Some Features

of Women's Stories

# of Self and Separation

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Abstract

Since the 1950s an increasingly significant strand of stress and trauma research has been research into separation and divorce. Approaches to separation by researchers in different fields, including sociology (e.g. Orbuch 1992), psychology (eg. White, 1991) and linguistics (e.g. Potter and Wetherall, 1987), all show the evolution of post-modern philosophical trends. The overlap between these fields has increased as the social constructionist theory of language has gained prevalence. In social constructionist theory, our thought and the organization of our society are products of the language with which we think and organize ourselves. The concepts and values and beliefs of society are implicit in the language available to the individual to interpret his/her own experiences. Research into people's responses to, and interpretations of, their experiences of change has focused increasingly on the language that people actually use in natural communicative contexts, and the accounts that they develop to account for what has happened.

This research explores the language used by a group of separated women to account for their separations. The theoretical orientation of the research is social constructionist. The main analytic concept that guides the research is the notion of interpretive repertoires. These are the words and images used by a group of speakers within a society, in relation to specific issues, that invoke the global patterns of understanding of the world that inform the speaker's interpretation of those issues.

The research has four main aims. It sets out to identify the characteristics of women's experience of transition, which is their psychological reorientation in response to change. It explores the mechanics and strategies by which women adjust to their separations and the adjustment differences between "dumpers" and "dumpees" and between "newly separated" and "formerly married women". It investigates the ways in which women validate themselves and their stories both by presenting witnesses and the evidence of spokespersons for our society, and by invoking selected discourses of our society.

The research shows internal consistency between women's perceptions of a woman's nature and their interpretations of women's roles, and it shows the conflict between the perceived nature and roles of a woman and the discourse of self-actualization.

Preface & Acknowledgments

This thesis was written in the laundry of a rented cottage in Te Awanga in 1999, in the only available space between the washing machine and deep freeze. Thanks to Wendy Gordon, who lent me her late grandmother's heater, I didn't freeze during the winter.

My own separation story inspired me to undertake the project and of course, influenced my perceptions and analysis of other women's stories. What I noticed first and foremost about the data were those themes that resonated with the themes of my own story. Writing this thesis has served me in several therapeutic ways. It provided a vehicle and framework for obsessively reviewing and adjusting to my own separation, it provided a means of meeting and talking to other separated women about separation, and it helped me to withstand the shifting sands of transition, by giving me a purpose and keeping me far too busy to fall apart.

Above all I would like to thank the five participants of the project. I have lived intimately with their intimate stories and I feel very connected to them. I thank them most sincerely for their trust, openness and enthusiasm for the project.

Thanks also to the many women, my friends and colleagues, who were engaged in the project in different ways. Tania Pattison supported the project as transcriber and technician and I thank her for her excellent work. Thanks too, to Sue Chapman who lent me her dictaphone, even though she thought I should get my own.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The development of one's own story is an important part of the process of separation. Lawyers, counsellors, family and friends all expect a separating person to account for what has happened. The past is excavated layer by layer, previously unstoried events and versions of events come into focus, and gradually the complete story of the marriage is constructed. As the past is dug up and raked over, people search for the meaning of it all, for how it relates to who they are now. Identity and life story and the whole saga of the marriage need to be reworked in the light of the separation.

Separating women have a strong impulse to confide and to tell their stories, especially to other women. Women in support groups, neighbours, acquaintances, family, friends and colleagues all tell their own stories of separation. Observations about the common themes of the stories and common purposes of the storytellers gave rise to the questions about women's experiences that are developed in this research.

The theoretical orientation of the research developed during the review of the literature relevant to personal stories and to separation (Chapters 2-6). The implications of social constructionist theory for the researcher's approach to this project were profound. Social constructionist theory shows how the conceptual framework within which we interpret our lives is provided by the language that we speak. The prevailing truths and knowledges, which are the discourses of our society, inform the identities and versions of events that are constructed and rehearsed as we tell our personal stories. The ways in which we think about our lives and the whole organization of our society are products of the language with which we think and organize ourselves.

Our human impulse is to tell stories of the significant events of our lives. The more critical or problematic the events are, the stronger our impulse to relate them. As we relate our stories over and over again in different ways and to different people, the incomprehensible and the inexplicable are rendered orderly and meaningful. Through stories, the problematic events are reconciled with the framework of our understandings of the world and our place in it. We present our preferred and socially acceptable selves, and align our narratives with the prevailing truths and values of our social group. As we interpret and rehearse versions of what happened, the selves and the realities that we describe are created.

The question, discussed in Chapter 7, that forms the basis of this research is:

What are the features of women's narratives of separation?

In particular the focal points of the analysis are:
* The common characteristics of transition
* Evidence of adjustment
* Evidence of selected discourses of our society
* Evidence of the use of selected validation strategies

The research method was qualitative analysis (Chapter 9). Five separated women volunteered and gave their informed consent. The participants filled out questionnaires and were interviewed for up to one hour. The interviews were loosely structured around three main questions and the interview style was informal. Interviews were transcribed and subdivided into text units. Text units were then coded to categories of analysis and later tabulated for analysis.

The approach taken to the data collected for this research was discourse analysis. Potter and Wetherall (1987) describe discourse analysis as the identification of the interpretive repertoires of a sample group in relation to specific topics or issues. The words and images used by the sample group to explain, describe or evaluate the particular issue, evoke a network of related ideas that are often supported by the commonplace "truths" of our society. The analysis of the data is presented in Chapters 10-13.

Transition is defined in the literature as psychological re-orientation in response to change (Chapter 4). Its end point is a complete and meaningful account of the change, through which a new sense of oneself and one's reality has evolved. Account –making is well researched, but transition is described in the literature in general terms only. In stories told to the researcher, many women described feelings of alienation, paralysis, the terror of the unknown, the crush of anxiety and the madness of swinging out of control between massive contradictions and extremes of feeling. This research sets out to explore in detail, the scope and specific characteristics of the experiences of psychological re-orientation described by five separated women.

The second major theme of the research is women's adjustments to their separations. Common to models of adjustment to change, whether cyclic or linear, is that they begin with change or a traumatic event and end with successful adjustment. The generalized mechanism for adjustment is letting go of the past and taking hold of the future (Chapter 5). This concept is beyond the grasp of many separating women. Women who are separating are experiencing the traumatic loss of their former vision of the future. The gaping void is full of the terrors of the unknown. This research aims to provide detailed information about the actual coping strategies that individual women have used and the precise mechanisms by which women construct a new future (Chapter 10).

When a personal story is told, the speaker selects events and chooses language that will persuade the listener to adopt the interpretation of the events favoured by the speaker. An aspect of this is negotiating acceptance for the speaker's preferred self-image. One of the principal observations made by the researcher prior to the proposal of this research was that separating women are strongly motivated in their stories to justify the separation in terms acceptable to a society that upholds the nuclear family unit.

This research explores two means of validating one's story. Firstly, it traces, through the interpretive repertoires of the storytellers, evidence of selected discourses of our society (Chapter 12), and shows how these are used to align the speaker with the shared beliefs and values of the social group. The following discourses were selected for the investigation:

- Self-actualization
- The nature of a woman
- The role of a wife
- The role of a mother

Stories warrant voice in other ways too. The research also looks at how the women invoke the authority and philosophy of our society by presenting witnesses and the commentary of spokespersons (Chapter 13).

The principal findings of the research are summarized in the conclusion (Chapter 14). The conclusion includes the implications of this research for separating women and their supporters and it indicates potential avenues for further research.

2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

The theoretical orientation of this research is social constructionism. This chapter sets out the main tenets of this approach pertaining to the way in which people use their language to talk about themselves.

Modernism And Postmodernism

In the modernist view of the world that dominated earlier this century scholars believed that there were objective truths in the world which could be discovered. Traditional psychology has a modernist backdrop. Individual human nature is seen to be a discoverable and definable entity. The Self is the "essence" of the person and is manifest in the person's behaviour. Language is seen as the vehicle for the expression of the subjective experience of the essential Self.

In a postmodernist or social constructionist view there is no objective reality; we negotiate and create reality and bring knowledge into being in all our interactions and social practices. In the social constructionist view we are engaged, as we speak, in a dynamic process of creating ourselves. Language is not the vehicle for our thought, but rather our thinking and doing is the product of the language we use. The beliefs we hold as subjective truths and the very concepts and structures of our thought are embedded in the language that we speak.

Self Construction

Geertz's (1983) description of the stylization of personal expression in Bali provides an analogy for the view that the self is continuously constructed within the conceptual framework and subject positions available. Idiosyncratic individual expression is muted in favour of expression congruent with a perception of self as part of a timeless and unchanging pageant of Balinese life. "It is dramatis personae, not actors who endure: indeed, it is dramatis personae, not actors, that in the proper sense really exist.... The masks that [people] wear, the stage they occupy, and, most important, the spectacle they mount remain, and comprise not the façade but the substance of things, not least the self" (Geertz, 1983, p62, cited by Freedman and Combs, 1996, p 34). There is no deep and hidden self. The person that we are is the sum of the masks that we wear and the roles that we enact in

the drama of our lives

The Formative Force Of Language

We understand ourselves and the world in terms of the concepts available to us in our language. It is the structure of our language that determines our fundamental assumptions about human nature and the world around us. Different languages divide the world up into concepts or categories of experience in different ways. In English we conceptualize different categories of animal and we distinguish between "pig" and "pork". In Kiswahili, animals and meat are indistinguishable. One word, "Nyama", signifies the concept meat\animals. The idea that our beliefs about what it means to be a person are implicit in our language is elaborated by Harre (1983, 1989). He discusses how in English, unlike some non-European languages, we have two terms to refer to ourselves; "I" and "me". This enables us to conceive of ourselves as having two aspects; a higher self, authentic and private, and a more social and superficial self. In English we can think in terms of "I" being in charge of "me" – "I took myself in hand", "I told myself....", "I hate myself". The concepts available to us in the process of understanding our experience and representing it to others are those which are embedded in our language. When we think about the world, our experiences and our identities, and represent these to others and ourselves, we can only do so in the terms and concepts of our language.

The Discourses Of Our Time

Within our discursive culture some versions of the world and human nature are more prevalent than others. The prevalence of discourses varies according to the historical time and specific social context. Prevailing discourses tend to be seen as truthful. For example, in modern times, in our culture, versions of events offered by empirical science have gained credibility while versions offered by spiritual/psychic disciplines have lost the prevalence and credibility they had in the past. The "knowledges" of our culture are the versions or discourses, which are held to be "true". It is the knowledge of our culture, which defines what is "normal" and "natural", what is "appropriate" and "moral", and what is not (Foucault, 1972). And it is the prevalence of the discourses of modern psychology that gives rise to our social practice of constantly monitoring and analyzing ourselves and measuring ourselves against these norms (Derrida, 1974).

Warranting Voice

According to social constructionist theory, if we are able to represent our actions by drawing on and manipulating the prevailing discourses or "truths' of our society, we are able to validate and legitimize our stance. Much work on how we use language to position ourselves in relation to the "truths" of our society has been done by Harre (1983, 1989). He stresses "the active performative role that language has, and sees the goal of such performances to be primarily one of accounting for ourselves within a moral framework" (cited by Burr, 1995, p128). We use language to exonerate ourselves of blame, justify our actions and convince the listener of the truth and reasonableness of what we say. We do this both by invoking the authority of prevailing discourses and the employment of various other strategies for securing the belief and agreement of the listener.

Gergen (1989) discusses the conventions by which people " warrant voice" or claim the validity of their point of view. "According to Gergen, we are all motivated by the desire to have our own versions of events prevail against competing notions. We are all competing for voice or the right to be heard, and we therefore present constructions of ourselves that are most likely to "warrant voice" (Burr, 1995, p90). Discourses that have the stamp of truth or common sense warrant voice. Warranting conventions include harnessing the authority of these discourses, and other means of presenting one's version as justified, such as observation ("I saw it with my own eyes"), rationality ("I am logical while your position is irrational"), intention ("He should be trusted because he has good intentions"), passion ("True understanding comes only from passionate engagement in life") and morality. (Egs from Gergen, 1989, p74-75).

Potter (1990) distinguishes between the analysis of discourses or the deconstruction of individual texts to lay bare the discourses operating within them, and discourse analysis, which is the identification of interpretive repertoires across a range of samples of language on the same topic. Like Harre (1983, 1989), Potter shows how interpretive repertoires are used by the speakers "to create morally defensible positions" (Burr, 1995, p177). Potter looked for repetition in metaphor usage, grammatical constructions and figures of speech in the language of a group of speakers with different points of view on the same current event. Images and words which were commonly used by the participants to describe the same concept were identified as being part of an interpretive repertoire of that group.

Interpretive repertoire is an alternative term for discourse. The term "repertoire" conveys well the idea that there are certain "moves" available to all members of the discursive community, and like the set moves of a ballet dancer they can be combined in an infinite variety of ways to serve the purposes of the speaker.

Exercising Power

The discourses that prevail in our language directly imply our social practices. Our society's perception of what is "true" supports us to act in some ways and not in others. We can exercise power through drawing on discourses that warrant voice in our society. In Foucault's (1972) view, "To define the world or a person in a way that allows you to do the things you want is to exercise power. When we define or represent something in a particular way we are producing a particular knowledge which brings power with it" (cited by Burr, 1995). There is power in the potential of language to direct and influence the social order; "If one's linguistic framing of events prevails, the outcomes may be substantial," Gergen and Gergen (1987, p279) give examples of how this works in the court, in courtship and in the family.

Ng and Bradac (1993) discuss the power of "loaded" words to evoke the listener's thoughts and feelings in the desired direction. The power of the image is not only that it can communicate a complex set of ideas in a word, but also that the evocation of a particular set of attributes excludes, and blinds us to, other alternatives. So, in effect, each new image or detail narrows the field of possible interpretations of the story. This echoes Foucault's (1972) theory that the effect of dominant narratives is to blind us to the possibilities other narratives may offer us.

Positioning

We are addressed by the discourses available to us according to our age, gender, occupation, education, income and ethnicity. We do not have equal access to the discourses and within each discourse there are a limited number of subject positions (Burr, 1995, Weedon, 1987). In the process of negotiating accounts of ourselves, we position ourselves and ascribe positions to others in relation to the discourses available. The process may be conflict ridden as we struggle to claim or resist the images available to us (Burr, 1995). The positions taken and ascribed in discourses have implications for power

relations. Each position confers specific rights and obligations and possibilities or limitations of action. As speakers of the language we cannot avoid these subject positions, which are the representations of ourselves and others that the discourses invite. We identify with the positions we take up in relation to the discourses of our time and our society and these "provide our sense of self, the ideas and metaphors with which we think and the self narrative we use to talk and think about ourselves" (Burr, 1995).

Role Theory

The symbolic interactionist perspective described by Terri Orbuch (1992) is congruent with social constructionism. The focus of this field of social psychology is on how the concepts we have of our roles and our identity influence the meanings that we attach to events. In the symbolic interactionist viewpoint our identities are the products of the descriptive statements which we make about ourselves. The fabric of these statements is the concepts of social positions which we have, because of the way our society is structured. We conceive of ourselves in terms of the social positions we hold in relation to other people. According to McCall (1977), "for each social position that a person occupies or aspires to, he or she tries to sustain a role identity (cited by Orbuch, 1992, p195). Role identity is defined as "the character or role that an individual devises for him/herself as an occupant of a particular position. Such a role identity is his/her view of him/herself as he/she likes to think of him/herself being and acting as an occupant of that position"(McCall, 1977, p65, cited by Orbuch, 1992). In social constructionist terms this means that identity is the result of the ways in which a person is able to take up and sustain positions in relation to the discourses of our society.

Orbuch (1992) conceives of the various role identities of an individual as being organized by that person according to a "prominence hierarchy". The organization of the hierarchy is influenced by the person's perception of his/her performance in the role in relation to the norms and expectations of society for the performance of the role, by the support given to the role by others, by the individual's commitment to the role, and by the gratification available to the individual in the role. The approach to relationship loss described by Orbuch (1992) looks at correlation between the significance to the individual of the role of "partner" and the distress experienced by the individual when the relationship ends.

Summary

This chapter has set out the main features of a social constructionism approach to language that informs this research. The main aim of the current research is to explore the repertoires of a group of women as they construct and position themselves as separated women in our society and to examine the means by which their stories warrant voice.

3 PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Post modernist theorists working in diverse humanist disciplines including sociology, linguistics and psychology offer perspectives on story telling that are relevant to this research. This chapter introduces the approach to stories of self and separation taken in this research and shows how this approach is aligned with a range of social constructionist perspectives on story telling.

Storytelling

It is in the nature of human beings to tell stories. The stories that we tell weave the fabric of our lives and are woven through by our cultural heritage. The stories that have been told through time, and the stories that we tell about our lives, are part of the evolution of our oral narrative tradition. Through this tradition we collectively portray what it means to be a human being in this world. As individuals and as societies we seek to make and communicate meaning through the activity of story telling. Storytelling is purposeful; it serves the teller's personal need to make sense and take control of events and the social need for interaction. Through stories we construct and align ourselves to the "knowledge" and "morality" and "truths" of our culture. Through stories we interpret the world around us and the human condition within it. In determining, through the narratives of our lives, our own position in relation to the world, we create the selves that we perceive ourselves to be. As individuals, our well-being and sense of equilibrium in a world that makes sense, depends on our participation in the storying of human life.

Self Presentation

At the heart of the stories we tell, are the selves that we represent ourselves to be in the specific context of the experiences we are relating and in the specific storytelling context. The selves that are represented are true selves and not just façades of selves. In the act of story telling we are creating the selves and the realities which we describe. We are both the authors and protagonists of our own lives. We constitute the realities of ourselves and our lives through the on-going process of describing and interpreting our perceptions in narrative form. What we say has links to the external world, but is, above all, self-referential and serves our personal purpose, which is to sustain preferred images of

ourselves and meaning and order in our lives.

