsibilities and challenges of the 'provider' position.

The discourses of *gender equality* and *intimacy* assume that gender roles are not fixed and the tasks that need to be accomplished to make the relationship workable, such as income earning, housework and parenting will be negotiated in ways that suit each couple (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). Couples attempting to implement these assumptions face a number of resistances. Across the whole population men continue to earn more than women and women continue to do most of the unpaid domestic work (Dempsey, 1997). Despite some beginnings on paid maternity leave, for most women wanting to have babies, there is inevitably a time of financial dependence on their partners (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). In various ways all discursive constructions, except *men's liberation* (Hacker, 2003), place a greater degree of financial responsibility on men and enable women to include the financial resources of men in their selection processes. Financial power and status is deeply embedded in constructions of masculinity from the viewpoints of both men and women (Harris, 1995).

Therefore the issue of the availability, management and sharing of financial resources permeates the relationship field and may be as significant in partner selection as the dynamic of love and attraction, especially in the effects on men. Financially disadvantaged men with incomes below 'breadwinner' levels are less likely to be partnered. Conversely, financially advantaged men are more likely to be partnered and if they separate are more likely to repartner quickly (Birrell & Rapson, 1998). One emerging theme in this analysis is the question of what men contribute to relationship that women want, especially if men are not contributing 'breadwinning'? Another theme is about gendered differences in the deployment of the mutually exclusive resources made available by *intimacy* and *individualism*.

6.2. Gender, money and relationship

Analysis of the texts for this study gave considerable insight into the importance and complexity of the discursive constructions about money as participants attempted to achieve not only their relationship goals, but their parenting goals as well. Four of the five men considered financial disadvantage contributed significantly to their difficulties in claiming a position in a sustained relationship because of women's financial expectations of them. Years spent in tertiary study, in prison, or in mental health recovery during their third or fourth decade meant that three of the men were seriously

disadvantaged financially. M1, M5 and M3 were all confronted by and were responding variously to the challenges of their situation:

M1: I'm of the opinion through my previous experiences that love tends to take a back seat to finances, that's for me anyway ...

M5: We come from a sort of middle income family. None of me or my cousins own a house, so our budgeting skills and financial skills are pretty sad. So I've always wanted to own my own house and now I'm doing this business course, I'm confident enough to create my own business to look after myself and ... provide for a family, instead of living from pay cheque to pay cheque.

While at a later stage of his interview M3 claimed 'The traditional couple was far better than what's happened now ...' he also resented the traditional security and romantic obligations placed on men that 'you've got to provide':

M3: You've got to be giving them money, you've got to provide them with a house... Just constant demands and a lot of them just can't be met... they want too much. You're just a normal guy...you're not a person earning millions...so you can't provide everything ...

M2 owned his own home and earned the income of a skilled technician, yet by being attracted to a professionally qualified woman who earned a higher income than he did he considered he had been relationally disadvantaged:

M2: She was the one that ended that relationship...she was around businessmen and money was a motivation for her work... and unfortunately for me, I'm not that financial in terms of the expectations that she had, so that I couldn't provide what she wanted ... we're talking diamond rings... the nicer things in life, nice lounge suites, nice apartment. Her argument initially was she had the income, so it wasn't an issue... but I feel over the period of the relationship it was something she was very concerned about...

However positioned as he was in *individualism* with occasional deployment of *romantic* interpretative repertoire, M2 experienced difficulties communicating intimately with women, as discussed in the previous chapter. Here he initially offered the vulnerability and authenticity of *intimacy* by explaining his financial situation to her:

M2: But the interesting thing was that right from the start, I explained to her that I had nothing to offer her from a financial point of view, but I had the potential to be able to create a lot. You always want to show you can do more than you can actually do...

However, with his: 'You always want to show you can do more than you can actually do' he slipped back to his primary positioning in *individualism* by exaggerating his financial potential beyond his own realistic assessment of what he could do. Such inauthentic, individualistic repositioning excludes the possibility of them communicating and resolving the differences utilising the resources of *intimacy*. Rather he supplemented his primary resources of *individualism* with the *romantic* interpretative repertoire:

M2: ...from what I'm aware of, she was looking for ... someone to provide the wealth, as opposed to falling in love... I mean she mentioned to me many times that I made her feel so different to all the relationships she'd had in the past...

On one hand, according to the rules and obligations of *romantic love* the difference in income should not have mattered: she should have prioritised 'falling in love', and accepted him as he was, so that his transformation could take place and he would realise his 'potential'. On the other hand, a well resourced woman is enabled by *romantic love*, *security* and *intimacy* to be discriminating and self-enhancing in selecting from those competing for her hand.

Yet as a high earning woman in the corporate sector F8 considered that traditional breadwinner/provider constructions of masculinity limited the options for relationship of herself and similarly positioned friends:

F8: My experience and the same with some of my friends is that you're ... going out with someone and things can be going well, until they discover that you earn more money than them and you own your own property and they don't, or they may even own one themselves but somehow that's an issue for them. They won't necessarily admit it but you can tell that it is ... they can't seem to deal with it.

Through her elaboration of distinctions between needing and wanting she highlights the discursive impasse for women positioned in *intimacy* and *gender equality* who want a sharing relationship which provides mutual emotional support:

F8: I think there are men that think women don't need them anymore... some men don't get the concept that... we might not need them for a house or financial reasons, but ... you really **want** to be with them...some men still have... that feeling of **needing to be the man and the breadwinner**... Even though to start with they might seem like a modern sort of guy... they'd rather you were down a peg or two from them in your career... seeing how independent you are ... affects them and they must think about it and be offended...

Conversely, some men are not offended by breaking with convention. Harris (1995) describes The Rebel on his list of 24 gender-role messages available to men. The Rebel challenges the system for a range of reasons, one of which may be his survival. Therefore high earning women may attract sexually available men, or charming con-men who want financial support:

F8: I went out with someone I thought was going through a bad patch financially and having his power cut off and things... it turned out that he was like that all the time. Certainly **he tried to use me financially** and he was actually a bit crafty about that... He'd sort of have you feeling sorry for him and I'd end up going out and buying him a month's worth of groceries... then I realised I was being ripped off...after that experience I would think more carefully about going out with somebody like that. I'd probably look for someone more my equal...

This situation is discursively conflicted. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, *romantic love* enables financially privileged women to share their resources with impoverished men who have admirable personal qualities and who contribute alternative resources to the relationship. In particular *romantic love* requires that a woman so positioned love him truly, thereby enabling his transformation:

F8: My sister had an experience like that ... he actually got together with her because she owned her own home very young and she'd done quite well for herself... she ended up living with him and he ripped her off... he put a lot of things on hire purchase in her name ... **normally she would be very sensible** about things like that **but she was 'in love' with him and thought he was there for good**...he ended up leaving and taking everything with him...and she ended up having to pay for it all...she discovered years later he'd done it with lots of other women... all around the country...

According to the rights and obligations of *romantic love*, women might support men through a temporary financial crisis, especially during the 'rose coloured glasses' phase, when normally 'sensible' internal and external voices are not listened to. However once women realised that these financially dependent men were not being transformed and were not contributing in other ways, such as being emotionally supportive, they were likely to end the relationship. According to the rights and obligations of *intimacy*, communication and negotiated agreement is required about what valued alternative resources he will contribute to the relationship:

F5: I was 21...he was 10 years older so he was just at the end of his phase of living it up. He was extravagant... taking me out to dinner at all the best places. He had a very good job... bottles of champagne ... things that a 21 year old girl was impressed by, Wow. So it was me looking up to him basically... Then back in NZ he couldn't get such a good job, then he broke his leg and we were living on my wages for quite a long time and that was our breaking point, plus I was being his counsellor... so having somebody weighing down on me just became too much...

Financial security is a relative consideration. For an long-term-unemployed man with only a carry bag of possessions, a shared bed and participation in the regular family meals provided by solo mothers for their children, meant he did not have 'to put himself up'. M1 described his individualistic and rebellious strategy for obtaining free board from a series of solo mothers for up to two months at a time:

M1: Making money gives me insecurity [sic], and because of that... my relationships have been with solo mums, and ... I haven't had to put myself up to have these relationships ...

While M1's discursive processes and practices cannot be considered typical of men, or even common, he did say: 'I'm close to other people who have had similar relationships, whereby the guy may be unemployed and with a solo mother'. In addition anecdotal evidence I have heard from occasional solo mothers attending counselling informs me that M1's practices are not unique. What was extraordinary in my experience was to be given such a detailed and authentic explanation of how this outsider, survival strategy was consciously constructed and practiced:

M1: ...I'm not going to jump in there and say, 'This is what I want, this is what I don't want', but behind the scenes, I'm actually doing that. But I don't cause a scene... in my experience of having a conversation... the woman comes up with a story and... [inaudible] I really know what's going on but ... I act disinterested... say I just keep watching TV... Sometimes I might give signs that I'm not pissed off, and yet I am... if my payday is coming around and I'm not getting paid till Thursday, I'm putting up this front like everything's OK...[inaudible]... then I left and never returned.

R: Can you explain that to me a bit more?

M1: Say, over money ... it's like [she said] 'Why won't you talk to me?'... in my mind I'm thinking, 'Well, what is there to say? ...OK. An argument over money, she gets pissed off over my attitude [not paying board even though he is receiving a benefit] so she goes out, then I go out, and it all comes back to money... but I'm thinking that this has gone beyond the money. It's got to the point where you've just buggered off, and now... you've basically said to me 'stuff you' so I'm going to say to you 'stuff you...'

R: And is that just once you've packed your bag and left without saying goodbye?

M1: I do it all the time.

Having relatively recently come out of prison for the third time, with no employment and no assets, but a determination to 'escape my past', M1 had initially been more concerned with his survival than achieving a goal of relationship. Disadvantaged in entering the employment field by his history, he had found that his resources of physicality, sexuality and charm could be deployed in the relationship field to individualistically ensure his survival. However the first criterion on his list of requirements for relationship was 'without fighting and arguing' which clearly could not be achieved for long by employing this exploitative survival strategy:

M1: ...love has a lot of considerations ... it's quite huge and to be honest with you I don't think I'd like to be in a relationship without it...I pretty much can see any relationship that I have dissolving if it was a relationship based on convenience. Yeah, I think it would probably fizzle out...