The evolution of our selves is formatively influenced by the responses of others to the selves we present. It is in our interactions with others that self comes in to being, that self is constructed and positioned in relation to the structure of our society and modified and maintained in co-operation with the members of that society. No distinction can be made between self and representation of self – I am the person that I successfully represent myself to be to other members of my society.

Features Of Personal Narratives

The accounts that people develop of themselves, which are interpretations and constructions of their lives, have all the characteristics of stories. The individual account is not an objective report of what happened, it is a creative narrative. Our interpretations of our lives are entirely subjective and constitutive of our individual psychological realities. Our cognitive analysis and evaluation of the meaning of events is loosely related to "objective fact" but is much more a matter of making the account of events fit the feelings we have about those events. In the telling and retelling of the story, in the evolution of a complete account of what happened, the "reality" of what happened is constructed.

The story has a plot, constructed around a central problem or goal state (Gergen and Gergen, 1987), a cast of characters and a sequential and temporal organization of selected events relevant to the goal state. The story has a beginning, middle and end with demarcation features to signal beginnings and endings. The story takes place in the storyworld. When the story begins, "the talk moves out of the here and now of the conversation into the storyworld: another time, often another location, populated by other participants" (Polyani, 1985) The end point of the story is weighted with some value which may be positive (victory) or negative (defeat). Gergen and Gergen (1987) describe stories which move towards the accomplishment of a positive end as progressive narratives, and stories that move towards negative outcomes as regressive narratives.

The goal of personal story telling is to find meaning; to construct a world of order and purpose from the events of our lives. Events have meaning for us in two ways; Implicit meaning is the personal significance we attach to the events involving our assessment of

how threatening or benign the situation is. Implicit meaning will influence the way in which we find meaning. The "found meaning" of an event is the fitting of it into our beliefs and views of the world in an orderly way and determining the purpose of the event in relation to our goals in life (Thomson and Janigian, 1988). Finding reasons for what happened (i.e. attributions) is part of finding the meaning because defining the causes of events helps towards a perception of order. Finding meaning is a matter of developing an account in which the events, our worldviews and our goals are made congruent. This may involve changing our assumptions, changing our goals and plans, or it may mean changing our perception of events so that they can be construed as meaningful and purposeful.

Story Genre

Some stories are full of descriptive detail, imagery and dramatic re-enactments, and these draw the listener in to share intimately in the teller's imaginative vision, in the experience and emotions that are relived through the story. Other stories keep the listener at more distance, recounting the course of events and including only such detail as is necessary for understanding. Riessman (1990), in her research on separation accounts, identifies different varieties or styles of narrative. She calls these story genre, habitual genre, hypothetical genre and episodic genre, and shows how the teller moves from one narrative genre to another as the plot unfolds. Shift in content is matched by shift in genre.

Narratives As Social Interactions

Just as when we read, it is not abstract and general propositions which convince us, but the specific details which capture our imagination and trigger our emotional responses, so it is the details, the images and the dialogue which involve us cognitively and emotionally in the scenes described by the storyteller. T o a great extent our involvement in a story arises through "scenes" created visually and aurally by the speaker's words. The speaker chooses detail and imagery, according to her interpretation and evaluation of events, to evoke the scene, "reconstruct" dialogue and provide information which will serve to influence the listener to align herself with the teller. In this way the thoughts and feelings of the listener are engaged and, based on the "evidence" of the scenes enacted in the listener's imagination during the telling, the listener in led to form an interpretation of the events described and draw conclusions which are likely to be those favoured by the story teller. The "reality" of what happened is negotiated by the speaker and the listener.

World View

Polyani (1982) and Thomson and Janigian (1988) elaborate on the formative influence of the teller's world view, the assumptions about how the world operates which are implicit in the story. Interwoven in the stories we tell are the generally accepted "truths" about the nature of things that are prevalent in our society. As discussed previously, the story teller demonstrates "proper socialization" by relating the events of the story to the common cultural understanding of what is "normal", "acceptable" and "understandable" (Polyani, 1985). "Basic truths" about the nature of the world and the proper conduct of human relationships are the reflection of the prevailing discourses of the specific time and culture of the storyteller. As human beings we need to organize our understandings in coherent ways and this includes positioning ourselves in relation to others and to our society. Harvey et al (1990) discuss the work of Harre, Clark and De Carlo (1985) and Shotter (1984) who stress "how people must talk about themselves in terms of the social order and socially constructed morality in which they exist" (cited by Orbuch et al, 1990, p192).

Therapeutic Functions Of Personal Narratives

Researchers into life schemes, or the frameworks of understanding by which people organise their experience, emphasize the therapeutic benefit of personal story telling and detrimental effects of failure to engage in it. Thomson et al (1988) review research into the correlation between recovery from trauma and life threatening disease, and the development of an explanatory account. Similarly Harvey et al (1990) emphasize the necessity of account-making in the process of transition and identity change following change or trauma. They focus on the centrality of people's stories in the process of their recovery. Like Weiss (1975), they view accounts as story-like explanations which "develop in response to highly problematic situations....that have implications for one's social identity" (Orbuch et al, 1990, p192). Orbuch's model of account-making begins with the traumatic event and ends with identity change. This model provides details of the negative physical, psychological and social consequences of failure to engage in account making. Adjustment is achieved through the evolution of a narrative that accounts for one's experiences in ways that are intelligible, compatible with one's life schema, and legitimate in one's current social context. The working through of the process towards the completion of an account, with concomitant identity change, involves the participation of

others with whom the account is elaborated and refined.

Narrative therapy is a modality of psychotherapy based on the idea that story telling is the principle means by which people effect change in their lives. Narrative therapy works within a social constructionist framework. People's lives are their stories, their realities, which are constructed in their interactions with other people and in their social practices. The stories that we tell are our interpretations of our daily lives. White (1991) writes, "People make sense of their lives through stories, both the cultural narratives they were born into, and the personal narratives they construct in relation to the cultural narratives" (cited by Freedman and Combs, 1996, p32). In stories we arrange our experiences such that we are able to arrive at a coherent account of the world and ourselves. "The success of this storying of experience provides persons with a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives, and this is relied upon for the ordering of daily life and for the interpretation of further experiences" (Freedman and Combs, 1996, p31). These interpretations, by which we determine the meaning of our lives, are interwoven by the stories that circulate in our society, in our culture, and in our time. Cultural stories determine the shape of our individual stories.

Narrative therapists (e.g. Michael White, 1991) identified that people sustain their "problems" through their stories, through the way in which they interpret the events of their lives to themselves and to others. He was interested in drawing out from his clients new interpretations of old stories, or stories of events previously unstoried. Using the approach suggested by White (1991), Freedman and Combs "discovered that as people began to inhabit and live out these alternative stories, the results went beyond solving problems. Within the new stories people could live out new self images, new possibilities for relationships, new futures" (Freedman and Combs, 1996, p15). No single interpretation of events is the "true story" and no one of the many selves we are in all our self-presentations is truer than any other. As Freedman and Combs point out, "preferred self" is not the same as "essential self". Narrative therapists assist their clients in identifying and "living out the narratives that support the growth and development of 'preferred selves'"(Freedman and Combs, 1996, p34).

Summary

The development of account-making theory over the past thirty years reflects the influence of modern social, psychological and linguistic theoretical trends. The approach to separation stories in this research incorporates several theoretical perspectives on personal narratives that amount to an elaboration of one another in line with current social psychological themes.

3 CHANGE AND TRANSITION

Theorists who have studied change explore it in terms of people's responses to it. Theories proposed by sociologists who focused on the responses of employees, of trauma victims, of women and of divorcing couples are all relevant to this research. Common to all these theories is the notion of transition. Bridges (1991) distinguishes between change, which is situational, and transition, which is psychological re-orientation in response to change. According to Bridges (1991) transition begins with an ending, with losses, with letting go of old concepts of "reality" and "self", and ends with a new beginning, a new "reality" and a new sense of "self". This project is about stories of transitions, the stories in which new "reality" and new "self" are created.

Obsessive Review

A number of sociologists (Marris, 1974; Riessman, 1990; and Weiss, 1975) have researched the effects of sudden big changes in people's lives. Dramatic changes include relational losses (death and separation) and serious reversals of fortune (e.g. job loss or financial loss). Central to the experience of loss is the struggle to reconcile what has happened with the image that one has of oneself and one's life - How could this happen to me? Who am I now that this has happened? The attempt to answer these questions leads people to review obsessively the events surrounding the change and develop, through this process of interpretive review, an account of themselves. The account deals with the individual's interpretation of "What happened?" and "Who am I?" in the light of these happenings. Transitions involve telling the story, and in the telling, constructing the meaning and reality of the change.

The Conservative Impulse

Marris (1974) explores fundamental human reactions to change in terms of a "conservative impulse"; a deep-rooted need for continuity, for stability and predictability in life. We need to be able to rely on the framework of our understandings about ourselves and about life, based on our past interpretations of experience, to inform current events, such that we can interpret and understand them. This framework is conceptualized by narrative therapists as our life story. When change occurs the human impulse is to adapt existing patterns of

thought and attachment to the effect that the change can be assimilated, while the experience of life as meaningful and interpretable is preserved. We try to make what's happening fit into our story because changing the story is de-stabilizing. When change is gradual then assimilation is gradual; step by step the new is assimilated into the context of our existing story and there is no threat to the essential meaning of life. However, there are limits to how much change can be assimilated without having to change the basic story. The Life Change Scale developed by Holmes and Raye (1976) is still relevant today. It rates life changes in terms of their potential to effect stress responses. Both positive and negative changes are stressful. If change is sudden and major and our adaptive abilities are unequal to the situation then "the centre cannot hold" ("The Second Coming" by W.B.Yeats), the structures of meaning by which we interpret our experiences begin to "fall apart". Our ability to find meaning in our lives is disrupted as suddenly much of what is familiar and reliable and meaningful, the old story, seems irrelevant to the new situation.

Conviction

An effect of the conservative impulse can be the need to cling to strongly held beliefs when things fall apart. Marris (1974) explains how the conservative impulse to hold firmly to the known in unfamiliar and unpredictable circumstances includes dogmatism. He uses missionaries and colonialists in Africa, and Communists and Jehovah's witnesses in Nazi concentration camps as extreme examples of how total confidence in the rightness and superiority of one's beliefs can protect people for the full brunt of the negative effects of dramatic change. The expression of strong convictions may well be a coping strategy.

Ambivalence

Marris defines grief as part of a process of adjustment to loss, which is characterized by two fundamental reactions; to cling to the past and to reach forward into a new future. Ambivalence, often expressed through contradictory impulses, is described by Marris (1974) as a typical effect of the struggle to reconcile the need to preserve all that is still valuable and important in the past with the need to escape from the pain of the loss by moving into the future. Marris (1974) researched people's reactions to a whole range of situations of wanted and unwanted change across different cultures and found that ambivalence is an invariable characteristic of the process of adjustment to change.

Anxiety

Carol Becker (1990) identifies anxiety as an effect of women's transitions. In her discussion of the prevalence of anxiety amongst "liberated" women of the 90s she describes how, "Caught between past selves that need to be transformed and future selves that must still be envisioned, women are uncertain about how to live in the present" (Becker, 1990, p23). In Becker's view the anxiety which modern women experience is an effect of the continuing prevalence in our culture of the belief that a woman's role is to be selfless and serve others, side by side with the newer discourses of the liberated woman. The anxiety of the group, and of the individual in transition "comes from not being able to know the world you are in, not being able to orient to your own existence" (May, 1976, cited by Becker, 1990). People in transition live in the conflict zone, which is a wilderness or limbo of uncertainty.

Completion Tendency

Change theorists Marris (1974) and Becker (1990) describe transition as a limbo between the familiar past and the unknown future. Not knowing how to live in the present we both reach back to the past and long to move forwards into the future. "Completion tendency" is a term used by social psychologists to describe people's motivation to adjust to change and move on. Completion tendency is manifest in the obsessive searching for the meaning of experience through account making. Horowitz (1986) "describes the role of completion tendency in people's use of thought to adjust to severe stress" (cited by Orbuch et al, 1990). He defines completion tendency as the need to match new information with inner models based on old information and the revision of both until they agree. Until completion occurs new information and one's reaction to it remain in active memory and are frequently and intensely represented. Accounts, according to Horowitz (1986), are composed out of "episodic representations that people continue to experience in flashbacks and to use in developing further semantic contexts for the account" (cited by Orbuch et al, 1990, p200)

Relevant to the implications of completion tendency is Weber et al's (1987) description of the Zeigarnik effect in the context of the search for closure and the need to finish the story. In the 20s Zeigarnik discovered that individuals who were unable to finish reading a story had more detailed recall of the story than individuals who had been allowed to finish reading (Lewin, 1927). If a story is not finished it remains immediate to us and cannot be

filed away in the archives. Until the story is somehow made congruent with the order and purpose of our lives we have to live with it.

Beliefs

Life schemes researchers Thomson et al (1988) propose that some people weather change more easily than others because the life schemes by which they live are resistant to threat in two ways. Firstly, if people believe that misfortune can and does happen to good people, then the negative event is not so incongruous to a sense of order as it would be to the person who believes that only the undeserving are punished in a just world. Research cited by Thomson et al (1988) shows that most people do have positive and benign assumptions about the world, and that most are ill prepared to experience the "injustice" of misfortune and find the meaning of their negative experiences. Secondly, if people's primary goals in life are achievable despite the misfortune then the impact on one's sense of purpose may not be so significant. People who have goals that are achievable under any circumstances (e.g. to face life with dignity) are more resistant to the negative effects of change than those whose goals depend on favourable conditions or circumstances (e.g. to hold the family together).

Summary

The theory reviewed in this chapter proposes that change is followed by a process of psychological orientation that has universal characteristics. This research sets out to explore the scope and specific characteristics of the transitions between marriage and separation described by a group of women, and to examine some of the beliefs that inform their experiences.

5 SEPARATION AND ADJUSTMENT

This chapter reviews theories of adjustment to change as they relate to marital separation and to women's separations in particular. It looks at factors that other researchers have found to influenced adjustment and at criteria proposed by Spanier and Thompson (1984) against which adjustment can be assessed.

Adaptive Strategies

Marris's (1974) theory of response to change is an elaboration of Piaget's theory of learning. We have a need to organize our experiences into coherent patterns, and when experience is inconsistent with the schemata by which we live, we are thrown into a state of disequilibrium. When separation occurs we become highly motivated to adapt our existing schemata so that the new experiences fit in. This requires a shift in the way the world is understood, a process of reconstructing and reinterpreting what has happened until it makes sense. Coming to terms with separation involves obsessive review and the gradual development of a subjective account of the failure of the marriage. Weiss (1975) writes, "For months after the end of the marriage, the events leading to the breakdown are likely to occupy the thoughts of the separated husband and wife. Again and again they review what went wrong, justify and regret the actions they took, consider and reconsider their own words and those of their spouse. Endlessly they replay actual scenes in their minds…" (Weiss, 1975, p14).

Obsessive review is not only an internal activity but an externalizing, social one. The separated person tells the story over and over again in many different ways to family, friends, colleagues and counsellors, highlighting different parts or themes according to current preoccupation and emotional state as well as social context. The listener is used as a sounding board, a moderator, a supporter and a resource for the activity of reconciling the past with a new understanding of the world.

Identity Change

All major changes involve redefinition of self, but in particular relational changes precipitate identity changes. On the Holmes and Raye Life Change Scale (1976) the three

most stressful changes are those that involve the transition from being a member of a couple to being a single person, through death of a spouse, divorce and marital separation.

Marris (1974) makes the startling observation that " courtship ends where bereavement begins". During courtship we organize the purposes and attachments which make life meaningful around our relationship to that person whose position in our lives is central. A life partner is a pivotal point around whom we formulate our understandings of our roles and purposes in life and with whom we co-operatively construct patterns of meaning by which to interpret and evaluate our lives. When the relationship ends, through death or separation, those personal purposes and patterns of attachment and meaning which were embodied in the relationship, need to be re-established independent of it, so that a sense of continuity of meaning, which makes life manageable, can be restored. The loss of a partner is to a great extent a loss of self and the process of adjustment is a working towards the restoration of a sense of self; a new and independent self, distinct from the married self, and the self who experienced the events of the separation, must be created.

The Interpersonal Orientation of Women

We sustain identities for all the roles in our current portfolio. For a woman whose identity is organized around a partner, those roles may include lover, wife, partner, companion, housekeeper and many others. Within the "system" of a marriage partners also take on identities that derive principally from the perception of one held by the other person. In many subtle ways couples put pressure on each other to live up to the images they have of each other. One may have identities within the marriage, supported by one's life partner, which are primary roles, but which are only sustained in that context.

As Orbuch (1990) points out, people vary in the way in which they organize the hierarchy of their identities. For some, the identity of partner is *the* major source of identity, but for others the sense of self relies heavily on the identities one is able to sustain in other roles; for example, at work, in same sex groups of friends, or in one's family of origin.

Women tend, more than men, to define themselves primarily in relationship to others (Becker, 1990). For a married woman with children, especially if she does not work, the major sources of identity are likely to be the roles of wife and mother. A woman who

major sources of identity are likely to be the roles of wife and mother. A woman who works and one who has a stable social network independent of the couple network will not experience the same level of disruption to her sense of identity, because there is some continuity of "self" and "reality" before and after the separation.

An interesting study by Schuldberg and Guisinger (1991) focuses on how divorced fathers describe their former wives. The results vary extremely from a psychological norm that had been established for describing other people. The majority of men used terms that were predominantly negative to devalue their former wives. Although these men were not clinically disturbed, their descriptions showed characteristics of a clinical condition in which there is a failure to integrate the good and bad sides of a person. One might hypothesize that separated women would do the same, being in similar circumstances, however there are indications to the contrary.

Riessman (1990) explores comparisons between the divorce stories of men and women. She notes that "women have extensive vocabularies for emotional distress. Unlike men .....they have no difficulty in talking about it at length. They often use relational metaphors.... An interpersonal orientation is manifested in the language women choose , yet this orientation carries high costs for them personally (Riessman, 1990, p126). She goes on to show how women show a lot of empathy for the distress of children and former spouse. "They blame themselves and experience high distress levels when they put their own interests first. Even as women leave their husbands, they display empathy for them" (Riessman, 1990, p129).

This faculty for empathy suggests that women may be better able than men to integrate the good and bad sides of former partners, and able to acknowledge their qualities as well as emphasizing their faults and contribution to the failure of the marriage.

Uncoupling

Each of the two individuals who join as a couple is shaped and identified by the shared life together, by the custom of years, mutual understandings, common attitudes and values. As Vaughan (1986) writes, "Uncoupling is complete when the partners have defined themselves and are defined by others as separate and independent of each other – when

being partners is no longer a major source of identity. Instead identity comes from other sources" (Vaughan, 1986, p5).

This adjustment is not a matter of time. Spanier and Thompson (1984) observe, "time is an artificial marker of what goes on in a relationship.....change is not linear and continuous". Their study found no correlation between acceptance and time since separation and they commented, "The resistance of strong affection and animosity to the passage of time is remarkable" (Spanier and Thompson, 1984, p145). Attachment theory explains how, just as parents are attachment figures even for neglected and abused children, individuals who were married remain attachment figures for each other long after any fondness between them has gone. The physical and emotional inaccessibility of the attachment figure causes separation distress in children and adults alike.

Adjustment

Women who have been separated for several years may not have "got over" the loss of the relationship. In terms of their non-acceptance of the separation, continuing emotional involvement and identity entanglement, some of these women can be described as "newly separated". Conversely some separated women, as initiators of the separation, may have begun the detachment and mourning process well before the actual separation, and may achieve "closure" relatively quickly.

Spanier and Thompson (1984, p103) define adjustment as the achievement of "a stable and resilient pattern of life, separate from the previous marriage and partner and based on anticipation rather than memory". Evidence of adjustment is examined in four categories of reaction:

- Acceptance – the belief that the separation was inevitable and the right decision, the cessation of obsessive review and preoccupation with the spouse and a sense of separateness and detachment.
- Anger – the maintenance of strong feelings is indicative of continuing emotional involvement
- Guilt – is perhaps less related to culpability than to continuing affection and sympathy
- Loneliness – the continuing effects of the loss of the attachment figure and the impact of

separation on social life.

Dumpees

The terms dumper and dumpee are used in this study to distinguish between people who initiated the separation, and those on whom the separation was imposed.

In 1975, Weiss suggested that people who are left feel more regret and rejection in the aftermath of separation. The diary analyst Rossenblatt (1983) who examined Victorian diary entries spoke of the greater grief of those who are left. Spanier and Thompson (1984) found that being a dumpee was likely to be associated with more emotional upheaval, obsessive review, preoccupation with the former partner, pining for the past and the feeling that the separation was a tragic mistake. Weber, Harvey and Stanley (1987, p125) suggest that "differences in accounts developed by the leaver and the leavee following the dissolution of a close relationship would be a useful avenue of study, given that such roles can be identified'.

This avenue was pursued by Vaughan (1986) whose whole premise is that "understanding uncoupling hinges on examining the process in relation to whether one is the initiator or the partner left behind". By definition the initiator is the person who initiates the separation. It is acknowledged that dumpees are sometimes driven away by initiators. This current research explores the differences in the stories of dumpers and dumpees. It differs from Vaughan's research in its exclusive focus on women.

While both dumper and dumpee go through a similar process of transition, the dumper begins the process well before the actual separation, so that at the time of separation, the experience of dumper and their partners is quite different. Dumpees have not had the advantage of beginning the search for alternative sources of identity and the accumulation of resources to mitigate the impact of separation before the break up. Being undetached from their partners and still seeing the positive more than the negative in the relationship, the separation seems incomprehensible. The conservative impulse to resist change and restore the past is a strong force. The way to acceptance is to make the relationship's history fit the current situation by excavating the negative and distancing oneself from one's former partner. This acknowledgment and acceptance of what was wrong is part of

the dumpees' painful task of accommodating change and moving on into the future.

Dumpers

Weiss (1975) proposed that dumpers feel more guilt and remorse. Spanier and Thompson's (1984) research did find that women dumpers experience more guilt than other women. In general they found that dumpers had an easier transition out of the relationship. This accords with Vaughan's (1986) study of transitions.

Dumpers do much of their obsessive reviewing and grieving for the relationship before it actually ends. In their accounts of the breakup they "redefine their partners in negative terms .... Reconstruct the history of the relationship, reordering their reminiscences into a negative chronology of events" (Vaughan, 1986, p29). The breakup is justified by the provision of socially acceptable reasons and information is selected for disclosure that supports the dumper's decision.

Despite their advantages, dumpers may nevertheless experience the reality of the separation as traumatic. Spanier and Thompson (1984) verify Weiss's (1975) conclusion that "it is the persistence of attachment in contradiction to eroded love which makes marital separation so ambivalent and painful" (Weiss, 1975, p142).

Transition after marital separation will be experienced differently by dumpers and dumpees. Dumpers are trying to dissociate themselves from the things of the past. They will be inclined to deny the value of material things, services and support which were valuable and meaningful in the relationship. They will focus on their gains through leaving the relationship. Dumpees, on the other hand, will hanker for what was valuable in the past and will focus on losses.

Other Circumstances Of The Separation

Riessman's study, *Divorce Talk* (1990), examines a number of ways in which men and women experience and express the trauma of divorce differently. Quantitative research cited by Riessman shows that women are more psychologically stressed by separation and divorce than men. Significant correlates of women's depression include children (the more children and the younger the children the greater the depression), economic strain and

support network (the more people a woman can turn to for practical assistance the less the depression). These factors were not found to be significant correlates of men's depression.

Bursik's (1991) research into correlates of women's adjustment shows that "successful transition" from the married to the single state does not seem to be influenced by women's ages, length of marriage, or presence of children   (she suggests that positive and negative effects offset each other). The extent and strength of a social network, especially on the availability of support and assistance on a daily basis correlates positively to adjustment.

Spanier and Thompson's (1984) huge research project, spanning 10 years, uses a 236 item questionnaire and analyses cross sectional and longitudinal data from hundreds of male and female participants. They summarize previous research and relate identified themes of marital breakdown (agreement \ disagreement and involvement \ non-involvement) and a host of other variables to people's experiences of the aftermath of separation. In general, they found that when the end of the relationship is characterized by conflict, disharmony, incompatibility and withdrawal, the adjustment process is less distressful than if calm prevailed and there was continuing companionship and involvement.

Summary

In this study it is expected that the way in which the positive and negative effects of separation are weighed up and expressed will depend principally on the level of the individual's adjustment. Comparison and contrast will be between better and less well adjusted groups. Women who are still involved in the process of separation are expected to be less well adjusted than women who have been able to put their separation behind them and move on independently. This latter group will be called the "formerly married" group. "Newly separated" and "formerly married" are differentiated in terms of adjustment. This research also explores the different experiences of dumpers and dumpees and examines other factors that may influence adjustment.

6 NARRATIVES OF SEPARATION

This chapter reviews the work of previous researchers who have discussed the narratives of separation.

The Functions Of Separation Stories

A retrospective account of events has a plot structure and is a finite entity. The story form shapes the course of the relationship and the events of separation into a manageable form. The storyteller has the version of events under her control and constructs the story so that the events make sense to her. The story will ultimately clarify and explain it all, weigh up all the losses and gains, and extrapolate the moral and plan for the future. The story that the teller relates is part of the process of constructing a meaningful and orderly psychological reality.

The development of an account through rehearsal and embellishment of the story provides opportunities for preserving and protecting one's self image. The newly separated women in this study, being in circumstances which place them beyond the pale, in terms of our social ideal of the nuclear family, and being caught up in an adjustment and transition process which involves redefinition of identity and the meaning of life, are expected to make extensive use of strategies for involving and persuading the listener to accept their self presentation and interpretation of events. Weber et al (1987) are amongst the theorists who have examined the account in the context of the teller's attempt to persuade the listener regarding the explanation or point of view expressed in the story. The strategic aims of the teller, according to the context, will determine how events are selected and sequenced in the story, and how it is told. Events and past performance can be framed so that one's self is presented in ways that are personally and socially acceptable. The storyteller's aim is "to bring off a representation of themselves or the world that has a liberating, legitimizing or otherwise positive effect for them" (Burr, 1995).

The activity of constructing a story of the relationship loss is also a form of grieving. It involves both emotional purging through expressions of grief and a process of detaching oneself from what is lost. In the story, losses can be objectified and their meaning and

purpose explained. Painful experiences can be rationalized and put to rest. Through story telling we can contain the chaos and misery of the past, and move on.

The Scope Of The Story

The separation story is likely to be an account of "a few significant events that dramatize what went wrong, or a few themes that ran through the marriage; in addition it allocates blame among the self, the spouse and any third parties... and so it settles the moral issues of the separation" (Weiss, 1975).

Attributional analysis is the study of the causes ascribed to events, of the reasons people give for the events that have happened. Attributing reasons to events gives a sense of control over them and also serves to protect and preserve one's self image (Grych & Fincham, 1991). Research into the content of divorce accounts indicates that most people perceive their partner and situational factors to be the primary causes of the failure of the marriage and "many of the explanations focussed on fixing blame and adjusting (usually lowering) evaluations of the partner" (Harvey et al, 1978 cited in Orbuch, 1992, p160).

The content of the story draws on the past and the future. "Central to account making are people's memories of the problematic event and their continued thinking about the event" (Orbuch et al, 1990). In our stories we vividly recreate the flashbacks of the past which, "undigested", still live in our active memories. Accounts also draw on the hypothetical past – what might have happened if things hadn't turned out the way they did (Riessman, 1990).

The stories of separated women will have common themes. They will describe the betrayal of a dream, the failure of the marriage to provide a context for personal growth and happiness. Typically divorced women "reconstruct their marriages as filled with constraint, subservience and vulnerability to the authority of their husbands" (Riessman, 1990). The cognitive content of the story is an analysis and evaluation of selected events. Evaluation of the change from the married to the separated state will inevitably involve a reckoning of losses and gains and the adoption of a moral position.

Emotions

"Many accounts are characterized by bitterness, sorrow or other vivid kinds of emotional qualities" (Harvey et al, 1986) We speak of our personal relationships in terms of our feelings. Relational language is the language of emotions. We use emotional terms to express how we feel towards another person and to imply thereby, the state of the relationship and our evaluation of it (Gergen and Gergen, 1987). As already discussed women have a strong interpersonal orientation and have been found to make more extensive use than men of emotive language in their separation stories (Riessman, 1990).

Weber et al's (1987) study of accounts of long lost loves has some relevance to this analysis of the stories of the formerly married in comparison with those of the newly separated. Their observation is that "years and years after a loss, a person appears able and quite willing to compose and relate a story of the lost relationship. Perhaps the emotional intensity of the story has faded somewhat over the years, but the poignancy and power of the account seem to remain intact".

The Social Context

In our culture, and in many others, marriage is socially sanctioned, ritually and publicly celebrated, and divorce is not. Divorcing individuals are deviating from the social ideal by splitting up a family in a culture in which the conjugal family is valued and upheld. This calls for an explanation to be integrated into the account of events. The reasons given must be perceived by the listener as "adequate grounds" (Riessman, 1990). Motives that are culturally acceptable must be invoked to explain the deviance. Personally making sense of the separation and representing oneself in a socially acceptable light involve relating the events to commonplace truths and values of our society.

"The Individual"

In present day society "liberal humanism could be said to be a heavily legitimated discourse....with the self-contained free individual at its heart. The discourse of The Individual is central to our present social and economic organization."(Burr, 1995) For the separating woman in our time and culture, calling upon images from the individualist, liberal humanist discourse is likely to be a successful strategy, both socially and in terms of personal coping and repositioning in light of the changed circumstances. We are all unique

and free individuals with an equal right to autonomy, self-fulfilment and happiness.

Both Weiss (1975) and Riessman (1990) discuss how the "ethic of self realization" contributes to the rising divorce rate and provides justification for leaving a marriage that impedes the pursuit of personal fulfillment and happiness. Our culture values individuality and freedom and, couched in these terms, leaving an unfulfilling marriage and reclaiming one's own life and identity can be seen as justifiable, even heroic!

"Romantic love"

Another heavily legitimated discourse in our society, more traditional than the discourse of the Individual is the discourse of Romantic love. In the evolution of our language and culture the concept of love has evolved. In Medieval times courtly lovers expected no gratification and were content to adore from afar. Love had nothing to do with marriage. Marriage was about making alliances, duty and responsibility. Nowadays the songs we listen to, the stories we hear, the images on the billboards and the TV screens all confirm the rightness and naturalness and desirability of falling in love, marrying and having a family. It appears that the kinds of love and support and fulfilment which we need to grow up and function normally within our society are only available within the mutually beneficial arrangement of heterosexual married family life.

"The Companionate Marriage"

The discourses of the Individual and Romantic love both feed into the discourse of the Companionate marriage. Riessman (1990) looks in depth at the ideology of the Companionate marriage, and the implications of this. As she explains, these days divorcing people can call on consensus understanding of what a marriage should provide in terms of a context for individual personal happiness. She shows how men and women hold the same ideals – sexual fulfillment, primacy & companionship, and emotional intimacy – but that they mean different things by them! Nevertheless, separated people can gain social support by showing how the betrayal of these "common" ideals justifies the decision to leave the unhappy marriage. (Riessman, 1990)

Closure

"Closure" is the Holy Grail to separated people. In a way, closure is the overall goal state of the separation story. We may dally with regret and anguish over the past but ultimately the distress is intolerable and we want to adjust, put the past behind us and move on. Separation accounts reach into the future. Our tendency to complete the story is evident in the construction of a new future in which we are different; a future in which we have been able to live into the new self identity which is presented in the current story. Harvey et al (1990) cite the research of Shank and Abelson (1977) in their observation that accounts "often involve a description of anticipated further consequences and plans for coping". Scripts for the future are " hypothesized structures that organize a person's comprehension and later guide performance". Within our accounts is the evolution of our hopes and plans and expectations of the future.

Summary

The features of separation stories described in this chapter will be evident in the stories of their separations told by the participants of this research. They are expected to present an analysis of the events that is self validating, to use emotive language to position and define themselves in relation to others, and to demonstrate completion tendency. This discourses that prevail in our society will determine the ways in which they interpret their roles and the events of their separations.

6 SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In describing this thesis in the context of previous research it is necessary to acknowledge, in particular, the influence of Catherine Riessman. Riessman sets out the theoretical context of her research, which also provides the basis and direction of this thesis. Previous research into people's interpretations of the traumatic events of their lives derives from the field of stress research. An increasingly significant strand of this research since the 1950s has been an investigation of what people say about divorce, in particular attributions that they make. An effect of dominant philosophical trends of our time, and the theory of social constructionism has been the evolution of a personal meaning tradition. Theorists like Marris (1974) and Weiss (1975) explore how people construct coherent and meaningful lives through their interpretation of events. Social context theory explores how people invoke motives or definitions of the situation which "are part of the cultural lexicon and enjoy a high degree of consensus" (Riessman, 1990, p14). Riessman aligns herself in particular with social interactionism. Social interactionists like Orbuch (1992) focus on the way in which people establish their own reality through their definition of the situation.

The development of Riessman's work was strongly influenced by Eliot Mishler (1979) who urged sociologists to pay more attention to what people actually want to say, rather than limiting them to a set of responses. This influence differentiates Riessman's work from previous research in the personal meaning and social context traditions. She analyses the language of the interview transcripts for evidence of *how* interpretation is done. In her own words, she operationalized her research questions by "analyzing the vocabularies that individuals themselves use to make sense and survive difficult experiences and by examining how these understandings are embedded in particular historical and cultural contexts" (Riessman, 1990, p11).

Riessman's research is based on three research questions, two of which are relevant to this thesis:

- How do individuals go about constructing meaning?
- What social understandings do individuals draw on to interpret their personal experiences?

- How do the understandings of men and women differ?

Riessman's sample group included equal numbers of men and women, all of whom had been separated for less than three years. She used quantitative data on levels of depression and qualitative data including narrative analysis. The main thrust of Riessman's analysis is a detailed comparison between men and women's interpretations of their experiences and the ways in which they construct the meaning of their new lives. In particular she traces the different expectations that men and women have of marriage (the discourse of the Companionate Marriage) and the different experiences they have of life after separation. Although women were found to be more depressed than men are, and for different reasons, women saw far more benefit in the separation than men. Riessman's exploration of the positive ways in which women interpret the divorce experience differentiates her work from the mass of divorce research that has traditionally focused on the negative aspects of marital separation. Based on Riessman's evidence that women find much to praise in the divorced state, it is anticipated that tracing the discourse of self-actualization will be fruitful.

While the theme of the Companionate Marriage is central and the main focus of Riessman's inquiry, her data was also used to explore ideologies about what it means to be a woman. In this area of inquiry there is overlap between Riessman's work and this research. But, whereas this study focuses on the personal meaning to individuals of their interpretation of a woman's role and a woman's nature, Riessman emphasizes the social origins and social implications of the hardships of separated women. Women's depression arises through the socially constructed system that disadvantages women, especially single mothers, and causes hardships that are not shared by men.

Riessman discusses the nature of women in terms of "the cost of caring". She also links depression to the "interpersonal orientation of women". Unlike men, strong empathy and sense of responsibility for others aggravate women's separation trauma. Women often feel guilty, overloaded with responsibility and the vicarious experience of others' distress.