By the time of the interview M1 had learned from his experiences with solo mothers that relationships based on his convenience alone would not work. He had also moved beyond mere survival by obtaining employment and his own accommodation. In order to more closely approximate his goal of relationship 'without fighting and arguing' he

had experimented with negotiating a relationship which was limited to physical sexuality yet incorporated clear agreements and equal rights:

M1: I'm having a sexual relationship... and she's completely incompatible... we're probably from different ends of the social structure and I really don't have a great deal of feelings for her... and that's OK as long as it doesn't get complicated for me. I think ... it's filling in time for her... not just having sex, but being with a man... she responds in that sense... I pretty much initiated what I thought was going to happen after we had sex and... she was at ease with my openness. The choice was hers whether we continued in that capacity, but I told her there was no other capacity.

R: So you spelled it out for her... this is a casual, sexual relationship?

M1: Sure... with some lasting conversations... she had to look at me, and she got it in a way that included her, without the pressure of being put on the spot. I eliminated that by saying... I'll pick up the phone when it suits me and sooner or later I'm gonna know that you're not interested, whether you tell me or not ... but until then, I'm going to keep ringing. I said, I'm an adult, you're an adult, you're single... if this coming together doesn't suit you, I'm sure you'll let me know... but, I'm not looking for a relationship...

R: ...and is she in the pattern of solo mums?

M1: She's single, childless, forty and on a salary.

This embryonic authentic 'openness'; inclusiveness; acknowledgement of equal choice; and learning from experience, suggested M1 was shifting his footing towards deploying interpretative repertoire from *intimacy*.

Whereas four of the five male participants viewed themselves as financially handicapped in the relationship field, M4 considered himself to be advantaged. However he had refused the traditional provider/breadwinner positions of responsible partner and parent. He had also refused the gender equality and mutuality of a contemporary intimate relationship. He had chosen instead to use his financial status to occupy an individualistic, gender-power position enabled by the *male sex drive* and *men's liberation discourses* to 'buy' the company of young women in his quest for a mid-life fling:

M4: ...she'd never go and have sex with a forty two year old balding guy. Why would she? ... She's got 25 year old hunks that want to have sex with her... but it was still cool to hang out with her... I knew she was a cheap Westie tart who was looking for a good

time ... sure she would drink as many drinks as I bought her... I could buy her company but she didn't really want my company... as soon as some other guy came along she'd be whizzing there ...

The practice of fantasising about and objectivising women assumes women will act with no agentic resources of their own. M4's experiences of two particular young women who had not complied with his male-privileged agenda, plus the experiences he had already described of 'bar-flying in desperation' meant that he was struggling with achieving his goals while positioned within the assumptions of *individualism* clustered with the *male sex drive/playboy* and *men's liberation* discourses.

Women may also be disadvantaged in the contemporary relationship field by poverty and debt as men may not accept the *romantic* obligations to rescue them for true love. In particular financial liability incurred through tertiary study can seriously disadvantage some women. At the age of 35 with a goal of relationship and children, F6 discussed the negative impact of having a \$40,000 student loan on her prospects:

F6: My large student loan... always comes up within a short time... in my three last relationships ... I felt that it was an issue for the guys even though they said it wasn't... they were particularly money orientated... obviously saving, tidy and well dressed... money in the bank. I certainly wouldn't ask them to talk about their money, but they indicated investments... each of them approached the topic: 'So you've studied for a while. You must have a student loan?' I didn't offer too much at first... then as the relationship went on a few months, it was: 'So how much is it?' I always felt it was an issue.

In another part of her interview F6 described how her automatic payments on her debt for the last 6 months totalled \$1,600, only to find \$1,420 covered the interest and she had only reduced the principal by \$180. This had shocked her to 'start thinking in a money orientated way' appropriate for *security* as she realised the enormity of her liability given her relatively low level of pay as a psychologist in the mental health sector:

I don't know whether that's in my head, but I don't think it was... when you start thinking in a money orientated way which I have lately... I realise if I met somebody who had a \$40,000 debt, I would probably be thinking twice myself ...

F6 struggled with her new *security* positioning. While she acknowledged that her 'flippant attitude about money in the past has got me where I am now', she emotionally preferred the fairy tale *romantic* constructions, that financial disadvantage should not block true love: 'I wouldn't like to think...' and, 'it's really sad...'

F6: In the past I had no issues about debt. Now I see it as an issue... but I wouldn't like to think I would let it impact on a relationship... I'd want to know he was working on it and not flippant about it, because my flippant attitude about money has got me where I am now ... it's really sad to have financial things like that impact on relationships...

As she accepted the 'money oriented' strategising offered by *security*, and the obligations to communicate, negotiate and agree about the management of finances required by *intimacy*, she constructed her debt as a liability in the relationship field. These alternative interpretations impacted on her construction of a shameful Self. If she adopts a strategy of hiding herself, she constrains her availability for relationship:

F6: ...and it's now impacting on me because I feel... maybe not ashamed... but it's a part of me I want to hide ...that's one of the reasons I haven't wanted to go out and meet anybody else. I'm working lots of hours to try to pay it off... I've also become quite down about it ... and eaten lots and put on quite a few kg. So I'm going round in this crazy circle, trying to make myself better when in actual fact I'm sabotaging all that, because I'm feeling worse about myself than ever... none of my clothes fit which doesn't make me feel good about going out and looking for a new job or a new boyfriend...

To withdraw from the relationship field at 35, for the number of years it would take her to clear a \$40,000 debt is counter-productive to her success. Achieving her goals requires that she find a partner, form a relationship and have her first child within the next few years.

6.3. Gender, money and mothering

The women wanting both a relationship and children prioritised positions enabled by *gender equality*, which is a corollary of *intimacy*. However with further questioning they acknowledged the early years with young children would be problematic without financial support from a partner. This is an assumption of the *security discourse*. It may also be an assumption of the *romantic love discourse* with the proviso that both

parents are 'in love' with each other. There is no assumption in *romantic love* to 'stay together for the sake of the children', as there is in *security*. However in *intimacy* both partners are expected to contribute and any significant deviation from mutual contribution is expected to be negotiated.

The women found that achieving their career goals enabled by *feminist/gender equality*, achieving an equal and intimate relationship enabled by *intimacy*, plus being an available mother required by the *good mother/bad mother discourse* posed considerable discursive dilemmas and required complex interpretative slippage:

F7: I guess I am a bit different from most people in that I believe that mothers should be at home to look after their children. I know if I end up getting married in my child bearing years and if I have children I would actually be stopping any career I was in. Whether that meant continuing some of it part time I am not totally sure but ... while I want to fulfil my career, it would be more important to be at home with my children.

While F7 preferred the traditional gendered positions enabled by *security*, F5, who had already experienced a six-year-marriage characterised by significant age/power differences and financial, emotional and social mismatching, was determined to deploy the resources of equality and mutuality offered by *intimacy*:

F5: When I said that... I want any future partner to be able to look after himself financially, I meant that he contributes, that he doesn't draw on me for his finances, but I wouldn't want to be in a relationship with somebody who wasn't happy to join the money. My mum and dad always lived in a relationship where dad came home and the money was in the account, and mum looked after it, and they both sat down and had discussions about their money. They are both equal and they both discuss it and that's exactly what I want in a relationship. I don't want there to be any kind of issue about money. It's like a business relationship really. In any relationship you have to make a business plan and set goals and one of the goals would be about how we raise our children together.

F5 struggled with the dilemma of how to contribute equally according to her preferred positioning within the assumptions of *intimacy*, while also reluctantly accepting being a dependent mother, a position traditionally made available by *security*. She took finding a resolution to the dilemma so seriously that she was changing her career in order to be able to earn money from home:

F5: ...The reason I am studying massage is I could work from home ... I would love to meet somebody who worked in the same modality as me and could work from home ...and one could be working for money while the other was with the children. That's my ideal world. One of my friends is doing that and I just think it's great ... perhaps not the first year or so but while my partner was out working if I was at home then I would do massage in the evenings. I always like to think that I am able to contribute, but I am also open to the fact that I have also contributed by having a baby. ... but of course then it comes down to me discussing that with him and both of us being OK with that ... and if he wasn't then he wouldn't be the guy for me...

Her firm preference for occupying positions enabled by *intimacy* is evident in her deployment of assumptions about contribution, discussion, mutuality and her prioritising of head over heart strategising in that if he didn't meet her requirement for achieving her family-making goal, 'then he wouldn't be the guy for me'.

6.4. Gender, money and fathering

Lack of money plus their advancing age was the combination of considerations M1 and M3 employed in their rejection of the position of fathering. Concerns about age were not so much biologically related to conception as they were for the women. Rather the men's concerns were related to *security* and their self-efficacy in occupying the available 'breadwinner/provider' position with the financial responsibilities of children when their future earning potential was insecure:

M1: That's been very much a money thing... the whole thing is a money thing but, at 38 ... the very last ...for me would be 40 because I don't think I would want to have children in their teenage years when I was 58 ... Money would be tied into it as a reason as well because if I went out and won \$2 million on Lotto this weekend, then maybe ...

M3: ...once you hit 40 it's probably a little bit late for that... It's not really whether we want them or not, it's financial considerations... I'm finding it hard to get work, the last thing you want is to be having children because it's more financial responsibility. So considering my age [43] it's not a big issue any more. If I was maybe 30, 35, I'd think, yeah, but I'm not.

The obligations of the breadwinner position were powerful and constraining. Both men separated the issue of wanting children from their financial circumstances: winning lotto

might over-ride the concerns about age. In contrast, although M5 was 37 he still wanted to have a large family, including adopted children:

M5: I'm the eldest child in my mother's, my father's and my step-father's families... I've got about 50 cousins out there... I've looked after all of them at some stage... so I know how to look after kids. I know I'll chip in and help with the kids. I'll change their nappies, if they're crying and my wife's a bit tired... I'll be out working for them... I love kids, I always have.

By doing a business course in order to improve his financial capability M5 signalled his acceptance of the rules and obligations of the provider/breadwinner position.