The main differences between this work and Riessman's are that this research focuses solely on women and includes both long and newly separated. The research of Weber et al (1987) on the written retrospective accounts of relationship loss by male and female

participants, confirm informally gathered evidence, in conversation with friends and colleagues, that long separated people have a complete account of the events of separation which they are ready and willing to tell. It appears that the accounts of long and newly separated people have both similarities and qualitative differences, which this thesis sets out to explore.

This current research project differs from that of Weber et al (1987) in several ways. Their data was the written accounts of long lost loves by elderly male and female participants and their approach to the data is socio-psychological. This research project is a linguistic analysis of women's oral stories of both recent separation and long lost relationships.

Unlike Riessman, I am particularly interested in women's transitions out of relationships and in evidence of their adjustment. Vaughan's (1986) research focused on turning points and transitions, and in particular on the different experiences of dumpers and dumpees. Vaughan's findings have influenced the development of this thesis but, whereas Vaughan explores the experiences of both men and women, and includes homosexuals, from a largely sociological perspective, this project focuses on women only and the approach is the linguistic analysis of the language of women's invited stories. The exploration of women's adjustment in this thesis is influenced by the work of Spanier and Thompson (1984) which offers definitions of adjustment and categorizes indicators of adjustment. They explored a huge range of correlations including gender related and circumstantial correlations between separation and adjustment.

Like Riessman, I will explore women's utilization of current discourses, but I am interested in other validation strategies too. Gergen (1989) has done previous work on validation strategies and this current exploration of the some ways in which women validate their accounts builds on that work.

7 THE SCOPE OF THIS RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to examine women's narratives of separation and to reveal how the stories demonstrate the common characteristics of transition, evidence of adjustment to change, evidence of selected discourses and use of other validation strategies.

The Common Characteristics of Transition

When women lose their partners, the ground shifts under them, the world looks different and they can barely recognize themselves within it. The future that once stood before them has dropped away. The feeling of being at home in one's life is replaced by a feeling of strangeness, of being a stranger to oneself. As human beings we need to know who we are and where we stand; we need familiarity and coherence; we need direction and purpose. Transition is a wasteland, unendurable to us, and we feel compelled to get out of it. If there is no way back into the past, then we begin obsessively to shore up the remaining fragments against our ruins, and to construct a new reality, which, in the course of time, grows familiar and comfortable around us.

Women's stories are the means by which they come to terms with their losses and evaluate and familiarize themselves with what they may interpret as gains. We story our lives out of the "unreal city" ("The Wasteland" by T.S. Elliot) and into a new world of meaning and purpose. We story our new selves into existence.

In their separation stories women will demonstrate and describe the effects of transition. Though the nature of transition is dependent upon the individual's personal interpretation of the change, existing research (reviewed in Chapter 4) indicate that these effects are characteristic of human responses to major change. Women in transition are caught between the demands of the past and the future. They are obsessively preoccupied with their personal circumstances. While scenes from the past are relived in an endless cinematic collage, the need to escape from the pain of the past and the discomfort of the present draws women to construct and live into a new vision of the future.

Women in transition are confused by the simultaneous coexistence of polarities of feeling

and by their contradictory impulses. They can veer from one extreme to another, or feel paralyzed by indecision and mistrust of their own judgment. Anxiety is an affect of transition, which may be especially prevalent among women.

In this project it is expected that a profile of the characteristic effects of transition on modern women will emerge through their stories of themselves and the events of the aftermath of marital breakdown:

Transition effects will be traced in the language of the stories. It is expected that:

- **Loss of Self** will be evident in descriptions and definitions of self, relation to and interpretation of roles, pronominal allegiances, comparison with former / future self, perception of being not whole / nobody really knows me/ life seems meaningless, perceptions of time hanging on one's hands / reported manic activity, metaphors of wholeness, fullness, wellness, realness and direction

- **Ambivalence** will be evident in descriptions of opposing forces, expressions of dilemma and uncertainty, contradictions, shifting points of view, indecisiveness, and difficulty in sustaining positions.

- **Anxiety** will be evident in reported symptoms of anxiety, statements of anxiety, language of powerlessness, incoherence, obsessive focus on perceived causes of anxiety, plans for alleviating anxiety.

- **Grief** for the loss of old self and old reality will be evident in vivid recall of the past, denial of change, intense emotional involvement (positive and negative) with persons and events of the past, evaluation of the past, reckoning of losses and expressions of bereavement.

Evidence Of Adjustment To Change

The process of adjustment to separation is a process of establishing a new and separate life and becoming settled and future orientated within it. Researchers (reviewed in Chapter 5) have identified indicators of adjustment. The well adjusted divorcee accepts that the separation was the right decision, feels detached from the former partner and the events of the past, has little or no ongoing emotional involvement in the former partnership, does not feel guilty about what happened or lonely in her new life. In contrast the unadjusted separating woman may be ambivalent about the breakup, and is certainly caught up in

obsessive review and preoccupation with her former partner and past events. Women who haven't adjusted to their new lives are still emotionally involved in the relationship. This can include strong negative feelings like hatred or anger or strong positive feelings like admiration. They are often lonely since the former partner is still an attachment figure for them.

The process of settling in to a new life, reaching acceptance and a position of relative neutrality may vary according to the circumstances of the separation. In this research it is expected that women who are the initiators of the separation (dumpers) will be more future orientated, positive about the change, distancing in relation to their former partners and less lonely than dumpees. Dumpees are expected to be more past orientated, more positive about the marriage, more emotionally involved and lonelier.

Another variable in the circumstances of the separation involves the partners' perceptions of the conditions under which they lived prior to separation. If the last few months of the marriage were stormy and miserable and the partners were distant from one another then the change may be constructed as relief from an unbearable situation. Positive orientation towards the change and emotional distance in the relationship contribute to adjustment. The stories of "marital refugees" will show evidence of this. If the time preceding the breakup of the marriage was stable and peaceful and there was still a high level of positive emotional involvement, acceptance and detachment are likely to be more difficult. Women whose marriages end "out of the blue" will tell stories that reflect this.

This research also explores the difference in perspectives on their separations of women who are currently separating and unlikely to have completed their adjustment, and women who are more likely to be well adjusted, having separated some years ago. The stories of the well-adjusted (formally married) group will be less cinematic in immediacy and detail and show less emotional involvement. Acceptance and distance from the events will frame the story. The narrative genre may be predominantly "habitual" (Riessman, 1990) since the account has reached completion. In the stories of the newly separated the listener will be drawn into the story world and will feel the emotional turbulence.

- **Acceptance** will be evident in declarations of acceptance, positive evaluation of the change, frequency of referral to former partner, pronoun use.

- **Emotional involvement/ distance** will be evident in emotive language, images, detail, superlatives, pronoun use, name use, frequency of referral to the former partner, general focus of the story, story genre, involvement strategies, relational language

- **Guilt** will be evident in expressions of guilt, regret, sympathy, and empathy and in positive statements about former partner, especially in comparison with self.

- **Loneliness** will be evident in expressions of loneliness / neediness / emptiness, pronoun use, expressions of social losses and loss of self, perception of being not whole / nobody really knows me/ life seems meaningless, perceptions of time hanging on one's hands / reported manic activity.

- **Obsessive review** will be evident in reports of obsessive information seeking and processing behaviour, reports of obsessive thinking about former partner and obsessive recall of the past, recognition of the role of account-making in the process of separation and in vividly detailed and cinematic depiction of events.

- **Conservative impulse** will be evident in unwillingness to let go of the past, reluctance to acknowledge the magnitude and implications of the change, positive evaluations and continuing emotional investment in the past, lack of focus and emotional investment in the future and in focus on losses rather than gains.

- **Completion tendency** will be evident in identifying the potential value of the changes and focus on gains, finding meaning, distancing oneself from the past and storying a new and better future.

Evidence Of Selected Discourses Of Our Society

When we access the concepts and expressions available to us in our language, we are accessing the common sense understanding of the world that we share. The beliefs of our society are "ready made" in the language which we acquire as children. Our belief system can be explored through the metaphors we use. Extensive research has been done on metaphors, which is beyond the scope of this project. Nevertheless, an aim of the project is to trace the beliefs that separating women hold, in particular through their use of metaphoric language. A simple example could be: A marriage is a house; it needs "strong foundations", the relationship is "built' up over years, the couple "invest" in the relationship, repair and maintain it. Like a building, a relationship can be "solid as a rock" or it can "fall apart". We believe that if we "work on it" we will build up a stable marriage that will then exist as an object and provide shelter.

Women will interpret the circumstances and events of the separation and adopt positions in relation to those experiences according to their beliefs about the role and proper conduct of a woman in our time. As discussed previously, the resources available to separating women for interpreting and representing the circumstances and protagonists in the separation story include discourses such as Romantic Love, The Family, The Individual, The Companionate marriage, A Woman's role, A Woman's Nature, Self Actualization, Economic exchange and many others. These current discourses, which have huge personal and social implications for separating women, offer very different perspectives. An aim of this project is to explore the ways in which some selected discourses, which have not previously been traced in analysis of separation stories, are used by the participants in this study.

- **Self actualization** – this discourse will be evident in discussion of our obligation to ourselves, growth, fulfilment, finding myself, doing what I always wanted to do, becoming a person that I like, doing things my way. Language may include metaphors of the natural world and organic growth, light, release, birth, power.

- **A woman's nature** – beliefs about what it means to be a woman centre around concepts of femininity. These beliefs will emerge in talk about bonds to others, affects and effects of the separation on others, serving others' needs, disclaiming own needs, appeals to naturalness and higher authority. Metaphors may include organic growth, organic unity, bondage

- **The roles of Wife and Mother** – beliefs concerning a woman's rights and responsibilities as a wife, as a mother, as an individual, will be evident in language that conjures the concepts of freedom, autonomy, duty, equality, sexuality and economic exchange. This language may include metaphors of standing / downtrodden, voice, investment/ exploitation

The Use Of Validation Strategies

This study explores how stories warrant voice in two ways: Firstly by accessing the dominant discourses to one's own advantage, and secondly by the use of specific validation strategies.

This examination of the techniques by which people justify what they have said, builds on and extends the work of Gergen (1989). This research proposes additional types of validation based on the researcher's own observations as a teller and social participant in separation stories. Validation strategies are defined as explicit attempts to persuade the listener of the validity of one's stance:

- **Assertion** – I swear it's true.
- **Observation** - I saw it with my own eyes
- **Quotation** – He said, "You'll never get the children"
- **Rationality** – it makes sense , it stands to reason
- **Passion**- my involvement and my feelings give authority to what I say
- **Intention** – my intentions are good so I must be right
- **Witnesses**- she saw / heard what happened
- **Verification**- my mother never trusted him. He was prosecuted.
- **Credentials**- I'm a good person so you can believe me
- **Evidence** – authenticating details, labels
- **Blame** – if he had just shown a little kindness sometimes
- **Excuses**- I couldn't help it
- **Justification** –There are good reasons for my decision
- **Rights** – I'm within my rights
- **Intensification** –It was the worst day of my life

Summary

This chapter has outlined the approach to the four parts of the central research question, which is, "What are the features of Women's Narratives of Separation". This proposed operationalisation of the research question forms the basis of the categories of analysis that were further developed as the research progressed. Final versions of the categories of analysis are presented in Appendix 5.

9 METHOD

The Participants

Main groups in the sample

There are two main groups of participants. These are the newly separated and the formerly married. These groups are differentiated from each other in terms of adjustment. Important subgroups within these main groups are dumpers and dumpees. These are also differentiated in terms of adjustment. Other variables which have implications for adjustment and for the language of separation stories, are discussed below.

The researcher attempted to recruit participants from two main sources. Two sources were identified to ensure that both main groups were adequately represented.

Making contact with "Newly separated" women

In New Zealand, every couple who file for separation are referred for counselling and six sessions are provided as a free service by the family court. The main purpose of this is to facilitate the settling of contentious issues, such as custody and property, out of court. In some cases counselling is a requirement of the court, and in some, additional programmes of counselling are provided. Since counselling is an integral part of the process of legal separation, the majority of separating women are engaged in it, at least briefly.

The principal method of making contact with the group who are "newly separated" was intended to be through a relationship counselling service. Information about the research project was available to potential participants in the form of leaflets displayed with other brochures in the reception area of the practice. Women who wished to participate were invited to contact the researcher to arrange a preliminary meeting. Clients of the counselling service were expected to come from all walks of life and represent the full range of separation circumstances and experiences.

As it turned out, there were no volunteers from this source, but there were, nevertheless, newly separated women amongst the final group of participants.

Making Contact With "Formerly Married" Women

Formerly married women are everywhere in society. One in three marriages ends in divorce and at least as many de facto relationships end in separation.

For pragmatic reasons, it was decided that second method of making contact with separated women, would be through making information about the project available to students of the Eastern Institute of Technology. This is the Polytechnic where the researcher works as an academic administrator.

The student body comprises a very large group of people (a total of 3687 students in 1999) aged 16 – 84 , who represent the social, cultural and ethnic diversity of Hawke's Bay . They are, however, differentiated from the wider society in their focus on education and relatively higher levels of education.

Four of the five participants were EIT degree students.

Other Variables within the Sample Group

Level of Education

Level of education may be a significant variable in research into the language of personal stories. More educated people may be more articulate and may have a more cognitive response to their experiences. There may be an impact on story content too, since research has shown that the separation experience of more educated women differs from that of women with less education. Spanier and Thompson's (1984) study showed that for women, "years of education was associated with greater acceptance of the break up and less loneliness after separation". On the other hand, "the relative lack of education characterized symptomatic distress amongst women" (Spanier and Thompson, 1984, p126).

Dumpers and Dumpees

It was expected that the sample group would include dumpers and dumpees. Vaughan's findings led the researcher to anticipate very clear differences between these groups. The findings of both Vaughan (1986) and Spanier and Thompson (1984) indicate that dumpers will be differentiated from dumpees in terms of advantage in the adjustment process.

Dumpers are less involved, have better resources with which to withstand the negative effects of the separation, and are more positively orientated to single life and to the future.

It was significant that no dumpees volunteered. The only dumpee in the sample group was contacted by the researcher and invited to participate, on the basis that she had indicated her interest at the conception stage of the project.

Other variables

Other variables pre-identified as having potential significance for the language and themes of personal stories of separation include:

- Presence and age of children
- Economic situation
- Occupation
- Ethnic affiliation

No attempt was made to control the composition of the sample group. Participants were recruited as they volunteered.

Self -Selectors

The research is biased by the self-selection of the participants. Self-selectors are obviously differentiated from non self-selectors in willingness to tell their story to an interviewer. The main difference seems to be in choice of confidant rather than in desire to work through the experience in conversation with other people, which is a major characteristic of transition processes (Vaughan, 1986).

The decision to volunteer for research may also be affected by the phase of the individual's transition. Vaughan suggests that going public with the decision to separate and explanations for it, happens in stages, beginning with admitting it to yourself, then to your partner, close friends and family and finally to acquaintances and strangers. Newly separated women who have not yet reached the public admission stage will not volunteer. It was expected that dumpees would be less likely to volunteer than dumpers, who have the advantage of preparation, and are at a more advanced stage of adjustment at the point of separation.

Vaughan (1986) suggests that " people's willingness and ability to talk about their relationships may peak when their relationships are most traumatic for them". On the other hand, Harvey et al's (1986) research on vivid memories of long lost relationships provides confirmation that not only the newly separated are ready to tell their story. Harvey et al remark on the willingness of their participants to produce a seemingly "ready made" and detailed account. Even when they are no longer preoccupied with their former relationship and separation, formerly married women review their stories. Over the years we take up opportunities to replay the major events of our lives, the births and deaths, the accidents and illnesses, the war stories and the break ups, because it is our nature as human beings to maintain the history of ourselves in narrative form. For these reasons it was expected that there would be a good response to the recruitment campaign.

The anticipated response was delayed by factors that the researcher had not considered. Information made available to students during term time did not yield a satisfactory response until the term break.

A brief introduction to the five participants in the study

The five women vary considerably in terms of durations of their relationships and their separations. Relationships ranged from 4-19 years and separations from 2-21 years. Four of the five women are dumpers, and all of the dumpers are students. The group includes Maori and Pakeha women.

All the participants are mothers and identify themselves first and foremost in this role. This research shows that a woman's experiences of separation are inseparable from their experiences of themselves as mothers. This project is an exploration of mother's experiences of separation. A comparison between the separation experiences of mothers and childless women is a potential avenue for further research

The table is a summary of the information used to categorize the participants in terms of anticipated groupings and as a basis for exploring potentially significant variables amongst the participants.

	Duration of relationship	Duration of the separation	Dumper/ dumpee	Children	Occupation	Ethnicity
Katie	4 years	2 years	Dumper	Yes	Student	Pakeha
Pera	19 years	7 years	Dumper	Yes	Student	Maori
Racquel	5 years	21 years	Dumper	Yes	Student	Maori/Pakeha
Lucy	19 years	3 years	Dumper	Yes	Student	Pakeha
Lynn	15 years	2 years	Dumpee	Yes	Professional	Pakeha

Figure 1: A brief introduction to the participants

Procedures For Recruiting Participants And Obtaining Informed Consent

Advertising

Information for recruiting participants is attached in Appendix 1. This includes a notice displayed in the foyer of the relationship counselling service and on the EIT Students' Association notice board. An information sheet was also made available to potential volunteers in the foyer at the EIT Students' Association inquiries desk. Separated women who read the information sheet and were interested in participating were invited to contact the researcher.

The Preliminary meeting

At this meeting the potential participant met the researcher and received further information including the consent form, the questionnaire and interview confirmation slip (see Appendix 2).

The following points were covered in the preliminary meeting:

- Information about the project

   (The topic and purpose of the research were discussed)

- Ethical issues and informed consent

   (Mechanisms and procedures for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality were explained. Participants' rights were discussed with reference to the consent form. The participants' declaration of consent form was read and clarification provided as necessary)

- Introduction to the questionnaire

   (The questionnaire was discussed with the participant. It was pointed out that the purpose of the options provided is to help to generate ideas and not to limit the participant's response. Clarification about any of the questions was provided as necessary

- Provision of counselling back up.