6.5. Constructing 'Me' as childfree

A lack of finances and advancing years were not the only reason to reject the parenting part of the conventional story. Despite his financial resources M4 made a conscious and individualistic decision to refuse the fathering position 'early on':

M4: No I don't really want children. I think I decided that early on and x was there with me on that. She didn't seem to want children either. I guess I've always felt it would be too constricting. I felt like I wouldn't have the patience and determination to be so selfless for so many years as you have to be ... you have to sacrifice ...

While primarily positioned in *individualism*, M4's experiences since leaving his 15 year relationship had not worked out as he had hoped. Therefore his individualistic positioning was not always sure-footed. Here he briefly considered an interpretative repertoire of fulfilling love and 'the love of your life'. Such consummate love is a rare achievement and is an interpretative construction whereby partner selection is accomplished in *romantic love* and deepened through the communicative practices of *intimacy* (Sternberg, 1988). However he quickly slipped back to his 'always' positioning in *individualism*.

M4: I could be wrong. I could be missing out on the most fulfilling thing in the world ... like you go through the love of a woman ... and maybe the next love of your life is the love of your children ... but my feelings have always been that I just don't think I could give that selfless devotion to someone else...

Like M4, F8 was also well resourced but valued her individualistic 'freedom' to go out and enjoy herself. She constructed herself as not 'maternal':

F8: I personally don't want to have children for a number of reasons but it wouldn't bother me if he already had children... and see them every second weekend. In fact that would make things more interesting... I'm happy to be an aunty or a step mother but I've never felt maternal... I've been more focused on career and I've always wanted the sort of lifestyle where I could go out and have a lot more freedom, whereas children stop that.

Research evidence supports her perception that most of the burden of 'selfless devotion' falls on working women (Dempsey, 1997). In the constructions of F8 and later in the chapter, F3, it seems possible that observing the 'hard lives' of working mothers may have a stifling effect on the 'maternal urge' of some women looking on:

F8: Even women that are in a relationship, their lives seem to be so hard. Most women still have to work 40 hours a week, because of mortgages and so on. There are very few women that can stay at home... when they come home from work, they do most of the housework and they have most of the responsibility for the children. When I've talked to women like that, I've realised they think I'm lucky because I go out and have a good time and they don't have that opportunity. Then sometimes they have children with behavioural problems... it sounds as if their lives are drudgery... regardless of what sort of background they're from... middle class or upper middle class, or working class... it looks like a pretty hard life to me.

Slippage occurred in her positioning as she constructed the possibilities of a partner's involvement, the equal sharing of responsibilities, and support from an extended family as factors which might influence her to reconsider her decision:

F8: If I did meet the man of my dreams and if it was extremely important to him, and it looked like it was going to be more like an equal thing where I wouldn't be left with all the responsibility, working, housework and kids, while he mucked around ... in that type of scenario I might consider it, but for myself I would rather not... I've got deceased parents ... a lot of women rely on their mother to baby sit or help them out. I don't have ... much support. In a second scenario, if I had a supportive partner and he had lots of female relatives that would help, because we were important to them, then who knows...

As F8 continued to explicate how important support was in her decision not to have children, her initially firm description of her identity as 'not maternal' showed some slippage, as she acknowledged it was 'quite sad' that the father could not be counted on to stay:

F8: And that was one of the reasons why I felt that I didn't want to have children because you just don't know whether the father's going to stay with you or not. Whereas in the past, in my parents' day, that probably might not have been an issue. So the way that things have changed in that regard I think is actually quite sad.

Once again past experiences appear to influence participants' construction and selection processes as they choose from the positions made available in the discursive field. F8 was one of 8 children and 'my father wasn't around after age 12 because he got very ill' so her mother's life would have looked 'pretty hard' if not like 'drudgery', and all the more 'sad' because:

F8: He was way ahead of his time ... when my mother was having children... a lot of men back then were really chauvinist whereas my father would think nothing of looking after the kids himself and her going out and things like that...but it didn't affect his sense of being a man, he didn't care what other men said about him...

Poignantly, despite being remembered as a wonderful man, husband and father, unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances mean 'you just don't know whether the father's going to stay with you or not'. F3 was another daughter of separated parents who constructed herself as a woman without 'that hormonal, maternal urge':

F3: If I met someone now and he really wanted to have a child, well I'd try... but I've never had that hormonal maternal urge ... My husband was a bit of a child as well. He didn't take any responsibility for the day to day things... I'd come home from a working trip and there'd be two weeks unopened mail and two weeks washing waiting for me. When people said, Why don't you have children? I'd say, Well I already have one.

By constructing her ex-husband as the 'child' in their marriage who clearly would not have helped her if they had had children, she established that the relationship was male-privileged with the rigid gender roles of *security*.

6.6. Solo mother: the controversial position

In his deconstruction of texts Derrida drew attention to the binary dynamic of presence and absence (Sarup, 1988). While this research project specifically excluded anyone positioned as a solo mother, in her exclusion and absence she exuded a strong presence in the discursive construction of the positions of several of those interviewed. If perceptions of the hard lives of working mothers in relationships attracted cautionary interpretations, perceptions of solo mothers were even more daunting. Indeed F1, F3 and F8 viewed that position as so undesirable that their assessment of the high risk of occupying that position was very influential in their decisions not to have children:

F3: I wouldn't want to have a child on my own. I see these women and it's awfully hard.

F8: The other thing that's put me off is seeing so many women that end up as a single mother on the DPB. You know, they get married, split up years later, and seem to have all the responsibility of the children... It always seems to fall back on women... seeing a sister that ended up breaking up with her partner and how she's struggled on the DPB and being judged by people and so on ... and also having another sister that divorced and ... her partner had nothing more to do with the children. So she had all of their teenage problems and he never paid any maintenance money.

F1: I wondered whether I would cope very well in a family situation... I'd see mothers with children and I'd think, Oh that would be too much work for me... I actually doubted my ability after seeing my mother bring up three of us on her own... I felt it was a big job... there's always the potential for break-up. It happens frequently and it happens with me a lot. I've had 5 serious partners and the longest relationship was for 5 years...

Other women wanted to have children, but absolutely did not want to occupy the solo mother position, so they were delaying motherhood by being very cautious in their choice of partner, while trying to be realistic in their expectations of lasting relationship:

F7: I would dearly love to have a family but in saying that I am not prepared to be a solo mum, unless death or some circumstance that was beyond my control happened.

F5: People separate right left and centre... that's something I was very aware of responsibility-wise towards children. That's why I never had children with my husband and he wanted to, but I just felt it wasn't the right thing to do because fundamentally I think I knew we weren't going to stay together, even though I didn't want to admit that. So who I choose to have children with... I'll be very, very careful that this has the potential to be a long term relationship... and I definitely won't take that decision lightly.

While women constructed the solo mother position as one to be avoided, even if that meant refusing motherhood, two impoverished men, M3 and M1 viewed the position as unjustifiably privileged. M1's interpretation of 'damaged goods' has already been discussed. M3, who resented women's financial expectations of men, constructed solo mothering as a female-privileged strategy for obtaining benefits and other perks:

M3: Looking back at the early 1980s... they were encouraging women to have children. They would have their children and they would drop their partner and get all these benefits like cheap houses, mortgages, rent ... Then they could get another boyfriend. I know a few people caught in that... rather than loving the guy or loving the children, they would get themselves pregnant so they could get the benefit and houses and money.

A number of writers have discussed the growing divide between men and women (Birrell & Rapson, 1998; Dempsey, 1997; Hacker, 2000, Waller, 2002). M3 considered 'a wedge' had been 'driven between men and women and it is partly due to the liberation thing' so that 'sometimes it feels like a dislike between males and females':

M3: Not only me but a lot of guys around about my age (43) ...are getting fed up, because of those two situations, firstly being used to have children, and secondly, not being able to see their children and be like a father should be, because of the woman using the children as pawns.

In their very different gendered constructions of the solo mother position, perceptions of a lack of mutual care and support between men and women are apparent. Hollway (2004) suggests 'mutuality' is the key word to making the asymmetry in gender relations workable. Mutuality is also the key to *intimacy*. Men discursively positioned in *security* and *individualism*, yet who lack the financial resources to occupy the breadwinner position have limited choices. Those who exclude constructions of mutuality offered by *intimacy* may be limited to resentfully occupying positions in *individualism*.

6.7. Good parent/Bad parent

The selection criteria for the participants required them to be childless or childfree. The intention in setting this criterion was to investigate the impact of the 'biological clock'. It has been one of the unexpected themes to find that more than half the participants had excluded the parenting aspect of the conventional story without apparent distress. Lack of financial resources, desire for freedom and fear of being a solo parent are reasons which have already been discussed. Also after serious consideration of their personal resources both men and women actively refused the parenting position if they thought, because of their history, they would not be good enough parents:

M2: I've done the marriage thing... but she wanted to have kids and I just couldn't give her what she wanted at that time ... the clock's ticking, let's have some kids, but I wasn't sure... People say it changes your life, you become a different person. But it's too big a risk for me to bring somebody else into the world and then not be there for them. That's the worst thing I could do, and I'd rather not have them than not be there for them. I don't think I'm a selfish person... I saw from my past how not to bring children up... so I'd like to change that... I'd rather give a child the opportunity to develop in their own way.

F2: I had a horrible childhood and I don't think I'd be a very good mother as a result... I very much had the urge not to have children. I thought by the time I got to my mid-30s I might change my mind...but it never happened ... I just turned 40 this year.

Perhaps it is significant that all the participants had reached their fourth decade without intentionally or unintentionally having children, because like M4, they all constructed parenting as an important job to be performed responsibly and well:

M4: I would feel very committed to doing it well if I made the decision ... I have enough morality within myself not to stuff up by bringing another person into the world and treating them badly.

To be constructed as a good or bad parent is an important consideration in the discursive construction of identity (Crogan & Miell, 1998). In delaying or in not having children at all, each of the participants had constructed their decision as responsible in terms of their own version of being a 'good parent'.

6.8. The good old days: security and gender

Some of the participants perceived the traditional gender roles of *security* to be one of the major reasons for relationship stability in the past:

F6: In the past it was expected that women found a partner and they got married and they stayed with that partner ... there were a small number of occupations to choose from, or they would be a mother. It would make life a lot easier.