   (If the volunteer was not currently engaged in a programme of counselling, alternative procedures for providing counselling back up were discussed with the participant and a plan was made for the eventuality that counselling would be required)

- Introduction to the interview procedure

   (The nature of the interview, venue options, date, time and duration were discussed and the interview confirmation slip was filled out.)

- Support person

   (None of the participants wanted to have a support person so no arrangements were made for this.)

- Arrangements for the return of the questionnaire, consent form and interview confirmation slip.

   (The participant was given the consent form and questionnaire and asked to fill these out at home and return them together with the interview confirmation slip in the stamped addressed envelope provided.)

Data Collection Procedures

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was given to volunteers together with the consent form at the preliminary meeting. The questionnaire was to be completed at home and returned by post together with the consent form and confirmation of intention to attend the interview. The rationale for this is that the potential participant would be able to reflect in private and at leisure on the information provided in the preliminary meeting, on the issues which are of interest to the researcher, and on her feelings about becoming involved in the research project, prior to committing herself to the interview.

Design of the questionnaire

In designing the questionnaire the following points were considered:

- The respondent should understand clearly what forms of response are required.
- The questions should be straight forward and easy to understand
- There is no need to try to standardize the participants' responses.
- Respondents will feel comfortable if they have the freedom to respond at length and in their own way, and the right to respond minimally or not at all.
- The respondents may like some assistance in generating ideas for responses.
- Checkboxes are limiting and depersonalizing. They may cause disengagement and induce automaticity in the response process.
- Generating own words and, to a lesser extent, actively selecting suitable words from a list, is creative and personal and engaging.

The researcher was interested in the participants' own words. The language for analysis is the language the participant used orally in the interview and not the words written on the questionnaire.

The decision to provide options on an attached vocabulary list was made after trialling the questionnaire with several separated women who are friends or close colleagues. In general they were of the opinion that options for each question was inhibiting, and demeaning in so far as it implied low expectation of the respondents ability to know and articulate her own feelings and experiences. The researcher decided to attach a list of options rather than have no options because of the conviction that richer data would be obtained in the interview if the broad scope of the issues was indicated in the questionnaire.

The Questionnaire is analyzed below. Most of the questions relate to the issue of adjustment to change.

Question topic	Question number	Purpose
Contact and identification	Q 1-3	
Biographical information	Q 4-6	
Duration of relationship and separation	Q 9-10	
The break up	Q 11	Pre-separation role identification
	Q12	Identity transition (with Q 20)
	Q13	Characterizing pre-separation relationship (implications for adjustment with Q13, 14, 15)
	Q14	Dumper \dumpee identification
The separation	Q15	Characterising the separation Transition process (with Q 21)
	Q 16	Loss and gain
The present	Q 17-18	Acceptance\ continuing involvement (with Q 19, 20, 21)
	Q 19	Acceptance
	Q 20	Role identification Identity transition (with Q 12) Transition process (with Q15)
	Q 21	Acceptance Future\past orientation

Figure 2: Design of the questionnaire

Purposes of the questionnaire

- To be used by the researcher as tool for the individualization of the interview guide prior to the interview, by enabling the researcher to begin to formulate an understanding of the participant's perception of her experiences and attitude towards the separation.

- To provide information which can be used to begin to assess the extent of participant's membership to identified groups in the study

- To focus the thoughts of the participant on the issues of change and themes of separation prior to the interview and to stimulate reflection on different aspects of change and the full range of its impact.

- To be used by the participant during the interview as a reminder of the thoughts which occurred during the reflective completion of it, and to generate talk about those thoughts during the interview.

The Interview

Venue

Interviews were conducted at a venue selected by the participant. The rationale for providing a choice was to minimize inconvenience to the participant or hindrances to participation, and to ensure that the participant felt comfortable in the interview setting. The choice of venues included an interview room at EIT, the participant's home and the home of the researcher.

Four of the five participants were interviewed at EIT. One of these interviews was conducted outside office hours to ensure absolute privacy. One interview was conducted at the home of the participant.

The interview guide

A. Introduction

- Reiterate the nature and purpose of the research project
- Give assurances that the participant will not be identifiable in the write up of the interview and that confidentiality will be maintained.

answers nor any intention of making value judgments on the content of the information disclosed by the participant.

- Emphasize the participants' right to say as much or as little as she wants to, to interrupt and seek clarification at any time, to ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time and to terminate the interview if it becomes distressing.
- Reiterate the arrangements in place for the provision of counselling in the event that the participant becomes distressed.
- Introduce the interviewer's own personal interest in the issues around separation.
- Request permission to turn the tape recorder on.

B. Interview questions

1. Tell me about your separation from the moment when you first began to sense that something was wrong.

(It was expected that in many cases this question would lead the participant back some key incident which may have occurred as early as courtship days. This set the scene for the account of the breakup. As necessary probes were used to encourage the provision of details of events felt by the participant to be significant. If the questionnaire had not clarified newly separated \ formerly married and dumper \ dumpee identification, then probes were formulated to try to clarify this.)

2. How did things change for you after the separation?

(At this point the participant was invited to look at her responses to Q16 of the questionnaire – good changes and bad changes. As necessary, probes were used to elicit more details the perceived changes. As necessary the participant was guided to discuss role and identity changes with reference to Q11 and 20 of the questionnaire.)

3. How do you feel now about the separation and your new life?

(The participant was guided to look at her responses to Q21. As necessary probes were used to elicit more detail about transition processes, acceptance, loss and gain and future orientation)

C. Debriefing

*   Thank the participant for sharing her stories and indicate that the interview is complete.
*   Ask the participant about how she feels about having shared her personal stories with the interviewer

    (The aims are (a) to check the participant is not distressed (b) to elicit any comment on the activity of story telling or the circumstances of talking to a stranger (c) to allow for any postscript disclosures)

*   Turn off the tape recorder.
*   As necessary offer to make arrangements for counselling.
*   Confirm that the participant still agrees to the use of the interview data for the research project.
*   Offer the participant the opportunity to read the transcript and comment on it (and delete parts). Make arrangements for this.
*   Offer the participant the opportunity to read and comment on the final draft of the thesis and make arrangements for this.
*   Check the participant has no questions or concerns and feels fine about the interview experience and the whole procedure.
*   Check the participant knows how to contact the researcher if necessary.
*   Conclude

Interview structure and style

The interview was structured by the three open ended questions into three main parts, roughly relating to past, present and future. The prepared questions were useful and seemed to fit quite naturally and fruitfully into the conversation at points where discourse arising from the previous question seemed to be exhausted.

The style of interviewing was very informal. Once the interview began the interviewer did nor refer to or make notes, but maintained normal eye contact with the speaker. As far as possible, while giving the participant the floor most of the time, the interviewer responded to the participant as one would in a conversation in which confidences are shared. In general the participants were very forthcoming and few probes were needed. They were sufficiently encouraged to continue by the minimal responses of the interviewer, which indicated interest, solidarity and empathy.

Ethical Concerns

The principles set down by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee were followed in the design and implementation of this research. The participants were well informed and multiple opportunities were provided for the participant to decline to participate and to withdraw from the project (See Summary of Steps In The Procedure, Appendix 3).

Counselling back up

Separation is a major life change and traumatic experience. The method of obtaining data was through requiring the participants to focus on it and recall it in detail. It was possible that people could become distressed through the use of the research instruments. The following arrangements were made to deal with distress triggered by the interview.

- **Non –EIT Participants**

These participants, recruited through the relationship counselling service, were expected to be in on-going counselling situations. Non – EIT participants who were not having counselling were to be referred to the EIT psychotherapy clinic. The clinic offers psychotherapy to the general public at very reduced rates. It is run by third year Diploma of Psychotherapy students. It was agreed that participants in this project who were in need of counselling would be offered one free session to discuss issues arising from the interview.

- **EIT Students**

EIT students were to be referred to the EIT student counsellor or to the psychotherapy clinic. The student counsellor's services are available free of charge to all EIT students.

Although some participants became emotional during the interview, and two interviews were interrupted because the participant was crying, none of the participants wanted any counselling, so none of these plans were implemented.

Confidentiality

Procedures for safeguarding the anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of information were all in place prior to making any recruitment information available. No one other than the researcher had access to questionnaires or consent forms. A typist transcribed interviews, in which pseudonyms had been used. The typist signed a Confidentiality Agreement prior to commencing the work (see Appendix 4).

Processing the Data

Discourse Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 2, the meaning of words evolves out of the ways in which they are used within different cultural/social groups. The commonplace understandings, or cultural narratives, of the group, structure the way those meanings are created, perpetuated and interpreted by individual language users within the group. Discourse analysis searches for regularities or patterns in the way language is used by members of the group to describe and interpret their experiences of themselves and others within the social life of the group.

Potter and Wetherall (1987) provide the analytic concept that guides this research. An interpretive repertoire is conceived as a theme that evolves and is supported through "global patterns of explanation, evaluation and description or sets connected arguments which often depend on recognizable tropes or 'commonplaces'" (Wetherall, 1999).

If we examine discourse for the meanings imbued in the words used by a group to describe and interpret particular experiences or events, we can identify and scope the common understandings that structure the ways the group responds to those experiences.

This analysis focuses on how selected themes of separation are articulated by the women in the sample group as they each construct an account of their own experiences. The aim is to reveal that certain common understandings operate within the group about what it means to be a woman and to separate from a life-partner in the context of our society, in New

Zealand at the end of the millennium. It also examines how individual members of the group, in the process of constructing an identity, position themselves in relation to those various themes.

Categories of Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 8, categories of analysis were initially prepared in accordance with the planned operationalization of the research questions. These were extensively revised and refined during the coding of the transcripts, as the main themes relating to each research question were identified (see Appendix 5).

Coding

Coding was done in three stages;

1. Pre-coding activities included identification of text units and preliminary reading of the transcripts in relation to the categories of analysis. The text unit was loosely defined as a 'chunk' of speech that expressed a complete thought or related thoughts. Initial coding was done by hand with a highlighter and margin notes.

2. Transcripts, pre-organized into text units, were imported into the NUD.IST programme for qualitative data analysis. Each text unit was examined for relevance to the various categories of analysis, and, accordingly, coded to the nodes of the index tree. Some text units were coded to several nodes and some were not coded at all.

3. Once the entire manuscript had been processed, the coding of each text unit was reviewed to ensure that no error or oversight had occurred.

Method of analysis

Main themes of the analysis were identified through a process of tabulating the information stored on the main and sub branches of index tree. The tables created in this preliminary collation of the data used the five names of the participants on the horizontal axis and selected categories of analysis on the vertical axis. The tables are not included in the presentation of the results of the research, since these were working papers only. An example section can be found in Appendix 6.

Coded text was imported from the nodes into the cells of the tables. These tables showed at a glance which themes predominated, and the scope and interrelationship of the main themes. The main themes were taken to be those which had the largest amounts of text by three or more of the participants.

Once the main themes within each category were identified, the relationships between themes were explored through diagrammatic representation in the form of draft models. The models provided the framework for writing up each section of the analysis. All the models were refined several times as the detailed working out of the themes in the manuscript text indicated necessary adjustments. Final versions of the models are presented in the summaries of each part of the analysis.

Transcribing conventions

Coded text units, or groups of text units, which were identified as relevant for the analysis, were arranged into clauses (complete and incomplete) and phrases. The purpose of this arrangement was to make the text, which was for the most part not subdivided in any visually discernible way, easier to read. It seemed to the researcher that it was easier to follow the speaker's thread through all the false starts, sudden backtracking, and asides that are typical of oral language, if the text was arranged in this way. The participants, having read and been shocked by the looseness, bordering on incoherence, of the interview transcripts, confirmed the researcher's view that, for comprehension, this is the best way to present oral language in written form. The subdivision of the text units also made patterns of repetition of vocabulary and form more apparent.

The following table summarises the transcribing conventions used in the presentation of text in the analysis of the women's stories.

Conventions used	Explanation

[..]
 	
eg.
 	
    I wasn't participating in...
    [...]
    Life (laughing) or the community...
	When the interviews were transcribed, every minimal response of the interviewer was transcribed also. These responses are omitted from the text for analysis. An omission of this sort is indicated by [..] between lines of text

Conventions used	Explanation

[..]
 	
eg.
 	
    I had enough of the playing and
    acting
    [..]
    I can't hold up this front anymore
	In some cases this symbol is used to indicate that longer sections of text, including interviewer responses, has been omitted

[..]
 	
eg
 	
    I thought I'd have to say
    Oh he's back
    [..] I didn't want to retell it.
	This symbol at the beginning of a line of text indicates that a few words have been omitted. This was only used when the words omitted were unclear or incoherent

(?) *eg* *he's still not happy(?)*	This indicates that question intonation was used although the form was not a question
… short pause … (pause) long pause *e.g. really … shrunk down* *e.g. he appeared that he was …(pause)* *you know, everything was fine*	These indicate the differentiation between short pauses (1-2 seconds) and longer pauses.
(laughing) (sigh) (quietly)	Sounds like laughter etc. and significant changes in volume are indicated in parentheses
* * * eg. *We did this with * * * * *	Names of other people are omitted and replaced with this symbol
Underlining eg. <u>*We'll go up north*</u> <u>*We'll have*</u> *a holiday* <u>*We'll go up north*</u> *and stay in a* *motel* <u>*We'll have*</u> *a good New Years*	In some places the readers attention is drawn to specific linguistic items or forms by underlining

Bullet Points
Eg.
 	
    regardless of whatever happened
    I'd always be a mother to my kids
    I would do anything for them
    I love being a mother
	Bullet points are used when a series of quotations are presented that are drawn from different speakers or different parts of the text.

Bold
Eg.
 	
    And he
    And ah my partner
    My my um husband (whisper)
    *We **were** married (very quiet)*
	Bold indicates the speakers strong emphasis of a word

Conventions used	Explanation

Couplets
Eg.
 	
    and if you <u>make a threat</u> to leave him,
    <u>carry it through</u>"
 	
    I'd <u>made this threat</u>,
    he didn't believe me
    so <u>I carried it through</u>
	Sometimes the lines are arranged in pairs or groups to draw the reader's attention to repetitions and parallels

Figure 3: Transcribing Conventions

Consultation

Consultation with friends and colleagues

Consultation with other women was ongoing from the conception of the project to its conclusion. Every opportunity to engage separated women in informal discussion about the project was used. In these discussions other women related their own experiences to the experiences of the participants and to the emerging themes of the project. This was very useful for clarifying for the researcher, the potential scope of the analysis.

Colleagues also provided feedback on the first draft of the analysis. A few copies were circulated for written comment. Readers commented on the comments of previous readers, providing the researcher with an unexpectedly rich variety of opinions. These colleague consultants of the project were very encouraging. They expressed enthusiasm for the project, empathy with the participants and close relationship with the themes of the analysis.

Consultation with the participants

The participants were kept well informed about the research project at each stage of their participation, and all demonstrated their engagement with the project by choosing a level of involvement beyond the requirements for participation. All the participants took the opportunity to read and make any changes to the transcript. In most cases the changes amounted to clarification of unclear parts. Most of the participants sought contact with the researcher after the interview for further discussion of the project. One participant wrote

extensive, unsolicited notes for the researcher. All the participants read the analysis and four gave detailed feedback. Two responded in writing. On the whole, they were very enthusiastic about the project and felt that their experiences were well understood by the researcher. Both colleagues and participants expressed that they felt uplifted by the discovery that they were not alone in their experiences. Almost every reader of the draft analysis commented, "I thought it was just me".

10 THE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSITION

"The Unreal City"

Transition begins when change is inevitable. When staying in the relationship seems no longer possible, when "things really can't go on like this", women move into a transitional zone. It is a bleak juncture between the past, which is known, but which has become untenable or otherwise unsustainable, and the future which is, at best, unknown and unfamiliar, and at worst, unthinkable. The poignancy of transition is that the perceived alternatives in the central dilemma may seem equally frightening or impossible.

Women in transition live in the unreal city. They are strangers to themselves, displaced and bewildered. They are adrift in a bizarre world of hidden meanings, illusion and disillusion. Through the metaphor of the unreal city the experiences of women in transition are linked to archetypes of human experience of change.

Dis-Ease

"The times are out of joint"

The dumpers know there is something not right about their live long before the separation, but it can take years to put the pieces together. Meanwhile a kind of paralysis sets in. In the turbulence of uncertainty and dilemma, these women, like Hamlet, feel like actors in their own lives. They convey their sense that, "the times are out of joint". Pera says:

> *I saw things,*
> *that the picture didn't look right.*
> *It didn't sound right*

Lucy says:

> *The feelings began*
> *Oh a good ten years before I separated*
> *That that things I knew weren't right*
> *[..] were happening in my marriage*

The story of Hamlet draws on the archetype of the wounded King. Traditionally, in

Western literature, the woundedness or sickness of the King is reflected in the barrenness of the land, or as in Eliot's "The Wastleland", in the disconnectedness of the "unreal city". If the king, symbolizing "higher self", is suffering, then dis-ease extends to the body and to one's perception of the world. Pera describes the strangeness of the world and her feelings of unreality on the journey between Australia and New Zealand, which was metaphorically a journey away from her old life and towards the new.

> *It was slow it was like the longest trip I've ever taken*
> *[..]*
> *And I wanted to sleep*
> *I was tired.*
> *Emotionally, physically*
> *I thought oh doesn't the grass look exhausted*
> *And and relief*
> *I don't know how you can feel exhausted and relieved*
> *and happy and excited all at the same time*

The physical landscape reflects her own inner landscape. We construct our interpretations of what we see and hear in the context of our subjective experiences.

Illness

All the dumpers report illness prior to the separation. Some evidence of links between illness and the other effects of transition was identified.

Lucy was diagnosed and treated for cancer between the time of her decision to separate and the actual separation:

> *And no way was I going to live round [his alcoholism]*
> *in the end cos it was too stressful,*
> *so it was just a matter of when was I going to get out*
> *[..]*
> *and then*
> *I got cancer, so I had to deal with that first,*
> *so that took priority over*
> *[..]*
> *Um well who knows why you get cancer,*
> *it was probably stress was part of it*

Pera decided to leave nine years before the actual separation and during that time she experienced, *chronic illness ...that came from within:*

I didn't feel...,
I felt really uncomfortable
[...]
It it was I was unsettled in my stomach,
my insides,
I felt hot,
um similar to when you're angry
and you get quite wound up,
I felt choked in the throat.
All that
my bodily functions were in disarray
I I just could tell by the way that my body was reacting
[..]
it went on for nine years.
[..]
I lost heaps of weight
[..]
... I was becoming tired and disinterested in things I normally like

Later in the transcript Pera relates discomfort or unwellness directly to the strain of having to keep up a pretense, of living an unreal life:

I had enough of the playing and acting
I can't hold up this front anymore
and it is quite draining and tiring

In our society mental illness is more likely to be perceived as directly connected to personal circumstances than physical illness. Katie interprets her mental illness as direct evidence that she *wasn't coping*. However, this extract from Katie's transcript shows that Katie and her family view her illness, not so much as evidence of her unendurable circumstances, but as evidence of her personal failure.

They knew that I had been
that I had gone to a refuge
so you know
I guess they
I don't know
I don't presume that I know
what they were thinking
but I felt like such a failure
um...and I sort of.. agh..I don't know
worse than a failure really
I felt like an idiot you know

And everything that had happened
With the post natal depression
With the anxiety disorders
Everything sort of
Everything looked like
I was an idiot

Both Pera and Katie relate their illnesses to their own sense of failure. Racquel also believed that the physical abuse that she suffered was somehow the result of her own failures:

Um well he you know he constantly reminded me
that I was the one at fault
[..]In a way I did [believe it]...
Um and then I I would resent my parents
because I thought if they brought me up better...
um I probably wouldn't of ended up in that situation

In this study illness and anxiety are dealt with separately, and yet all the metaphors of anxiety are metaphors of being physically overwhelmed. Pera was:

all knotted up about it

Lynn describes anxiety attacks as the feeling of:

an elephant sitting on your chest

Similarly Racquel evokes the image of unbearable weight with her description:

I just felt completely crushed

Both Racquel and Katie emphasize the physical effects of fear and anxiety with reference to accidents and shock. Katie says:

I was in a state of shock like somebody would be after
they'd had a major trauma or accident or something

And Racquel describes how:

[it was] just like my whole voice box
was just ripped out
I couldn't speak
I was in a state of shock

For Pera in particular, the perceived connection between spiritual and physical well-being is strong and this is evident in her use of imagery:

I was shrunk..
it, it's almost as if I'd shrunk
[..] all those ar emotional...
body changes really made me go
introvert yah know
really ..shrunk down

Anxiety

Anxiety arises when people recognize a threat to those things that make them feel safe: familiarity, coherence, purpose and direction and so on. All the characteristics of transition identified in this study are essentially manifestations of inner conflict. Uncertainty and unresolved conflict trigger anxiety.

Anxiety is a dominant characteristic of Katie's process of transition. She contextualizes her report of the symptoms of her anxiety in her report of the official interpretation of her condition. This is a validation strategy; she was crazy, but her craziness was officially the result of her circumstances.

Katie's rendering of an explanation for her disorder is orderly and logical. The form that Katie uses to describe her cleaning is soothingly repetitious and presents a step by step strategy to gain control over her environment, her self and her child. The patterning of the lines reveals Katie's appreciation of clarity and reason:

"You have this anxiety
This this obsessive compulsive disorder"

I was cleaning
I was cleaning compulsively

I was washing my hands 60 times a day

Um until they were bleeding

I was
I was um I was (sigh)

I was just
My whole life was just
Cleaning
Cleaning

Keeping the house clean
Keeping myself clean
My child
This therapist said to me
That I had lost so much control

In every other part of my life
That the only part of my life

I had control over was the house
So if I could control the house obsessively

To the point where I didn't want a thing out of place
That gave me my sense of control back

So that's what I was doing.

Katie's anxiety is well justified in her account. She portrays her husband as unstable and violent. The following text provides significant information about her perception of him.

And then he would say to me afterwards
Or a..a..a..after he'd had an explosion
Or one of his turns
You know
He'd always go vacant in the eyes
And I'd think oh no
Here it sorta comes again

The expression *vacant in the eye* implies in our society a kind of inhuman or subhuman element, an absence of the human spirit. "Here it comes again" is a common expression that conveys regularity, inevitability and external agency. *It* is the violence that possesses him from time to time and causes him to behave in terrifying ways. The verbs that Katie chooses to convey his manner and his actions in the interview validate her actions and stance towards him:

- *He would <u>throw</u> these temporary separations at me*

- *He would sorta <u>throw</u> the phone at me*

- *He <u>assaulted</u> me*

- *He would <u>grab</u> my hair*
  And <u>hit</u> my head against something
  Or umm just <u>grab</u> it and <u>squeeze</u> it

- *He was <u>grabbing</u> stuff which belonged to me*
  Precious things
  <u>Grabbing</u> them and <u>throwing</u> them
  Out the front door
  Onto the concrete
  Outside
  He was completely naked

She does not need to make any further evaluative comment; expressed in these terms, his actions speak for themselves. Her fear of him and anxiety are also well justified by an account of threats that amount to psychological terrorism. She provides this explanation to elaborate on her declaration that opposing him openly in court required great courage. This text also provides further evidence of Katie's perception that she was obliged by the court, for the sake of her child, to go through with this:

> *You know it was really*
> *It was a horrible thing <u>to have to do</u>*
> *It was*
> *It was emotional*
> *And I was absolutely terrified*
> *Because to actually stand up*
> *And go against him*
> *In front of him*
> *Was terribly frightening*
> *And then*
> *Because I didn't know what the repercussions would be*
> *I mean*
> *This was somebody*
> *Who told me*
> *Three days after I gave birth to his son*
> *That <u>if I ever left him</u>*
> *<u>If I ever left him</u> with his son*
> *He would kill me*
> *That <u>he would find me</u>*
> *That it might take him five years*
> *But <u>he would hunt me down</u>*

> *And he would kill me*

The repetition of form, the layering of detail, including the setting of a time frame, all contribute to the creation of a predatory image that adds emphasis to the reported threat.

In Katie's case fear and anxiety are not clearly distinguishable, although they are different. Fear is attached to an object of fear. Anxiety is less specific. It can be a generalized sense that something isn't right, that in some essential way the organism is under threat, and change is necessary for survival. The nonspecific unease of anxiety and the physical impact on a woman is best demonstrated in Pera's transcript. At the time of the interview Pera felt that she failed to recognize the sources of her anxiety and illness because she was disconnected from her self.

Pera uses metaphors of the senses to convey this sense of disconnection. She was not able to *see* or to *face* what was happening and did not *listen* to her inner voice:

> *I lost myself in in terms of*
> *not listening to what I want.*

Homelessness

Women in transition are confounded by the feeling of no place to go, the feeling of not belonging anywhere. Perhaps what many women fear the most is to cast themselves into the unknown as a single person, away from any sense of belonging, without knowing where home will be. Katie talks in terms of uplifting herself, like a piece of baggage in transit, and going into a kind of no-man's-land:

> *I would actually remove myself*
> *but I would get to a....a ...a..*
> *I would ge...yeah*
> *I would remove myself from where we were living.*
> *I would get to... somewhere*

Lucy was only briefly away from *home* but she echoes Katie's depiction of no-mans-land:

> *and once he'd gone*
> *then I came home*
> *then we came home*
> *But until then I was somewhere... else*

Katie left her husband several times before the final separation. She lived in a twilight world of transition, feeling trapped by the lack any achievable alternative to the marriage. She says:

> *The only reason I was with him*
> *Was because I just couldn't do any thing else.*
> *I was trapped*
> *I was um..I didn't... I was so depressed*
> *I didn't even wanna leave the house*
> *Let alone think about packing a suitcase to leave him.*

In both Katie and Racquel's accounts, the story of flight from their partners is characterized by their sense of homelessness. For both *home* is where their parents live and no longer home to them. Racquel says:

> *My life was not mine*
> *And I couldn't go back home*
> *[..]*
> *I'd continuously um held in my thoughts that I*
> *would never ever go home again*
> *after having left home...*

In some notes that Racquel gave to the researcher she revealed that she had left her parents' home after being raped.

Katie describes the house where she lived with her husband as *where we were living* or *the house*, rather than *home*, except when she reverts to validating legal and social services jargon:

- *There was lots of conflict going on in the home*
- *The police had been to our home on several occasions*

When Katie finally leaves her husband, she describes herself as *feeling like a complete sort of homeless, deserted wreck of a person.* In reality she is the dumper, but in her own interpretation of the events culminating in a taxi ride to a Women's Refuge, it is she who is deserted.

Racquel is another dumper who felt lost. She describes the early days of the separation as:

> *Like being in the middle of the ocean*
> *With no sign posts.*

She says:

> *I really didn't have no direction,*
> *I really didn't know which way to go,*
> *who to go to,*
> *how to go about it,*
> *I didn't know what I felt I should have kn..*
> *should know,*
> *although people ex...*
> *treated me like I was expected to know*
> *what to do with my life*

Katie's account of her dilemma evokes the image of a journey aborted at the first crossroads:

> *I'd get to these places*
> *where I was out of the....*
> *Out.. out.. away from him*
> *and it just seemed too daunting.*
> *It just seemed like there were too few options*
> *To take the next step*
> *and go on with my life*
> *And I would go back to him*

Homelessness is more than the loss of one's home; it is the loss of a sense of belonging and connectedness, it is the loss of the known and the familiar, and it is the loss of a sense of direction in the 'journey of life'.

Disconnection

"The centre cannot hold"

"The Second Coming" by W. B. Yeats, is a vision of anarchy that will ensue when "the falcon cannot hear the falconer", when order, control and authority break down. The metaphors of this dark vision of social change are applicable to changes in an individual's life, in which essential structures of meaning and value break down. The images of transition are the images of disconnection from the self, lost sense of belonging and direction, and loss of control.

Loss of Self

Unfamiliar Self

Women in transition find it difficult to recognize the person they have become. They feel ill at ease with their unfamiliar identities. Even changes which are perceived as positive can feel threatening. With the changes that Pera recognized, came the consciousness that the marriage was not right for her. She says:

> *The first ten years*
> *I was a different person*
> *and it looked like*
> *I'd completely changed.*

The experience of the dumpers is that they slowly recognize that they have changed. Central to this recognition is the recognition that they can no longer endure the marriage.

For Lynn, a dumpee, the experience of unfamiliar self is very sudden. Lynn did not realise that anything was wrong until her husband announced suddenly that he was leaving, that he had never loved her and had been miserable in the marriage. Her view of the marriage was quite different:

> *As far as I was concerned our marriage was..*
> *He was a fantastic husband*
> *And a fantastic father*
> *And we did a lot..*

Loss of self for her arises out of her inability to reconcile two opposing views of the same reality. The experience of rejection destabilizes one's sense of self. Lynn says:

Well your self esteem goes
All of a sudden
I've put everything of my life
into this person
and they don't want you

Split Self

One of the ways in which self gets lost in transition is through the sense of becoming two people. Split self has many forms. It includes:

- having to fill the roles of two people,
- a sense of having distinct persona in different areas of life,
- betrayal of self,
- leading a double life.
- being an actress in your own life

Lynn remarks on the sense of having to be two-in-one when she describes taking on traditional male tasks like lawn-mowing:

All of a sudden
I'm the man
and the female

Pera's story is a story of betrayal of self. In her version of the events she made a sacred commitment to be a wife to her husband and to fulfil that role, as she interpreted it, although it involved betrayal of her own deeply held values and beliefs. Of all the participants in the study Pera's transition is the longest, possibly because of the her strong commitment to her role as wife.

I was feeling like this is my life
and I'm quite happy with this
and and where ever you go
 and what ever you've changed
....so long as we're together
and we can work them out,
that was fine.
I kind of gave myself up to doing that

Even though Pera did not want to have children, having been the eldest of ten, and a "mother" since childhood, she gave in to her husband:

> *And I truly lost myself that time*
> *and devoted myself*
> *to the to my husband*
> *and and the*
> *and the moment I realised*
> *I first did that was ...*
> *he was the youngest of 16 children.*
> *And he wanted to have just as many children*
> *[...]*
> *they're very important things,*
> *how many children(?)*
> *And what you believe in*
> *and the way that you do things.*
> *I let them go*
> *and I did whatever he wanted to do*

Pera had made a conscious commitment to be a wife:

> *I had already made up my my mind up*
> *and in my you know in my head*
> *rather than in my heart*
> *or how I was feeling.*
> *Um that this is the way to go*

For Pera the consequence of giving up things that she believed in, was that her life became increasingly unreal. Self-actualization versus the role of a wife are strong themes in Pera's story and are central to her process of finding the meaning of her experience. These themes are further explored in Chapter 12. Pera realizes:

> *.... for 19 years*
> *[..]*
> *I was someone else's shadow*
> *and I lived for someone else*
> *and I lived on their ideals*
> *and their beliefs*
> *and it wasn't that person's*
> *fault either.*
> *[..]*
> *I freely gave it*

The dichotomy between the discourses is expressed metaphorically. Pera feels the split within herself between the impulse to self-actualization and the commitment to the family values of her society:

> *I felt like two people..*
> *I was developing on this side*
> *and coming through in a respectable*
> *way and yet on this other side....*

The data includes several variations on the theme of being an actress, a player in the game and leading a double life. The concept of an unreal life is expressed through metaphors.

Metaphors of Unreal self

Dream

In the data dream is used as a metaphor for unreality and disbelief, dream images appear in narratives of actual events and real dreams have symbolic significance. Lynn uses the dream to explain her denial of what was happening:

> *I basically shut myself in my room*
> *and thought if I shut the door*
> *and closed off*
> *it would go away*
> *and I didn't tell anybody or..*
> *cos I was thought this was a dream*
> *and it wasn't happening*
> *And if I told people*
> *I'd have to untell them again*
> *So I didn't say anything to anybody*

Shutting the door is an interesting image too. Lynn wanted to shut the door of herself, to barricade herself off against the pain of rejection and failure. She also says *I cocooned myself* - the image is of being unborn and having no experiences, she wanted to wipe out what was happening and start again.

Racquel's account of her rescue by the milkman includes dreamlike images which convey the unreality of the scene:

> *[..] running up the street*
> *and all I knew was that my husband was behind me,*

chasing me with this butcher knife up in the air,
just [sound effect] *waiting to,*
you know
Yeh.. And um and so I thought
well if I scream someone might hear me
and I tried but um I I tell you
I just was
it was just like my whole voice box
was just ripped out

This is a classic dream image that conveys Raquel's sense of being in a nightmare.
Pera says:

I had a dream
It was a horse being tied up.
A beautiful animal,
and it was being restrained
and it was being held back
and I felt exactly like it
[..]
I just felt like I wanted to burst out
and and be untied
and be free

Prison

For Lynn transition was like falling into the pit. It is a hiding place she doesn't want to
come out of:

I actually lost focus..
like that -dark hole
where you don't want to come out of it(?)

On the other hand, the dumpers in the study use images of being confined against their will.
Katie says:

I was trapped.

Racquel's words also evoke an image of escape from imprisonment:

I just thought to myself
I gotta
I gotta break away from this

I gotta get out

Breaking/Wholeness/Fullness

Overload and breaking point are common images of transition. The reality of Lucy's situation was:

We've been a broken family for years

At the time when she made the decision to separate Racquel felt:

I was just completely crushed

Images of breaking relate to other metaphors of not being whole or complete. Lynn says this about going to work each day after the separation:

> *it was like going...*
> *stepping from my ..*
> *another world*
> *into it this place*
> *where I was secure*
> *and and it was different*
> *I didn't need my husband to be whole*
> *where back at home,*
> *there was this gap,*
> *there was something missing,*
> *at work there wasn't*
> *he was never in my work,*
> *so that was my sanctuary,*
> *it didn't change*
> *cos I didn't need him*
> *where at home I felt I needed him*
> *I wasn't complete*
> *I lacked something*
> *I'd failed*
> *Where at my job I hadn't*

Lynn's image of the sanctuary is significant. Things had changed incomprehensibly and home was no longer a place of safety and support. It had become a place of failure and painful memories. Lynn's strategy after the separation was to be away from home as much as possible. Her sanctuaries were new places without memories, and places where she had not failed.

Looking back on her marriage Pera sees that she was not a whole person in her role then:

I was someone else's shadow

Movie/Play

The movie is another metaphor for the unreality of events. Katie had lived in the unreal city, feeling alienated within her own life story for a long time, but she perceives the events leading up to the final breakup of her marriage as bizarre and unbelievable:

it was like something out of a movie

The metaphors of the stage and of the game are images of the disconnection between self and public persona. Pera refers a lot to her abilities as a storyteller and an actress:

..... I I portrayed a character
somebody else
Or I I put a screen up
a a a front.

Describing the events leading directly to the separation Pera says:

I had enough of the playing and acting
[..]
I can't hold up this front anymore

Lucy was also an accomplished actress. Her husband had no inkling of the impending separation as she and her children *played Happy Families*.