There was some nostalgia for the perceived simplicity and stability of 'the past'. Yet participants, especially the women, did not want the whole traditional package, so they were selective about what to keep and discard. F7 valued the freedom and career options that *feminist discourse* had contributed to her:

F7: ...the freedom I have to pursue a career that I really enjoy... is not considered to be second rate ... I am glad that I live in the type of world where I do have that freedom. I've got an aunt who has just got married at 50, and I used to perceive her as an old maid, that spinster thing. I'm glad some of that perception has gone now, because... if you looked at me now I would get that title 20 years ago, whereas I don't see myself like that... the stigma of the label would have been quite demoralising....

However she also wanted to be a traditional mother at home. Her positioning shows considerable slippage between gender equality and traditional gender roles of *security*:

F7: I don't think men are respected the way they were previously...I agree with it in terms of equal rights and equal power, but I don't go much beyond that...some men are chauvinist, but then some people are too extremely feminist... men today are quite confused about the role they are expected to play ... they have lost a lot of their masculinity... 'women want me to be like this', and 'I want to be like this'...and who am I?

M3 so preferred the traditional gender roles offered by the *security discourse* that he was about to leave NZ for several months to further a relationship he had begun on the Internet with a potential partner in the Philippines:

M3: I have got a girlfriend at the moment. She's in the Philippines and I feel quite stable with her, but we're talking about somebody from a different culture ... Compared to the

women I've gone out with over here... she'll want to make the relationship work whereas over here, they seem to want to destroy a relationship and not carry on with it...

The first requirement on his list was 'stability' and he constructed the culture in the Philippines as more supportive of stable marriage than contemporary New Zealand culture. In their comparative study of sex-role ideology Williams and Best (1994) identified South East Asian cultures as amongst the more male dominant and traditional cultures. M3 constructed the new 'selfishness' as a factor undermining relationship stability in New Zealand. However it is not clear whether he was rejecting 'selfishness' as constructed by *individualism* or interpreting New Zealand women's non-traditional expectations of equality as 'selfishness'. His choice of partner suggests the latter:

M3: I remember when I was in my 30s thinking, it would've been good to be my parent's generation... People have said to me, back in your parent's day they had to stick together no matter how bad it was, but I'm wondering if that's true... Maybe back in those days they weren't so selfish... The traditional couple was far better than what's happened now... it's become a very selfish society ...

From his postgraduate training he was aware of the potential for abuse in heterosexual relationships and carefully positioned himself as traditional but not sexist or abusive:

M3: I'm not saying that men should be doing this and women should be doing that ... I'm also not saying that one is better than the other ... but women and men should be working together and they should understand that they're both different ... **Maybe women were oppressed before ... certain people may oppress women,** but not all guys will. People like me... I let the women do more or less what they want... so long as they didn't get on my case about things... criticise and belittle me and take away my freedom as well.

Yet in his constructions of 'I let the women' and 'get on my case' and 'take away my freedom' there is more of a sense of two people attempting to relate defensively from oppositional discursive positions, rather than of employing the practices of mutuality and communication enabled by *intimacy*.

6.9. A lateral shift in the relationship field

Roseneil (2003) investigated the emergence of another alternative to both the conventional story and to being single in the contemporary relationship field. When separating from a relationship results in disillusionment, people may construct networks of friends, flatmates and family members. These networks meet their needs for intimacy, affection and belonging and are supportive of both adults and children. Yet safe personal boundaries are set that do not entail the emotional risks of investing in one right person or the nuclear family structure. While patiently waiting and being highly selective about choosing a co-parent/soul mate, F5 valued the mutuality in her consciously-constructed, friendship-network:

F5: I socialise and I go out a lot... I have a big group of friends here which is something that I made myself do because I have no family in NZ... my family are my friends...

Friends and sisters may support solo mothers in the network while gaining personally from involvement in the lives of children with whom they have a special bond:

F3: I don't think it would bother me too much if I didn't have a child... I've got a niece and 2 nephews...

F8: I've got a friend that does have a child ... I get on so well with her son...

F1 and her sister lived together in the family home they had inherited, where they had been sharing the parenting responsibilities for their orphaned, teenage nephew since he was a child. Outside this 'family' she had constructed a support network:

F1: I have another male friend who rings me up sometimes to go to the pictures... I belong to a Catholic singles group... I've been going to that for the last eight or nine years... singles who are in the same boat as me, getting on in age...and a lot of them very fussy about who they go out with...

F8 had a goal of relationship, yet with her active support network she considered in many ways she was better off than women in relationships and women with children. She had already (above) described the hard work and drudgery of these women's lives:

F8: I've got single friends that live in Ponsonby and all their flatmates who come and go are just like them... they could still be in their 40s and living a single life... being a bit of a bachelor and bachelorette... I actually go out a lot more than couples... to night clubs and jazz bars and whatever's going on in Auckland in the theatres and galleries.

A theme throughout all the texts was of socialising with, and receiving valued support at critical times from, sisters, mothers, ex-partners and friends. On offer appears to be a new form of security made available by constructions of informal *community*, as distinct from the traditional *security* based on the genetically-connected extended family or whanau of collective cultures. Roseneil (2003) found the networks investigated by her research teams were surprisingly stable over an eighteen month period.

6.10. Summary

Just as infatuation is an ubiquitous phenomenon which requires interpretation by every discourse available in the relationship field, so women's dependence around child bearing and child birth requires functional construction by every discourse. It appears that, overtly or covertly, women are enabled to incorporate financial considerations into their constructions of attraction by all the discourses. In difficult economic times of high unemployment, men earning below breadwinner/provider levels are particularly disadvantaged. This disadvantage is intensified for men who choose to occupy male-privileged, individualistic positions and refuse to make alternative contributions to relationship, especially those enabled by *intimacy*. The relatively new two-income and solo-parent family structures both place such a high burden of responsibility for house work and relational work on women that women view both options with caution.

As a consequence, intimate lives in the contemporary relationship field may be diversifying even further from the conventional story as both women and men increasingly construct lifestyles that meet their needs for connection with others, while preserving their individual autonomy and independence. These highly valued support-networks may be a combination of friends, children, family, a non-residential partner, an involved-father or friendly-ex. They may be quite inclusive of sexual, racial, cultural and generational diversity. They may offer some of the support formerly offered by the traditional extended family and whanau: support which the post-war nuclear family has seriously lacked.

PART III

CONCLUSIONS

RESULTS

and

DISCUSSION

Chapter 7

Results and discussion

What's love got to do with it?

Tina Turner

7.1. Introduction

The phenomenon of a growing divide between mature, heterosexual women and men is confirmed and explicated further by this study. In a quiet revolution in New Zealand, Australia and the other Eurocentric countries 20 to 30% of contemporary men in their fourth decade are unpartnered. These unprecedented numbers of single men are living alone, in flats with other singles, or with their parents (Birrell & Rapson, 1998; Hacker, 2003). In the post WWII decade of the 1950s over 90% of men were married and living in nuclear families. It was the most married decade for men in recent history (Israel, 2002). The 1950s and 1960s are often perceived with nostalgia as the good old days of family stability when couples stayed together. Knowledge of how much governmental assistance men, particularly married returned servicemen, received to enable them to occupy the breadwinner/provider position is largely excluded from popular memory.

While 20 to 30% of contemporary women in their fourth decade are also unpartnered, there are some significant differences. First it is not new for a considerable number of women to be unpartnered. During the twentieth century over 27,000 New Zealand men were killed in combat overseas. In the so called golden years of the 1950s thousands of women were relegated to the discounted status of 'spinster' with limited career choices and low levels of pay. While the social status of 'married woman' and 'mother of 4' was much higher than 'spinster', the positions of 'secretary' 'office wife' and 'flapper' presented a threat. Consequently married women were encouraged to unstintingly serve their breadwinner/husbands' physical, emotional and identity needs in order to retain the security and status of her married position (Israel, 2002).

While the new population of unpartnered, liberated men live in situations with minimal financial or emotional responsibility for others, many contemporary single women are

solo-mothers living with excessive family responsibility for the financial and emotional support of children. Currently only about 1% of solo parents are men. In contrast to the effort women in the 'good old days' contributed to sustaining their marriages and serving their breadwinners' needs, contemporary women initiate around 70% of the 30% of relationship breakups. Working women may deconstruct a partner with non-contributing practices, modelled on their fathers and grandfathers, as a burdensome, dependent child. While women may resent the absence of a responsible, intimate co-partner, single mature men appear to be confused and wounded by women's unavailability and expectations..

7.2. Summary of findings

There were four research questions for this analysis:

1. What are the relationship **goals**, in terms of their construction and function, for men and women in this demographic group?
2. What are the dominant and counter **discourses** available to men and women in this demographic group in achieving their relationship goals?
3. Which **interpretative repertoires** enable modification and variation of the more stable discourses?
4. Are these discourses and interpretative modifications **functional** in enabling participants to achieve their relationship goals?

Goals:

This analysis of the relationship goals of mature singles indicated that all participants had preferred goals of being in relationships in the foreseeable future. Yet achievement of their relationship goals was highly conflicted and problematic. They had learned from their own past experiences and their observations of friends and family members, that positions in coupled relationships carry a high risk of pain. Breaking up may produce negative constructions of themselves as failures and the intensity of the emotional pain of loss may induce suicidal ideation. Therefore breaking up is constructed as an experience to be avoided, even if that entails avoiding relationship. Conversely when passion fades, staying may entail accepting control, abuse or a diminished identity.

Strategies of self-protection are needed to limit the risk of falling into these undesirable positions again. One commonly employed strategy is the construction of secondary goals of being self-sufficient and 'happy on my own', or well supported by friends and siblings as preferable to an unhappy or abusive relationship. From their carefully constructed and practised self-sufficient positions, singles form a list of criteria by which to recognise 'the right person' in whom it may be safe to invest their vulnerable feelings and identity. Even so the high risk of breakup and heartache is perceived to be outside personal control because contemporary life is characterised by ubiquitous change.