Automatic Pilot

Another aspect of the loss of self that occurs in transition is the sense that one's automatic pilot takes over the tasks that amount to normal daily functioning. Pera says:

I remember,
I was eating and and and washing and doing things
but not really (?)
in the moment(?)
It was just sort of automatic and I,
this is life
I gotta get on

In the first shock of her husband's departure, even Lynn's automatic-pilot failed, but gradually she, like the other participants, got into *existence mode*:

> *I couldn't cook*
> *I couldn't eat*
> *I couldn't function*
> *the kids,*
> *so the family actually took over the*
> *I couldn't be a mother*
> *I couldn't be there for anybody,*
> *I couldn't even keep myself going*
> *[..]*
> *you had to..*
> *even though I didn't wanna cook*
> *I didn't want to eat –*
> *I still had to basically sustain them*
> *so it wasn't nutritious food,*
> *but I managed to cook for them*
> *and it gradually*
> *you just get back into some sort of routine for them*
> *and you do it not for yourself*
> *but for other people*
> *in going to work,*
> *I had to earn the money*
> *and it made me get out of bed in the mornings*

Unlike the other participants, Lynn did not see the separation as final. For her the absence of her husband was an interim thing and she just got through one day at a time, waiting for him to come back to his senses. Lynn sees denying the reality of the separation and using automatic pilot mode as essential survival strategies:

> *I was just basically keeping everything exactly the same*
> *So he could slip slot back into that life*
> *And that's how I survived*
> *I didn't accept it*
> *I just lived each day covering the basic needs*
> *mm so it was just a limbo until he came back*
> *Yes I didn't move on*
> *I didn't ..*
> *I talked to people about it..*
> *but all the time I never ran him down,*
> *[..] I only talked to close people,*
> *I didn't tell acquaintances cos again*
> *I thought I'd have to say*

Oh he's back
[..] I didn't want to retell it.

Katie was in *existence mode* for many months prior to separation and her automatic pilot seemed programmed for housework. Her life seemed seriously disordered to her, and she obsessively tried to restore order and gain some control back by manic cleaning and tidying activities. She says

> *My whole life was just*
> *Cleaning*
> *Cleaning*
> *Keeping the house clean*
> *Keeping myself clean*
> *My child.*

Katie did not feel like a mother but her automatic pilot cared for the child:

> *I did all the practical things*
> *that a mother does*
> *but emotionally*
> *I wasn't there for him*

An Unreal Marriage

Katie expresses the unreality of the marriage, the distance between her expectation of what a marriage would be and her subsequent experience of her own marriage in these words:

> *And he*
> *And ah my partner*
> *My my um husband (*whisper)
> *We **were** married (*very quiet)
> *But we just*
> *We weren't*
> *It just didn't ever seem real*
> *[....]*
> *Cos it was like*
> *I married him.... (*pause)
> *Cos I*
> *Cos he told me to*
> *You know*
> *And it was sort of no big deal*
> *It was just*
> *I didn't have my family there*
> *I had one friend.*

Katie's husband is predominantly referred to as *he* in the transcript and he is not named. *Husband* is mentioned in connection with court appearances and used to indicate the legal status of the relationship.

Like Katie, Racquel did not feel like a real wife and even the wedding ceremony seemed alien:

> *And got married in a church that wasn't even mine.*
> *Um (*pause*)*
> *it really just wasn't my day*
> *[....]*
> *I guess I just really*
> *I didn't really feel like a wife,*
> *I just felt like someone who gave birth to his children*
> *and that's all*
> *[..]*
> *it was it was a marriage of convenience*
> *[...]*
> *So I lived in a marriage that wasn't a marriage,*
> *and it just it*
> *just continued like that for um three and a half years,*
> *and it took me a year and a half to finally get out of it.*

Loss of control

An important variable in transition is control. The four dumpers took control of situations that seemed out of control, by leaving their husbands. They felt that they gained control through their actions. Being in control is empowering. Lucy lost her job a year or so after the separation. She makes this observation:

> *I think [losing my job] had a bigger major impact on my life than separating*
> *[..] because it was beyond my control*
> *Separating was my decision*
> *so it was me making the decisions*
> *calling the shots*
> *that was my control.*

Lynn's transition was characterized by sudden loss of control at the point of separation. Out of the blue, she found her husband demolishing everything that she had put her life into and she was powerless to prevent it:

and I wanted con..
I'd always had control of everything in my life,
I'd make plans
I made the steps
[..] for once in my life I had no control of the situation
I'd never been in a situation...
I'd been in a secure family,
close very close friends,
everything went smoothly
and this was the first...
my mother had passed away of cancer but ..
you didn't have control of that
but she'd had her life
we'd talked about
we dealt with it

Here Lynn explicitly relates control with concepts like safety and support, predictability and dependability. In transition she loses her expectation that life will be smooth and that happenings will be controllable or at least, explainable. In the shifting sands of transition, nothing can be taken for granted:

we'd got to a point in our life
where I think I was taking [the children] *for granted(?)*
you know just each day let it
well now I make sure
I love you
I tell them I love them everyday
it was just cruising,
I don't take anything for granted anymore
I just took it as my right
where it isn't

Katie begins her account with the perception that she had of herself prior to separation:

Losing too much control
Of my own life –
My friends
My family
My interests

Here Katie defines what it means to her to have an own life. In the marriage Katie felt that her own life was taken away from her, that she was denied those things which are essential to an own life. Her husband *had me very isolated*:

I didn't work
I didn't see friends
I didn't
You know
I wasn't participating in...
[...]
*Life (*laughing*) or the community...*

Throughout the transcript Katie defines the elements of having an own life as having family and friends, being part of a community and having work that you can *put your life and soul into.*

The more she gave in to him to avoid *conflict,* the more she demonstrated her inability to leave him, and the more the police seemed powerless to intervene, *the more and more powerful* Katie's husband became. Slowly he *took over* the government of her life and definition of her self, and she became *a mental case.* Cleaning was the only thing that *gave me a sense of control back.*

The language of Katie's story provides further evidence of her feelings of powerlessness at every turn. She makes frequent use of the passive voice to show how she was not in control of events.

The law, as represented by the police and by the court, is depicted as both powerless and powerful in relation to the events of Katie's separation. Prior to being granted a protection order the police were worse than useless in Katie's opinion, since their failure to intervene provided a further way of undermining Katie:

We would have these fights
And I'd be terrified of what he was gonna do
And he would turn around to me
and sort of throw the phone at me
and say
Well, go on
Ring the police
You know they're not gonna do anything
when they get here
They're not interested
you know
You're just wasting their time

You're a nuisance
[..]
So I wouldn't.
Well, I thought, he's right
What's the bloody point?

Once she had the protection order, Katie's experience of the court's intervention was that she herself was trapped and disempowered by the very mechanisms of the law which provide protection. Once the wheels of the court process were set in motion she faced a threat more terrible and authority more powerful than her husband's. She gives this account of her meeting with the Counsel to Assist:

She said ahhh
I will make a recommendation
to the court
Umm that even though
you might not want to leave this relationship
Your child is going to have to.
I was absolutely terrified
I mean he
My son (laugh)
Was my world (laugh)
I mean and sh..
And I just
I just (sigh)
I just
Honestly, I'll never forget that.
I think that's the worst day of my life
Being told that because of my relationship
I could lose my child
[...]
And anyway I left that office
And I knew it had to end
I knew I had to get out
Ummmm
He had managed to ruin
Every single other aspect of my life
And now he was going to (pause)
destroy .. (pause)
that.. mothering
in me as well

Katie presents these events as a catalyst of her separation. The indescribable moment when Katie recognized the power of the court, the moment that still renders her speechless, is the moment when the balance of power shifted. Katie finally left, not because her husband was

abusive, but because she believed that the court would take her child away. This perceived threat to her deepest sense of herself provokes Katie into her final attempt to gain control over the situation

Ambivalence

Ambivalence arises when people don't know which way to turn, when their impulses are contradictory and when they live in the turbulence between incompatible positions. Katie's account demonstrates the shifting ground and contradictory behaviour which is typical of transition and which seems incomprehensible to onlookers.

> *And um, got to my mother's*
> *And I was just a mess*
> *And I didn't know what he was ...*
> *I didn't know what frame of mind he was in (?)*
> *I didn't know whether he was going to come down and get me*
> *In the middle of the night*
> *Or you know*
> *It was terrifying*
> *I was absolutely terrified.*
> *And anyway um (pause)*
> *I rang him*
> *I rang him at his parents' place on Christmas day*
> *[..]*
> *And I was on the next bus*
> *My mother was horrified*

Now that she had the protection order, but was *back with him*, Katie had difficulty sustaining her position in regard to the protection order despite all that she had been through to get it. The party line that Katie delivered to the judge was:

> *My husband and I had a future together*
> *And it was going to be working out*
> *Everything was going to be fine (*very quiet*)*

Torn between the desire to please her husband and contribute positively to the resurrection of the marriage, and her terror of him, she wavers:

> *Both our lawyers were trying to work out*
> *What to do with this bloody protection order*
> *Cos I was saying*
> *Well I think I want it (*laughter*)*
> *But if it's going to cause trouble*

He was saying
It's gotta go
It's gotta go

Pera also felt torn between conflicting needs. What she needed to do to become well meant the destruction of what she most valued:

And I sat there
and I started to build up the courage
to tell my husband how I felt
I I wanted to leave.
But I think it was more
I didn't want to break up my family unit

Leaving him, she felt a sense of loss:

I was hurt and let down and....
I I.... really lost a good person(?)

Women can feel that they are going crazy in transition. They swing between extremes of feeling as they try to accommodate huge contradictions.

Lynn could not comprehend what was happening, and the sands shifted under her as she moved between hopes and despair:

the day was... so drawn out
(and) I was thinking
well when are you..
yah know
he's not going,
he's going
he's not going
and then when he brought out his bags
I knew he was going

The truth about what is happening was elusive. Whenever Lynn thought that she understood what was going on, the picture changed:

she was a very good friend of mine,
I've known her for 15 16 years,
and I confronted her
and she denied it,

and she denied it,
and they've always
never been honest yet...
he told me it was on,
she told me it wasn't
you know it was one of these things,
and I just kept on thinking
that I'm going mad
They were making me mad... go mental
cos I was thinking well
that explains it,
then I'd think no it's not real
because she said this
and it
I just thought of going mad

Ambivalence is found, in this study, to arise in two ways. Firstly, it arises when women, like Pera, are confounded by the co-existence of polarities of feeling and commitment to mutually exclusive positions. Secondly it arises because women who are disorientated are susceptible to the influence of others, especially if others seem to be offering clarification, or better still, direction and hope for the future.

Summary

The model of transition developed throughout this chapter uses metaphors drawn from three great works of literature. These are not imposed artificially on the data but arose naturally in the search for descriptive terms to encompass related themes and images that emerged in the analysis of the transcripts. Through the use of these metaphors the participants' experiences of transition are related to archetypal experiences of change.

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Dis-Ease

"The times are out of joint"

- Illness
- Anxiety
- Homelessness

Disconnection

"The centre cannot hold"

- Loss of self

- Unfamiliar self
- Split self
- Metaphors of
  Unreal self

- Dream
- Prison
- Breaking/ wholeness
- Movie/ play
- Automatic pilot
- Unreal marriage

- Loss of control
- Ambivalence
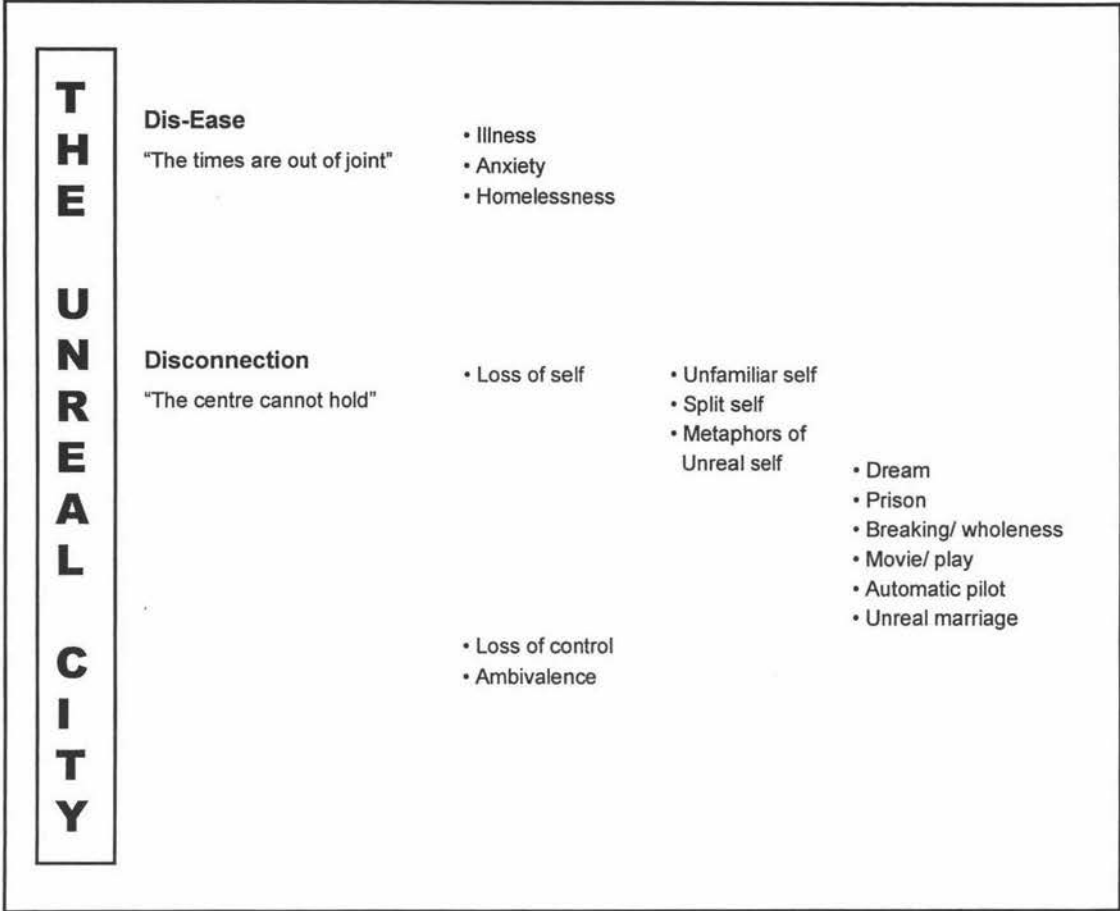
Figure 4: Model of the characterisitcs of Transition

11 EVIDENCE OF ADJUSTMENT

In this study, the definition of adjustment, provided by Spanier and Thompson (1984, p103) is the achievement of "a stable and resilient pattern of life, separate from the previous marriage and partner and based on anticipation rather than memory". In the analysis of the data, adjustment seems to have two major components, letting go of the past and grasping hold of the new future. The principal mechanism for doing this is obsessive review. Both in private and in their social networks women review the past until it can be laid to rest and until they have constructed themselves anew.

The process of adjustment involves:

- Establishing a new sense of identity by distancing oneself from less preferred or obsolete descriptions and definitions associated with past self
- Claiming an identity which corresponds with positive visions of self adapting successfully and with integrity to the changed circumstances.
- Finding the meaning and positive value of what has happened and setting new goals which are congruent with the new circumstances and revised structure of values and beliefs

Letting Go Of The Past

Emotive

Pera chose to travel by bus on her journey back to her family and her roots, so that she could revisit her memories of all the towns that she had lived in and travelled through as a bride and as a young family:

> *I could of got the plane,*
> *it would of been quicker*
> *[..]*
> *I wanted the time,*
> *I wanted to cry some more I guess,*
> *I wanted to let go of some more things*
> *and take this trip the longest way down.*
> *[..]*
> *but I I knew it was a cleansing*

and I I cried a lot
and I I and every time I cried
or every time I I saw something
and thought about it
it was like letting go of one more ,
of lots more things.
And I..it was like baggage.
I mean it's a bit like not having [excess baggage]

For Pera, grief is restorative and she feels lightened and cleansed by it.

Unlike Pera, Lucy felt no grief at the moment of parting. She had already done her grieving well before the physical separation:

I think I must of done all that
while I was married
in my head
because I knew it was gonna end
[..]
Yeh I think I cried about that,
I cried about lot of things
even though,
yeh I guess I did cry a lot about him being an alcoholic.
I cried that he'd never do anything about it

As the only dumpee in the study, Lynn was the only participant who did not grieve for the end of the marriage before it actually ended. The day that her husband told her he was leaving:

I just went into this terrible grief
Like someone had died

Dealing with guilt and sense of failure are part of the process of letting go and distancing oneself from the past. Lynn also evokes an image of cleansing when she speaks of clearing herself of guilt as part of the obsessive review. These words seem to describe Katie's and Pera's processes too:

all that I'm doing over time is..
seeing that.. I...
little things happen
and I think
no I I'm not to blame
I did my best and I've just gotta keep reinforcing that

[..]
I'm basically clearing myself of guilt
just very slowly
Just little things
And that's how I will move on

Cognitive

One of the functions of the development, over time, of a complete account of the separation is to establish and accommodate the meaning of events. In her account Katie offers analysis and explanation for the way things turned out. She identifies both implicit meaning and found meaning.

The implicit meaning that events had for her at the time is often conveyed through the provision of contextualizing information:

- *they arrested him.....*
  and it was <u>the week before Christmas</u>
- *"told me <u>three days after I gave birth to his son</u>*
  that if I ever left him..... he would kill me".

The purpose of presenting the implicit meaning of events often appears in this study to be validation of the speaker's response to those events.

In her assessment of the meaning she has found in the events since the separation Katie makes use of legal, social services and counselling jargon. Much of Katie's account is taken up with her analysis of the power relationship between her husband and herself and explanations for why she married him, how he gained and maintained power over her, the effects of the power dynamic on her life and on her child, why she couldn't leave him, and why she finally did leave him.