To have children in such an uncertain climate increases the risk of personal loss for men and hardship for women. The high risk of occupying the solo mother position is so unattractive to some women that they resist having children, while others delay having children until they are sure they have found that right co-parent. Yet the ticking of the biological clock adds an unwanted pressure. Financial concerns about their self-efficacy as provider/breadwinners are influential in some men rejecting fathering. The high risk of separation and becoming an absent father is a reason some men delay having children until they are sure they have found that right co-parent. Wanting freedom rather than the responsibilities and restrictions of children is the reason some well-resourced men and women give for refusing parenthood.

Discourses:

The discourses most likely to be deployed by mature singles to achieve their goals in the relationship field are *romantic love*, *individualism*, *intimacy*, *soul mates* and *security*.

The assumptions of *romantic love* promise happiness-ever-after and privilege intense feelings as the indicator that the 'one true love' has been found. The discourse offers positions of passive waiting until 'Cupid's arrow' strikes, after which men are obliged to actively take risks while women are obliged to be gentle and protective of risk-taking men's egos. The requirement for initial passivity leaves both men and women vulnerable to desperation, but particularly women wanting children, as the biological clock ticks on. While *romantic love* continues to be favoured by teenagers and twenty year olds (Jackson, 2001; Rocco, 2004) most mature participants had found *romantic* assumptions, constructed as they are in fiction, to be deceptive and productive of considerable pain and desperation. Twelve of the thirteen participants had shifted their

primary positioning to other discourses. Therefore for mature singles *romantic love* is largely marginalised and is no longer the dominant discourse.

When men shift their primary positioning from *romantic love* they are most likely to reposition themselves within the independent, self-sufficient resources of *individualism* which is most familiar to heterosexual men's cultural practice. Meanwhile women are most likely to reposition themselves within the communicative, relational resources of *intimacy* which is most familiar to their cultural practice.

Whereas *romantic love* places the obligations for taking risks to initiate relationship on men, *individualism* enables previously wounded men to act defensively and to self protect by justifying strategies of 'acting cool' and privileging their own identity, sexuality, needs and desires over those of others. Some women perceive the practice of acting cool as a male-driven strategy which they are confused and frustrated by. Even so they may try to occupy individualistic positions by acting cool and being available for first night casual sex, in order not to appear 'desperate' and 'frighten a man off'. Still other woman lose interest and 'turn off' men who are self-focused, sexually motivated and do not engage in the reciprocal talking practices of *intimacy*. However from this analysis *individualism* appears to be the dominant discourse deployed by mature single men, despite the disconnection with contemporary women.

Women prefer the positions enabled by *intimacy* because of their familiarity with talking practices and because the rules, rights and obligations of *intimacy* offer them equal value and equal voice. In this discourse both women and men are enabled to consciously and actively pursue relationship through informed construction of lists of the criteria required for compatibility and workable relationship. Although *intimacy* privileges skill in communication over infatuation, some 'chemistry' is likely to be an 'essential' on their lists. Participation in *intimacy* would obligate men to share the responsibility for emotional work, reciprocal communication, authenticity and mutuality. This analysis suggests that some men find the verbal practices of *intimacy* unexciting, or bewildering and may construct them as mysterious and inaccessible occurrences in women's heads. However from this analysis *intimacy* appears to be the dominant discourse deployed by mature single women.

Soul mates is an emerging discourse in a fluid state of construction. The most established assumption is that there is a preordained partner for each person who will emerge when the time is right (Braden, 1996). This assumption was employed by both women and men to occupy positions of patience and hope, thereby being less vulnerable to sliding into positions of desperation.

Soul mates also enables informed construction of lists of the required criteria based on up-to-date research into compatibility and resilient relationship (Hoffman & Weiner, 2003). While the discourse offers strong attachment it does not promise happy-ever-after outcomes. Rather it gives value to personal growth through mutuality, skilful communication and learning to work together to accomplish life tasks and goals (Collins, 2001). Therefore *soul mates* is more closely allied to the assumptions of *intimacy* than *romantic love*. However its deployment in this study was restricted to the minority of women and men who also deployed assumptions of New Age spirituality. Therefore *soul mates* functions as an emerging counter discourse.

The *security discourse* is overtly marginalised in the contemporary relationship field. Yet the simplistic solutions *security* offers to the inevitable dependence of women during the pre and post natal periods at least, and to the problem of relationship instability mean that the 'good old days' when security was dominant are viewed with nostalgia. None of the women positioned themselves primarily within the gender-role rights and obligations of *security*, and the only man to do so was looking outside New Zealand to form a relationship with a woman from the Philippines.

Mature singles who are disillusioned with *romantic love* may also be constructing and constructed by an as yet nameless discourse, which could be termed *friendship-family* or *friendship-community*. The primary assumption is that, 'while partners come and go, friends are forever' (Roseneil, 2003). This discursive resource emerged as a common theme in the texts with frequent references to highly valued support-networks of friends, family (especially siblings) and even friendly ex-partners. *Friendship-family* networks have the potential to be inclusive of sexual, racial, cultural and generational diversity. They appear to offer mutual support previously offered by the extended family and whanau which the mobile post-war nuclear family seriously lacked. However none of the participants positioned themselves primarily in this discourse.

Interpretative repertoires:

The positions offered by the major discourses were at times firmly accepted, but as the interviews progressed and participants elaborated their situations, considerable slippage and use of various interpretative repertoires was apparent. Sometimes the resources of alternative major relationship discourses were deployed and sometimes the resources from other discursive fields, such as spirituality or sexuality were accessed.

Romantic assumptions and rights to euphoria and happy-ever-after outcomes mean that despite the discourse being marginalised by this age group it remains seductive, therefore the *romantic* interpretative repertoire may continue to be deployed. As the sexual passion of infatuation is ubiquitous across collective and individualistic cultures, the experience, which is so privileged in *romantic love* may be reinterpreted and given alternative functions in other discursive constructions. For example, in *intimacy* infatuation is constructed as 'chemistry' and allocated the function of attraction, but it is not expected to sustain relationship or remove the need for emotional work. In *individualism* infatuation may justify short term 'flings' with 'hot' sexual partners.

Some men complemented their individualistic positioning with interpretative repertoires made available by the *male sex drive*, *men's liberation* or *hedonism discourses*. By employing these resources they were enabled to divide and objectivise in order to be blatantly derogatory about women, while excusing their own predatory and exploitative sexual activity as a natural expression of masculinity (Hollway, 1984; Sutton, 1995).

The resources of *security* were deployed more as an interpretative repertoire than for primary discursive positioning. While women's nostalgia tended to be for men to be more committed and financially responsible, they valued their own education and career possibilities too much to accept the role allocated to them by *security*. Similarly nostalgic men hoped for women to expect less of them while supporting them more.

No one identified a goal of being positioned primarily within a social support network without a partner, despite their current participation in and appreciation of their own support system. Therefore at this stage I consider the discursive resources of *friendship-family* were deployed as an interpretative repertoire.

Functionality:

This analysis suggests that the contemporary practice of delaying commitment into the fourth decade may be contributing to mature singles not achieving their relationship goals. Common perceptions that there is plenty of time to find that 'right one' enables the practice of serial monogamy. However each relationship or breakup experience which diminishes their identity or traumatises their feelings increases the likelihood that mature singles, especially men, will strengthen their positioning in *individualism*.

It is apparent that *individualism* enables options for leaving the relationship field, either temporarily to take time-out to recover, or perhaps permanently. However assumptions and practices of *individualism*, such as excluding vulnerable feelings and denying or minimising authentic hopes for relationship may be counter-productive to achieving relationship goals. The active pursuit of goals to protect self-identity is likely to produce strategies of resistance which exclude the relational practices of mutuality necessary for the achievement of fulfilling relationship. The prevalence of men in particular claiming positions within the *discourse of individualism* is likely to be a significant discursive enabler of the rapidly growing numbers of heterosexual men who, contrary to the conventional story and historical practice, are single and childfree in their fourth decade.

While self-protective strategies are deployed to decrease the short term risks of 'failure' and pain, these strategies may increase the long term risks to physical and emotional wellbeing, and may deny mature singles, especially men, access to the significant proven benefits of being in relationship at least, if not formally married (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Wilson & Oswald, 2002).

Men who choose to employ the repertoire of the *male sex drive discourse* may 'take their chances' and enjoy short term gains in sexual experiences; however this construction is also likely to contribute to the numbers of unpartnered men in this age group. Choices for such strategies of relating to women may frustrate their longer term preferences for not wanting to be alone in the future.

Women's high expectations for relationship, preference for *intimacy* and dismissive impatience with *intimacy*-challenged men may also be a contributing factor to the growing numbers of unpartnered single, childfree women and solo mothers, as the rules

and practices enabled by this discourse are unfamiliar to many men (Coates, 1996, 2003; Mapstone, 1995, 1996, 1998; Steil, 1997).

Yet so far there are limited alternative discursive options available which are productive of fulfilling family-making relationships. Despite some nostalgia, the rigid constraints and obligations of *security* are not attractive to contemporary women, or to men either. *Romantic love* has been tried and marginalised by most mature singles because it has been found to be deceptive. Despite the strong presence of *individualism* in the contemporary relationship field it does not function as a relational discourse. Without the deployment of the resources of other discourses, *individualism* ultimately, may be productive of the oxymoron: the one-person family.

Intimacy is the most likely discourse to offer a contemporary relational repertoire sufficient to provide nurturing resources for children, women and men...if more heterosexual men can be engaged in the practices of *intimacy*.

The only other discourse with the potential to meet the needs of children, women and men for nurturing and practical support, is the new *friendship-family discourse* which is being constructed from selected resources of other discourses: the respect for personal boundaries of *individualism*; access to emotional support through the talking practices of *intimacy*; and the practical and logistical support with child care, illness, accommodation, etc. enabled by *security*. Yet no one aspired to a goal set in this discourse, therefore its function appears to be to make available fallback positions from the primary goal of relationship. However the fallback positions on offer are far more beneficial than those of self-sufficient *individualism*. They protect from desperation, offer multi-dimensional support and enable participants to socialise and practise relational skills towards achieving their primary goal of relationship in the future.

While *soul mates* may support the assumptions and practices of the *intimacy* and *friendship-family* discourses, its New Age spirituality assumptions are likely to continue to limit its deployment across the wider relationship field.

7.3. Implications for the talking therapies

Discursive constructions that 'I don't need anyone' and 'I am OK on my own' are endorsed by pervasive self help and psychotherapeutic literature that presents the 'need' for relationship as addictive and dysfunctional co-dependency (Beattie, 1987; Bradshaw, 1988; Norwood, 1987). Rather than needing relationship a 'healthy' individual is constructed as self-sufficient and able to enjoy relationship as a bonus, if it happens at all. This prevalent construction may not be helpful to mature singles in acknowledging and achieving their preferred goals of relationship. In fact to practice being self-sufficient and single, may produce expertise in being single, rather than being relational.

It may be more therapeutically useful to support and enhance strategies for claiming, rather than being ashamed of goals of relationship, marriage and having children. In addition active therapeutic support for learning from past mistakes in order to skilfully, selectively and actively return to the relationship field is likely to be beneficial. That the preferred goal of relationship is considered to be a major life task in all cultures (Buss, 1994), is endorsed by the research evidence that both men and women benefit significantly from being married, although their areas of benefit may vary (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Wilson & Oswald, 2002).

While it is appropriate to assist clients to progress from dysfunctional enmeshment and dependence to greater self-efficacy and independence, it is therapeutically responsible to assist them to continue their progress towards interdependence, mutuality and intimate relationship if that is their preferred goal. As well as ways to recover and manage life independently after a traumatic breakup, the talking therapies could usefully offer psychoeducation in the latest research on both effective partner selection and the communicative construction of relationship. After 15 years of research at Harvard University into the signification processes and poststructural conceptualisations of communication, Stone, Patton and Heen (1999) have produced *Difficult Conversations*, a model of meaning-making and interpersonal communication readily learned and deployed by both women and men.

Some writers present a 'backlash' perspective of heterosexual men in crisis, as victims of the feminist movement (Gough & Peace; 2000). However this analysis supports the

both/and position espoused by Coates (2003), Steil (1997) and Waller (2002) that the crisis of these transitional decades negatively affects both heterosexual men and women. While a range of women can increasingly succeed in many other areas of their lives, heterosexual women cannot achieve their goals of establishing and sustaining nurturing, rewarding two-parent, families without partners whose discursive resources and practices enable them to occupy complementary positions deploying the resources of *intimacy*.

7.4. Implications for social policy

For some years Professor Ian Pool of the Department of Population Studies at Waikato University has been stressing the urgency of developing family-friendly policies in New Zealand for looking after the quality and wellbeing of our primary capital, children. This is particularly urgent in the light of the widely discussed socio-economic problems produced by the combination of an aging population and a declining birth rate.

Pool promotes two realistic strategies. The first is to look after the human capital already born. This would include the health and education of children and is outside the scope of this research project. The second is to develop and implement family-friendly policies in order to turn around the rapid decline in rates of fertility in New Zealand and to eventually achieve at least intergenerational replacement. Many New Zealand families today are vulnerable, in part as a consequence of the restructuring of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Workable family-friendly policies need to be a context-related package (Pool, 2002; Pool & Sceats, 2003). In response to widespread concerns the Families Commission was established in New Zealand in July 2004, to facilitate researching and addressing issues of family support.

This analysis confirms the need for greater support for families as the majority of participants perceived the task of having and raising children competently as important but overly restricting and daunting. This analysis also endorses the much publicised concerns about the negative impact of student debt and indicates a context-related, family-friendly package needs to relieve student debt, urgently. Financial policies need to support those wanting to have children and to give them good quality care. It needs to be remembered that in the 'good old days' education, health and dental care were universally free and therefore not the responsibility of immediate or potential breadwinners.

Incentives for informed good-quality parenting and family-making, and the promotion of programmes to break the cycle of abusive parenting are endorsed by the interpretations of participants who had experienced broken families, absent fathering or abusive parenting. Their constructions of their experiences indicate a long term negative impact on their relationships and their willingness to be parents themselves (Wallerstein, 2000).

Poole (2002) also recommends that New Zealand's official statistical community and demographers improve and extend data collection and analysis. Relevant to this project is the fact that marriage and divorce statistics no longer give sufficient information about the silent revolution which is occurring in New Zealand. Currently, the rapid increase in the number of men and women who are single during their prime years for parenting and family-making must be extrapolated from other statistics.

In addition to the above recommendations, this study identifies an urgent need for further investigation into constructions of heterosexual masculinity, as 'normal' may not equate with 'healthy' (Brooks, 2001). Indications are that any effective family-support package produced from the Families Commission recommendations needs to include workable strategies for enabling men to access the resources and practices of *intimacy*. This would be in order that they may achieve their goals of forming and sustaining positive and communicative relationships with women and children, as well as to give greater support to each other in times of personal crisis and loss.

7.5. Limitations of this study

Access to Participants: Participants were all **volunteers** who responded to distributed information sheets, advertising or networking. The intention was to have sixteen participants with equal numbers of men and women. Eight women were interviewed but only five men. Even though eight was an arbitrary number, it would have added further confirmation to the analysis and may have opened up additional discursive resources if another three men had been interviewed.

Perhaps if I had language my advertising more as: 'wanting to interview men who would talk about being single and childfree in their fourth decade', rather than to talk about 'love' I might have engaged more men. Then having engaged them in an

interview, I might have been able to access their interpretations of the field of relationships. However it is by no means certain that would have made a difference.

My experience of the men I did interview was of a gratifying willingness to talk about their experiences and concerns and I consider the texts which resulted from their interviews to be rich and revealing. This is somewhat counter to the literature on men's deficiency in revealing vulnerability in communication (Coates, 2003). However it supports other contentions that change is occurring through men's increasing contacts with self help literature, counselling and their talk with trusted women, as four of the men referred to experiences of this type which they valued (Waller, 2002).

Functionality: While an attempt has been made to assess the functionality of the various discursive resources deployed (p. 130-131) these can only be suggestions and indications. A longitudinal study over one to two decades would yield more reliable information on which discursive resources are more useful in enabling a cohort of mature singles to achieve their relationship and family-making goals and which discursive resources enable the quiet revolution to persist into the fifth decade.

7.6. Implications for future research

The analysis of this research project reveals the need for considerable additional research into heterosexual masculinity in relation to *intimacy*, in order for them to establish and sustain rewarding relationships with women and to give each other mutual support in times of crisis.

Therefore some areas for further research are: how are changing constructions of masculinity conveyed; the role of advertising in endorsing traditional masculinity or in presenting evolving constructions of masculinity; how heterosexual men and boys might be engaged in incorporating verbal intimacy into the evolving male culture and what incentives, if any, men and boys might perceive for employing the communicative practices of *intimacy*?

This analysis also indicates a need for further research into the deployment of the *friendship-family* discursive resources and practices in New Zealand. While Roseneil (2003) and her team from the University of Leeds found remarkable stability over the 18

months of the study, that is not very long in terms of the approximately two decades of multi-dimensional support needed to grow a child to competent adulthood. Therefore further research is needed in New Zealand to investigate the occurrence and structure of such support networks; whether they are a replacement for coupled relationships or a goal-achieving stepping stone; and the negative or positive effects on children of growing up in solo parent families within such a network. As mentioned above, a longitudinal study of a cohort of 30 year old singles over one to two decades would produce reliable information on the deployment of discursive resources and their relationship to function and outcome.

Meanwhile this analysis endorses the urgent need for the research, development and implementation by the Families Commission and the NZ Government, of a package of family-friendly social and economic policies. This analysis also highlights a need for informing the popular media such as women's and men's magazines to stimulate public discussion and add 'voice' to the 'silent revolution'. Also indicated is a need for research and development of psychotherapeutic interventions that assist mature heterosexual singles with their particular discursive difficulties, in order that they may increase the likelihood of attaining and sustaining their goals of fulfilling relationship with each other.

Reference List

Books and papers

A

Anderson M.A., Gillig P.M., Sitaker M., McCloskey, K., Malloy, K. & Grigsby, N. (2003). "Why Doesn't She Just Leave?": A Descriptive Study of Victim Reported Impediments to Her Safety. *Journal of Family Violence*, Vol. 18, No. 3.

B

Barnett, R.C. & Rivers, C. (1998). *She works, he works: How two-income families are happy, healthy and thriving*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Beattie, M. (1987). *Codependent no more: How to stop controlling others and start caring for yourself*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Bernard, J.S. (1982 2nd ed. [© 1973]). *The future of marriage*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Billig, M. (1998). Rhetorical and discursive analysis: How families talk about the royal family. In Nicky Hayes (Ed), *Doing qualitative analysis in psychology*. East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press Ltd.

Birrell, B. & Rapson, V. (1998). *A not so perfect match: The growing male/female divide, 1986-1996*. Australia: Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University.

Braden, N.L. (1996). *What is a soulmate?* Retrieved June 19, 2004, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.soulmaterelationships.com/soulmatearticles/whatisasoulmate.htm>

Bradshaw, J. (1988). *Healing the shame that binds you*. USA: Health Communications.

Brooks, G R. (2001). Masculinity and Men's Mental Health. *Journal of American College Health*, Vol. 49 Issue 6, 285-298.

Burgoyne, C. (2004). Heart-strings and purse-strings: Money in heterosexual marriage. *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol. 14(1) 165-172.

Burman, E. (1991). What discourse is not. *Philosophical Psychology*, 4, 325-342.

Burman, E. & Parker, I. (1993). Introduction – discourse analysis: the turn to the text. In E. Burman & I. Parker (Eds), *Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and readings of texts in action*. London & New York: Routledge.

Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Buss, D.M. (1994). Mate preferences in 37 cultures. In W.J. Lonner & R.S. Malpass (Eds.), *Psychology and culture* (Chapt. 28, pp. 191-196). USA: Allyn & Bacon.

C

Cantor, C.H. and Slater, P.J. (1995). Marital breakdown, Parenthood and Suicide. *Journal of Family Studies* Vol.1 No.2, October.

Child Poverty Action Group. *Child Poverty Statistics*. Retrieved July 20, 2003, from the World Wide Web: http://www.cpag.org.nz/Statistics_sheet.doc

Chodorow, N. (1995). Individuality and difference in how women and men love. In A. Elliott & S. Frosh (Eds.), *Psychoanalysis in contexts* (pp. 89-105). London & New York: Routledge.

Clayton, R.R. (1975). *The family, marriage and social change*. Lexington, Mass: Heath.

Coates, Jennifer (1996). *Women talk: Conversation between women friends*. USA & UK: Blackwell.

Coates, Jennifer (2003). *Men talk: Stories in the making of masculinities*. USA & UK: Blackwell.

Collins, S. & O. (2001). *What really happens after you find your soulmate ...* Retrieved September 4, 2004, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.soulmaterelationships.com/>

Crawford, D. & McDonald, J. (2002). *Fathers and the experience of family separation*. Retrieved April 22, 2004, from the University of Western Sydney website on the World Wide Web: http://apps.uws.edu.au/media/news/index.phtml?act=view&story_id=240

Crawford, M. (2004a). Mars and Venus Collide: A Discursive Analysis of Marital Self-Help Psychology. *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol. 14(1): 63-79.

Crawford, M. (2004b). Marriage: The Telling and the Doing. *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol. 14(2): 313-318.

Crogan, R. & Miell, D. (1998). Strategies of resistance: 'Bad' mothers dispute the evidence. *Feminism and Psychology*, 8, 445-465.

Crotty, M. (1998). Postmodernism: Crisis of confidence or moment of truth? In *The foundations of social research* (pp. 183-213). Australia: Allen & Unwin.

D

Davies, B. & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the theory of social behaviour*, 20:1.

Dempsey, K. (1997). *Inequalities in marriage: Australia and beyond*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

De Beauvoir, S. (1995 [© 1953 English]). The second sex. In M. Scheir (Ed.), *The vintage book of feminism* (pp. 3-20). New York: Vintage.

Djicic, M. & Oatley, K. (2004). Love and Personal Relationships: Navigating on the Border Between the Ideal and the Real. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 34(2) 199-209.

E

Easthope, A. (1990). 'I gotta use words when I talk to you.' In I. Parker and J. Shotter (Eds.), *Deconstructing social psychology* (pp. 76-87). London & New York: Routledge.

Edley, N. & Wetherell, M. (1995). *Men in perspective: practice, power and identity*. Hertfordshire, UK: Prentice Hall.

Edley, N. & Wetherell, M. (1999). Imagined futures: Young men's talk about fatherhood and domestic life. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 38(2) 181-194.

F

Fishman, P.M. (1983). Interaction: The work women do. In B. Thorne, C. Kramarae & N. Henley (Eds.), *Language, gender and society* (pp. 89-101). Cambridge, USA: Newbury.

Fletcher, G. (2002). *The new science of intimate relationships*. USA & UK: Blackwell.

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. In H.I. Drefus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (pp. 208-226). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Franzoi, S.L. (1996). *Social psychology*. USA: Brown & Benchmark.

Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton.

G

Gergen, K. (1973). Social psychology as history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 309-320.

Gergen, K. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40(3), 266-275.

Gergen, K. (1989). 'Warranting voice and the elaboration of self'. In J. Shotter and K.J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of Identity*, London: Sage.

Gergen, K. (1991). *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. USA: Basic Books.

Gergen, M. & Gergen, K.J. (2003). Marriage as a Relational Engagement. *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol. 13(4): 469-474.

Gill, R. (1996). Discourse analysis: practical implementation. In John T.E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences* (pp. 141-156). Leicester: BPS Books.

Gillies, V. (1999). An analysis of discursive positions of women smokers: Implications for practical interventions. In Carla Willig (Ed.), *Applied discourse analysis. Social and psychological interventions* (pp. 66-86). Buckingham & Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Giora, R. (2001). Theorizing gender: Feminist awareness and language change. In B. Barron & H. Kotthoff (Eds), *Gender in interaction: Perspectives on femininity and masculinity in ethnography and discourse* (pp. 329-347). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Goldner, V. (1992). Making room for both/and. *Networker*, March/April, pp.55-61.

Gordon, M. (Ed.)(1972). *The nuclear family in crisis: the search for an alternative*. New York: Harper Row.

Gough, B. & Peace, P. (2000). Reconstructing gender at university: men as victims. *Gender and Education*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 385-398.

Gray, A. (1983). *The Jones men: 100 New Zealand men talk about their lives*. NZ: A.H. & A.W. Reed.

Greer, G. (1995 [©1970]). The female eunuch. In M. Scheir (Ed.), *The vintage book of feminism* (pp. 343-350). New York: Vintage.

H

Hacker, A. (2003). *Mismatch: The growing gulf between women and men*. New York: Scribner.

Hafner, J. (1993). *The end of marriage: Why monogamy isn't working*. London: Random House.

Harré, R. (1989). Language games and texts of identity. In J. Shotter and K. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of Identity* (pp. 20-35). London: Sage.

Harré, R. (1996). Video of a lecture at Massey University, Palmerston North, NZ.

Harris, I. (1995). *Messages men hear: Constructing masculinities*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Hatfield, E., Walster, G.W., Piliavin, J. & Schmidt, L. (1973). "Playing hard to get": Understanding an elusive phenomenon. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 113-121.

Herman, J.L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: From domestic abuse to political terror*. USA: Basic Books.

Hetherington, E.M. & Kelly, J. (2002). *For better or for worse: Divorce reconsidered*. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co.

Hoffman, E. & Weiner, M.B. (2003). *The Love Compatibility Book: The 12 Personality Traits That Can Lead You to Your Soulmate*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Hollway, W. (1981). 'I just wanted to kill a woman' Why? The ripper and male sexuality. In Feminist Review (Ed.). *Sexuality: A Reader* (pp. 123-133). London: Virago.

Hollway, W. (1984). Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Irwin, C. Venn and V. Walkerdine. *Changing the Subject. Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* (pp. 227-263). London & New York: Methuen.

Hollway, W. (2004). Feminism and Heterosexual Marriage: The Return of the Repressed? *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol. 14(2): 319-322.

I

Innes-Kent, S. (1998). *Love for all seasons*. Auckland, N.Z: Penguin.

Israel, E. (2002). *Bachelor Girl: The secret history of single women in the twentieth century*. New York: William Morrow/Harper Collins.

J

Jackson, S. (2001). Happily never after: Young women's stories of abuse in heterosexual love relationships. *Feminism and psychology*, 11(3), 305-321.

Jellard, N. (2003). Love is in the air. *North Shore Times Advertiser*, May 13th, p.3.

K

Kerr, D. (2004). Family transformations and the well-being of children: Recent evidence from the Canadian longitudinal data. *Journal of comparative family studies*, Vol 35 (1) pp. 73-90.

King, E. (1996). The use of the self in qualitative research. In J.T.E. Richardson (Ed.). *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences* (pp. 175-188). Leicester: BPS Books.

Kitzinger, C. & Frith, H. (1999). Just say no? The use of conversation analysis in developing a feminist perspective on sexual refusal. *Discourse & Society*, 10(3), 293-316.

Kposowa, A.J.(2000). Marital status and suicide in the National Longitudinal Mortality Study. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, Vol 54(4), April. 254-261.

L

Lester, D., Wood, P., Williams, C. & Haines, J. (2004). Motives for Suicide: A Study of Australian Suicide Notes. *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, Vol. 25(1), 33-34.

Letablier, M.T. (2002). Fertility and family policies in France. *Journal of Population and Social Security (Supplement to Vol. 1)* 242-258.

Lewis, J. (2003). *Should we worry about family change?* Canada: University of Toronto Press.

M

McCarthy, J. & Holliday, E.L. (2004). Help-seeking and counseling within a traditional male gender role: An examination from a multicultural perspective. *Journal of counseling and development*, Winter, Vol. 82.

McLoughlin, D. (2003). The Parent Trap: Child support responsibilities. *The Dominion Post* May 31.

Mapstone, E. (1995). Rational men and conciliatory women: Graduate psychologists construct accounts of argument. *Feminism & Psychology*, 5(1), 61-83.

Mapstone, E. (1996). Division of labour in the social construction of argument. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 35, 219-231.

Mapstone, E. (1998). *War of words: Women and men arguing*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Maley, B. (2003). *Divorce law and the future of marriage*. NSW, Australia: Centre for Independent Studies Ltd.

Massey University Human Ethics Committee [MUHEC]. *Code of ethical conduct for teaching and research involving human subjects*. Massey University: Palmerston North. Retrieved 2003 from the World Wide Web: <http://humanethics.massey.ac.nz/code.htm>

Ministry of Social Development, 2003. *Child Poverty Statistics*. Retrieved July 20, 2003, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.msd.govt.nz>

Moore, T. (1994). *Soul Mates*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers

Morgan, M. & Coombes, L. (2001). Subjectivities and silences, mother and woman: Theorising an experience of silence as a speaking subject. *Feminism & Psychology*, 11(3), 361-376.

Morawski, J. G. (1997). *Practicing feminisms, reconstructing psychology: Notes on a liminal science*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

N

New Zealand Psychological Society Inc (2002). *Code of Ethics*.

Nichols, M.P. & Schwartz, R.C. (2001). *Family therapy: Concepts and Methods*. USA: Allyn & Bacon.

Norwood, R. (1987). *Women who love too much*. London: Arrow Books.

P

Phillips, J. (1996). *A man's country: The image of the pakeha male – a history*. NZ: Penguin.

Pool, I. (2002). New Zealand population: then, now, hereafter. *Journal of Population Research*, Sept (16), p23. The Australian Population Association.

Poole, I. & Sceats, J. (2003). Low fertility of the English speaking countries. *Journal of Population and Social Security*. Vol. 1(Supplement), 337-380.

Potter, J. (1996). Discourse analysis and constructionist approaches: theoretical background. In John T.E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences* (pp. 125-140). Leicester: BPS Books.

Potter, J. & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage Publications.

Potts, A. (1998). The Science/Fiction of Sex: John Gray's Mars and Venus in the Bedroom. *Sexualities*, 1(2) pp. 153-173.

R

Ramazanoglu, C. (1993). Introduction. In Caroline Ramazanoglu (Ed.) *Up against Foucault: Exploration of some tensions between Foucault and feminism*. (pp. 18-25). London & New York: Routledge.

Reissman, C.K. (1993). Practical models. In *Narrative analysis*, Chapt.10, 25-53. London: Sage.

Rocco, S. (2004). Doing Derrida down under – a matter of (feminist) response-ability. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 17(1), 129-142.

Rogers, C.R. (1951). *Client-centred therapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Roseneil, S. (2003). We'd rather be with friends. *New Statesman*, December 2003, 15-30.

S

Sampson, E.E. (1978). Scientific paradigms and social values: Wanted – a scientific revolution. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, 1332-1343.

Sarup, M. (1988). Derrida and deconstruction. In *An introductory guide to post structuralism and postmodernism* (pp. 32-57). Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Satir, V. (1964). *Conjoint family therapy*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.

Satir, V. (1972). *Peoplemaking*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.

Sattel, J.W. (1983). Men, inexpressiveness and power. In B. Thorne, C. Kramarae & N. Henley (Eds.), *Language, gender and society* (pp. 118-124). Cambridge, USA: Newbury House.

Schwartz, M.A. & Scott, B.M. (1997). *Marriages and families: Diversity and change*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Shumway, D.R. (2003). *Modern love: Romance, intimacy and the marriage crisis*. New York & London: New York University Press.

Smith, G. (1990). *Will the real Mr New Zealand please stand up?* NZ: Penguin.

Statistics New Zealand. *NZ Marriage & Divorce Statistics & Trend; Population and dwellings; Family types*. Retrieved July, 2003 & May 2004, from the World Wide Web: http://www.stats.govt.nz/domino/external/web/prod_serv.nsf/htmldocs/People+and+Society

Steil, J. (1997). *Marital equality: Its relationship to the well being of husbands and wives*. California: Sage.

Sternberg, R.J. (1988). *The triangle of love: intimacy, passion, commitment*. New York: Basic Books.

Stone, D., Patton, B. & Heen, S. (1999). *Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most*. New York & London: Michael Joseph.

Sutton, L.A. (1995). Bitches and Skanky Hobags: The place of women in contemporary slang. In K. Hall & M. Bucholtz. (Eds.), *Gender articulated: Language and the socially constructed self*. New York & London: Routledge.

T

Tawney, R.H. (1938). *Religion and the rise of capitalism: a historical study*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Taylor, J.M., Gilligan, C. & Sullivan, A.M. (1996). Missing voices, changing meanings: Developing a voice centred, relational method and creating an interpretive community. In S. Wilkinson (Ed.), *Feminist Social Psychologies. International perspective's*. (pp. 233-257). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Thorne, B. (2001). Gender and interaction: widening the conceptual scope. In B. Barron & H. Kothhoff (Eds.), *Gender in interaction: Perspectives on femininity and masculinity in ethnography and discourse* (pp. 3-18). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Towns, A. & Adams, P. (2000). "If I really loved him enough, he would be okay": Women's accounts of male partner violence. *Violence against women*. 6(6), 558-585.

Tuffin, K. & Howard, C. (2001). Demystifying discourse analysis: Theory, method and practice. In A. McHoul & M. Rapley (Eds.), *How to analyse talk in institutional settings: A casebook of methods* (pp. 196-205). London: Continuum International.

U

Unger, R.K. (1992). Will the real sex differences please stand up? *Feminism and psychology*, 2(2), 231-238.

W

Waite, L.J. & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The case for marriage. Why married people are happier, healthier and better off financially*. New York: Broadway Books.

Waller, M.R. (2002). *My baby's father: Unmarried parents and paternity responsibility*. USA: Cornell University.

Wallerstein, J. (2000). *The unexpected legacy of divorce*. New York: Hyperion.

Weatherall, A. (2002). *Gender, language and discourse*. UK, USA & Canada: Routledge.

Weedon, C. (1999). The production and subversion of gender: Postmodern approaches. In *Feminism, theory and the politics of difference* (pp. 115-120). Oxford: Blackwell.

West, C. & Zimmerman, D.H. (1983). Small insults: A study of interruptions in cross-sex conversations between unacquainted persons. In B. Thorne, C. Kramarae & N. Henley. (Eds.), *Language, gender and society* (pp. 103-117). Cambridge, USA: Newbury House.

Williams, J.E. & Best, D.L. (1994). Cross-cultural views of women and men. In W.J. Lonner & R.S. Malpass (Eds.), *Psychology and culture* (Chapt. 27, pp. 197-202). USA: Allyn & Bacon.

Wilson, C. & Oswald, A. (2002). *How Does Marriage Affect Physical and Psychological Health? A Survey of the Longitudinal Evidence*. Retrieved 2003, from the World Wide Web: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/faculty/oswald/wilsonoswaldmarriagejan2002.pdf>

World Health Organisation (2002). WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women. Retrieved August 22, 2004, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.who.int/gender/violence/brochure.pdf>

Interview Schedule

The statistics show there have been a lot of changes in recent decades in the area of relationships, but the statistics don't tell us what people think and feel about those changes... so I'd like to try to understand what it is like to be a single woman/man in your age group.

1. I'm interested in what you want for yourself in the area of relationships?
2. Love is a busy word. Can you tell me what you mean by 'love'?
 - How would you recognise love?
 - How important is love to a successful relationship?
3. Have you ever thought you were in love, only to be disappointed later?
 - Did that experience change your ideas and feelings about love?
4. Has that experience affected the way you've approached men/women and relationships since then?
5. Have there been any other experiences or factors in your life which you think have made it **difficult** for you in forming relationships?
6. Have there been any other experiences or factors in your life which you think have made it **easy and natural** for you in forming relationships?
7. I'm interested in your perceptions of men and women these days?
 - What do you appreciate?
 - What do you find frustrating or difficult?
8. Do you feel any pressures to be in a committed relationship?
 - From what sources? Family? Friends? Biological clock? Social expectations?



Appendix B

School of Psychology
Private Bag 102 904,
North Shore MSC,
Auckland,
New Zealand
Telephone: 64 9 443 9799
extn 9180
Facsimile: 64 9 441 8157

Speaking of love: A discourse analysis of single women's and men's talk about relationships approaching mid-life.

INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Barri Leslie (Ms). I am undertaking a research project to complete a Master of Arts degree in Psychology at Massey University.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 02/119. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this project, please contact:

Professor Sylvia V. Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North.

Phone: 06-350-5249.

Email: S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz

My supervisor for this research is Dr Mandy Morgan, School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North.

Our contact details are:

Barri Leslie (Researcher):

Postal address:

Email: barri@pl.net **Ph: (w) 09-488-0340**
Blue Spectrum Counselling,
1st Floor, 3-5 Auburn St, Takapuna,
North Shore City, Auckland, 1309.

Dr Mandy Morgan (Supervisor): Ph: (w) 06-350-5799 ext 2063

Email: C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz

I am sending you this Information Sheet and Consent Form as you responded to the promotion of my research project, and expressed interest in participating.

The nature and purpose of the study is to discuss with single, heterosexual, childless/childfree adults, between the ages of 30 to 40 years of age their ideas, experiences, disappointments and hopes of relationship in contemporary New Zealand.

Please take time to read and consider this Information Sheet carefully and contact me as above with any questions you may have. Please sign and return the Consent Form in the stamped, addressed envelope if you agree to be interviewed and I will contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time and place for an interview.

Participants will need to allow approximately two hours, for arrival and settling in, for a one hour interview which will be audio taped, and a half hour debriefing time to address any questions you may have.

I will collate the information obtained from the audio taped interviews and write it up primarily for presentation as a thesis for my MA degree. A copy would be stored in the Massey University Library and would be available to other students and researchers. As well, in consideration of the very privileged information gathered from you as a participant, and my expectation that you, myself and others may be extremely interested in the picture which emerges of what it is like to be in your age group, at this point in time, as part of New Zealand's rapidly changing social environment, I would also like to publish the findings in other places including academic journals and more generally accessible media.

Throughout this process your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected. While your first name is likely to be used in the audio taped interview, it will be changed to a code number in the typing up process and any identifying features of your interview will be changed. You will be offered the opportunity to check the transcript of your tape. The tapes themselves will be securely locked away until the research project is complete. You will be offered the option of having your tape returned to you. In accordance with Massey University Policy on Research Practice, Section 2.2 the transcripts will be retained in secure storage by the researcher, for at least five years after publication of the thesis.

Any possibility of research materials being released to another research archive where they could be available to other researchers would be discussed with you and require your written consent.

If you consent to be a participant you have the right to:

- Decline to participate by declining to answer any particular question, or, by withdrawing at any time while the study is in process.
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during your participation.
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will NOT be used (unless you give written permission to the researcher).
- Check the transcript of your interview.
- Have your audio-tape returned to you.
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- Receive a \$10 petrol voucher as an acknowledgement of your participation.

I would hope that participation itself in the project is beneficial to you in having an opportunity to express yourself and contribute to our knowledge of heterosexual relationships in changing times.

In addition the optional debriefing time of half an hour after the interview is available for you to address any questions or concerns you may have.

Yours sincerely,



Barri Leslie(Ms)
BA(SocSc), Dip.Ed. MNZAC

**Speaking of love: A discourse analysis of single women's and
men's talk about relationships in mid-life.**

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to decline to answer a particular question, to withdraw from the study during the interview and debriefing, or during the research process.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission, and that the information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.

I agree to the interview being audio taped.

I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audiotape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Phone:

Men Men Men

If you are:

- Single
- Heterosexual
- 30 to 40 years old
- Have no children
- A NZ citizen or long term resident

I would like to interview you about your ideas,
opinions, experiences and hopes of

Love and Relationships

In NZ in these changing times.

This is for a research project towards my MA degree.
This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey
Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 02/119

For further information &/or to participate please contact:
Barri Leslie (Ms)

barri@pl.net or Ph: 0800 568394

At Blue Spectrum Counselling, 1st Floor, 3-5 Auburn St, Takapuna

Barri Leslie
Researcher
Ph 0800 568394
Email: barri@pl.net

Barri Leslie
Researcher
Ph 0800 568394
Email: barri@pl.net

Barri Leslie
Researcher
Ph 0800 568394
Email: barri@pl.net

Barri Leslie, Researcher
Ph 0800 568394
Email: barri@pl.net

Barri Leslie
Researcher
Ph 0800 568394
Email: barri@pl.net