Katie has developed quite a comprehensive account of what happened in the marriage. She offers detailed explanations. Likewise, Pera has well developed explanations for what happened and the words and phrases that she chooses show the influence of the language of popular psychology and self development. Despite all the reviewing they have already done, both Katie and Pera use the account for further exploration of meaning. Lucy and

Racquel, on the other hand, offer little reasoning about what happened. In this way, Lucy and Racquel indicate that their accounts are complete. With labels like alcoholic and horrifying tales of extreme physical violence, one could argue that not much explanation for separation is called for. However, other indications of their more advanced adjustment are elaborated in this chapter.

The constant reviewing and rehearsal of the separation story is evident in the language used to tell it. Katie reports that she has told her story many times and this rehearsal is evident in parts of the account which are more fluent, composed of longer and more complex structures, with fewer fillers and more full sentences. Parts of the accounts which are less coherent and constructed of shorter utterances, with lots of false starts, pauses, fillers, and question intonation, seem to be evidence of trying to articulate ideas which have not yet been fully thought through. Of all the accounts, Pera's showed the most evidence of this struggle to find the words to convey her experiences. It is also worthwhile to note that while all the interviews were 45-60 minutes in duration, the transcripts vary considerably in length; Pera's was almost twice as long as Lucy's or Racquel's. In a sense Lucy and Racquel seemed to have distilled an essence from the raw material of language and experience while the others are all still at various stages of the process.

Unlike the other participants, for whom transition began well prior to the separation, Lynn has only the bare bones of an explanation:

> *he definitely had a thing –*
> *he had to have the best of everything he wanted*
> *and I think that's his problem*
> *he didn't think... ...*
> *he thought*
> *he could do better than me*

She suggests possible precipitants of the crisis but throughout the interview she reiterates her incomprehension of the events at several points:

> *Cos I don't know where it went wrong,*
> *all I know is he's unhappy*
> *but he doesn't*
> *I don't know why he was unhappy,*
> *[..]*
> *Triggered by the death of his brother?*

> *it definitely had an effect*
> *Mid-life, 40 years old*
> *and he must of taken stock of his life*
> *but he .. without ever communicating anything to everybody*
> *and he decided*
> *that he wanted more*
> *or something better*

Lynn articulates a relationship between finding the meaning and being able to accept the change and move on. She is the only one of the participants who does not accept that the separation was the right decision:

> *Yes, I've got ...*
> *deep in my heart I know it is [final]*
> *there's no going back,*
> *cos there's too much*
> *like I can still say I think I love ***,*
> *but I know I could never trust him,*
> *I know I could never*
> *so I have gone past that dream of it*
> *but I still haven't.. accepted the situation,*
> *I didn't understand*

Not only is it difficult to accept a change which still seems incomprehensible, but it is difficult to orient oneself to the future if the past is still under review and the reasons for past failures are still veiled in mystery:

> *You know everything you do*
> *you look at and analyse..*
> *[..] but.. I have to move on*
> *but it... you get a fear of the next relationship*
> *I think what if I do the same mistakes?*
> *but I don't even know what my mistakes were.*

Constructing The Future

Orientation to the Future

Orientation to the future rather than the past is used as an indicator of adjustment in this study. Past/future orientation is explored in terms of:

- Evaluation of the past/future

- Emotional involvement in the past
- Goals and plans

In the accounts of the four dumpers, the influence of the discourse of self actualization is strong and the women have well developed plans and visions of the future, and they distance themselves from the past. Lynn, in comparison, is still emotionally involved with the past. Far from expressing relief that it is over as the other participants do, Lynn's evaluation of the past is emphatically positive:

> *I didn't really realise how lucky I was*
> *[...]*
> *as far as I was concerned*
> *our marriage was...,*
> *he was a fantastic husband*
> *and a fantastic father*
> *and we did a lot*

This stands in contrast to evaluations of their marriages by other women in the study. Lucy, for example, sums it up like this:

> *The only good thing I got out of it*
> *was my three kids*

For all the participants except Lynn, the present is a great improvement on the past. Katie, for example, evaluates the change in her life as a result of the separation as predominantly positive. Although she has struggled financially, it seems to her that things *fairly rapidly started to get better* once she had left him. She feels *like a mother for the first time* and, ironically, has lost her *sense of loneliness* now that she is living alone as a solo mother. She and her son are *part of an extended family now* and *also very much part of the wider community*. Life now *couldn't be more different*. In her questionnaire she lists a number of highly positive outcomes of the separation that correspond closely with the features which she defines as essential to having an *own life*.

Although Katie's account provides much evidence of adjustment to the change, she shows continuing, albeit negative, emotional involvement with past events and her former partner. In her account she uses strong emotive language and describes extremes of feeling. She reports that she still fears him and is haunted by his threats and she says that she pities him

now that she interprets his behaviour as *sick*.

Lynn is still very caught up in the past:

> *I still.. I wait for the day*
> *he actually says he's sorry.*
> *and that he did make a mistake*

She still invests extremes of emotion in the separation:

> *I just hate her*
> *but I don't hate him*
> *but I think it's because*
> *I loved him*
> *but I didn't love her*
> *so it was easier to blame her*

In contrast Lucy and Racquel seem emotionally distant from their former partners and with the events of the past. Lucy, in particular, strongly denies any on-going emotional involvement with the past, and the general focus of her account is the present and the future.

In each of the accounts except Racquel's, the partner is sketched in as a protagonist in the drama and brought fleetingly to life in snatches of quotation and little details. Lynn, as the least adjusted of the participants, provides the most information about her former partner and is the only one who mentions her husband's name. Neither of Racquel's two former partners seem to have any substance at all in her account.

The four dumpers were optimistic and enthusiastic about the future. In contrast, Lynn who has not yet developed a vision of the future, had difficulty responding to questions about it. One of the most painful things about separation is that you lose the future that you had in mind, and face an emptiness that is frightening:

> *And it's so confus...*
> *and some days I just,... I still exist*
> *Basically I don't look too far into the future*
> *I just.. it.. just keep going*
> *cos if I look too far*
> *I get that fear of being alone again*

> *look when the kids move on*
> *like I can't think to there*
> *and so I suppose I've still got a way to go*

Lynn is the only participant who has not yet developed new goals and plans for the future. The approach described here fits in Lynn's general strategy for coping, which is to carry on with the routine as though nothing had changed:

> *I was in the process of purchasing a pharmacy*
> *and that hasn't changed,*
> *I'm still..*
> *because that was my goal*
> *and it was*
> *and I will still do that*
> *[..]*
> *No, it's the same,*
> *my focus hasn't changed*

How different this is from Lucy, who reaches out to the future and to being on her own again:

> *Five years time,*
> *two of the kids will be off my hands,*
> *hopefully I'll have a teaching qualification under my belt,*
> *be back in the workforce.*
> *10 years time,*
> *I'm gone*
> *I'm off overseas.*

Changing the Environment

An important aspect of letting go of the past and grasping the future after separation is changing the environment. This includes physical environment –new home, new décor, visits to new places - and changing the family culture with new habits, new regime, different kinds of activities, new friends and new stories.

Lynn tries to convey the idea of creating new associations between familiar places and unfamiliar selves. The changed family needs to have it's own memories and history:

> *[..] the first trip to Taupo,*
> *I felt this when we were...*
> *Then,*
> *we did this with ***,*

we did this with ***,
and it was the second time
or… "when me and the kids were here last"
those first …
we did things
that I didn't think of 'that happened',
like you tried to do something different

In this study, changed families that remain in the old family home after separation throw themselves energetically into new activities. Lucy and her children took up several new outdoor pursuits:

he'd he would of never let us go skiing
[..]
I've physically I've pushed boundaries out
…since I've separated
I've I've sky dived,
went water skiing
And snow skiing
canoeing at Wanganui with the kids

Lynn wanted to get away from the haunted house and create a new family culture with her children outside the home:

[..] I actually went places
cos I didn't like going home
because that's where the memories were
so I'd organise the kids,
we we would go away
we would visit,
I'd ring up friends
[..]
we went
we did bush walks,
things we'd never done
so I didn't have to be at home
[..]
I felt when I tried to do things at home
that was when the overwhelming pressure
I can't cope on my own
I need some..
and and the negative thoughts came in
so I actually tended to be..
leave we… it still was a base and security,
[..]
we socialised at wo..

as I was in a big group of friends
and they'd say oh do this
and we did things we hadn't done before
Exciting things,
the kids thought it was neat

For the four student participants, study is a post separation project, which provides new routine and daily habits, Lynn is also forming new rhythms and habits:

I'm reading more
which I always did before I got married,
[..]
Where I'd stopped reading cos it didn't....
that and I sleep better,
*I drink more (*laughing*)*
A glass of wine at night
which I never did
and it just calms me

Changing Self Image

Katie presents these definitions of herself in the marriage and at the time of separation:

- *a mental case*

- *in the gutter*

- *in a mess*

- *at my worst*

- *trapped*

- *very isolated*

- *terrified*

- *a failure*

- *an idiot*

- *a homeless deserted wreck of a person*

The process of adjustment involves reviewing one's life and constructing new understandings and plans. New structures of meaning are aligned with new identity and corresponding goals for the future. Katie reports that she *spent a lot of time re-evaluating my beliefs and values* after the separation. She reports that she *was hungry for information*

about domestic violence, and told her story over and over again. Here Katie explains how she set about constructing a new future:

It was sorts like there was a glimmer of hope
That um I could start making plans
And what I did for the very first time in my life
Was I started setting some little goals
[....]
I took on some voluntary work for Barnardo's
[....]
Then I decided that the only way to get off the DPB
Was to do some training...and...and
I didn't want to get a
Sorta get a job at K Mart
Or the warehouse
I wanted a job that that
I could sort of put um life and soul into
So I decided to do
Enroll for the first year of a Bachelor of Arts

Evidence of the process of adjustment is the vision that she has of her future self. The new Katie is a professional woman, intuitive and confident about what is right for her:

Yes, there's just no going back
Once I get my degree
And I'm working...
You know ...
The future..
I don't I don't know what the future holds
But I know that what I am doing now is right
And I know that I'm on the right track
And I know that I would never ever go back to him in a million years not ever
Without you know.... Um ...
I just I know that ....(sigh)
Um .....I know that
I know where I am now
Is where I'm supposed to be (?)
Yeah
Because it feels right (?) (laughing)
Yeah.

Lucy sustained herself through the marriage with a positive self-image:

I'm quite strong-minded,
and quite determined within myself
that's how I coped with the situation.

[..]
I'm bloody-minded
I knew I was gonna succeed
I never had any doubt that I wouldn't,
after all the years of living with him...
being told I was stupid
and you know,
you'll never survive on your own.

The benefit to her self- image of the separation has been *great self worth and self respect.* She says

Over the last three years,
I've got to like myself very much

Racquel describes her former self as *weak and very controlled.* She describes how, as a rape victim in her early life and later as a newly separated woman, she was a naïve victim without the resources to stand up for herself:

I think that [the lawyer] realised too
that I wasn't as um intelligent or in the know
of a lot of things
that was concerning my rights.

A new self-image evolves in the course of her account, constructed out of her determination to be seen to be a survivor:

My ex said to me
that I would never survive on my own
and I was determined,
[..]
That was like arh um a diving board for me,
because there's one thing that I I will do
is that when someone says something
and it's a challenge
I'll I'll see to it
that I do see it through

The self image that Racquel presents in the interview, in her questionnaire and in notes that she offered to the researcher, is the image of a person for whom successful "survival", measured largely in terms of standard of living, education and career, is the ultimate goal. Racquel took great risks, supporting her family by shoplifting, and took big steps to achieve the image of a successful *survivor.*

- *I was able to have a single life, be a mother, and um be the home provider*
- *I hold down a part time job, I'm a full time student*
- *I own and have more than both relationships back then- Car, property, career, knowledge and class of friends*

Pera describes her past self as a person who had a *sacred* commitment to the role of wife and *kept a low profile* because her successes were a threat to the marriage. She presents her former self as blind and deaf to the signs of disharmony between inner self and wife persona. In the construction of her current self-image, Pera emphasizes her success in her work, describing herself as skilled and talented in dealing with people, and above all highly intuitive and in harmony with her *inner self*. Whereas in the marriage she felt chronically ill, *tired and disinterested,* she now describes herself in these glowing terms:

- *I felt lighter, free, alive, energetic*
- *Feeling good inside*
- *Feeling healthier*
- *I have endless amounts of energy*

Summary

This chapter has developed a model of adjustment based on concepts of processing the past and constructing the future. There is naturally an overlap between letting go of the past and grasping hold of the future. It is in our nature to hold on to what we've got until substantial alternatives are at hand. Letting go of the past and constructing the future happen simultaneously. In the linear arrangement of the text, it was not possible to show how the overlap is conceptualized, while the differentiation between the two components of the process is retained. The model shows the main features of the process of adjustment and the relationship between them:
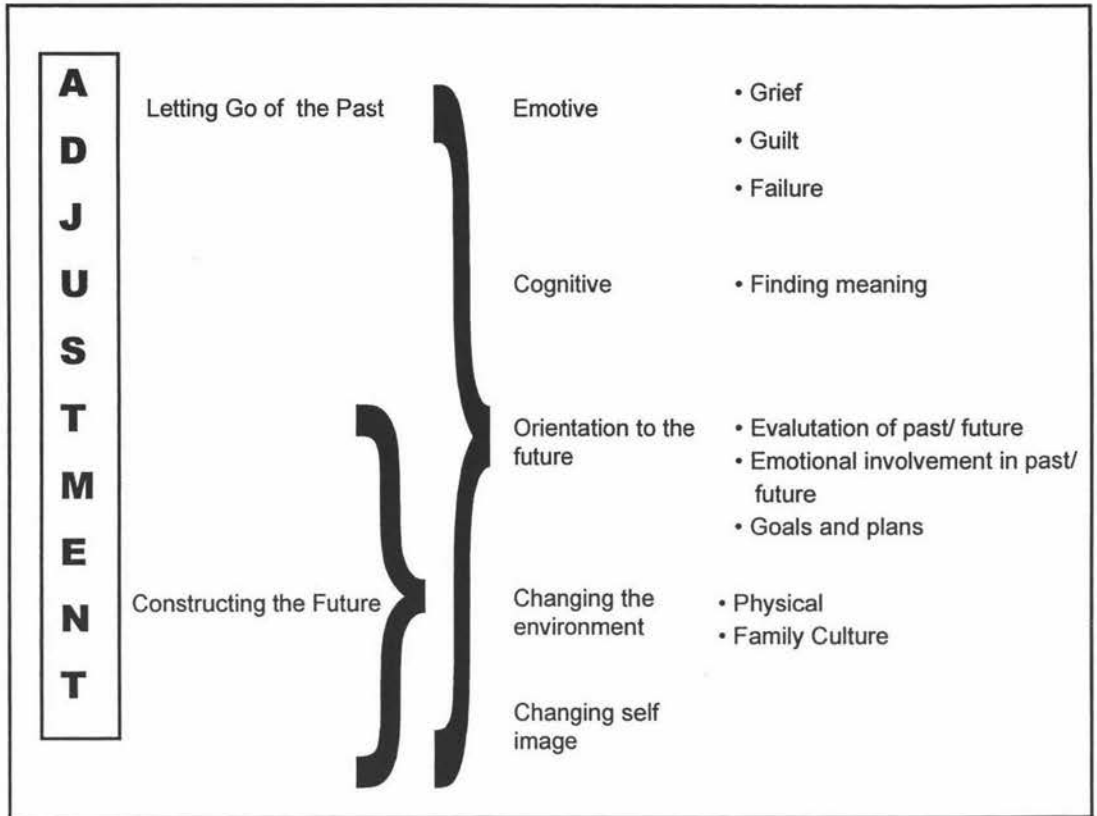
Figure 5: Model of Adjustment

12 EVIDENCE OF SELECTED DISCOURSES OF OUR SOCIETY

People make sense of their lives through language. The terms that women have to choose from as they give accounts of the issues and themes of their separations are not neutral. Language is imbued with the meanings that reflect the larger patterns of thought that prevail in our society. The words that we use invoke and align us with familiar patterns of related ideas and attitudes, which are the discourses of our culture and our society. This chapter explores the ways in which the women in this study access the interpretive repertoires available to them in relation to pre-selected themes. The themes are:

- Self-actualization
- A woman's nature
- A wife's role
- A mother's role

Self Actualization

To a great extent our modern western culture, our beliefs and attitudes and values and the behaviour through which these are manifest, is shaped by the discourses of modern psychology.

In our grandmothers' time, if you worked hard to fulfil your "station in life" and social duties, that was sufficient, and you could live a contented and "unexamined life". A life of integrity for women of our grandmothers' time was the dutiful and self-sacrificing service of the family that was a woman's main role and responsibility. Nowadays the highest good, for men and women, is to be "true to yourself", to be "authentic" and to "grow".

The twentieth century is the century of the American Dream and the self-made man. It is the century of the "liberated woman". The women of New Zealand were at the forefront of the liberation movement and achieved a political voice before the turn of the century. In this far flung and scarcely populated colony, self-reliance and DIY became a moral force and national characteristic. In western culture, and especially in New Zealand, we value independence, self-reliance, equality and individual endeavour, and we believe that, "Life

is what you make it".

We live in a mobile and self-monitoring society. The ethos of life-long learning and continuous improvement permeates every sphere of life. Our chief responsibility as individuals is to ourselves. We have an obligation to ourselves to self-actualize: to monitor ourselves continuously against our own and our society's values and standards of success and to strive all our lives to improve, to progress and to fulfil our potential in every way.

Catherine Riessman's (1990) exploration of the Companionate Marriage shows that we expect that marriage will provide a context for personal growth and fulfillment. As the divorce rate continues to rise, inability to self-actualize within the marriage becomes an increasingly common justification for separation. Certainly the dumpers in this study positively evaluate their separation in terms of vastly increased potential for self-actualization. All these women experienced the tension between the conflicting demands of the discourse of the Family and the discourse of the Individual. The dumpers endured the marriage "for the sake of the children" and family values, but ultimately decided that the children would be better off with a fulfilled and happier mother, who is a role model for self-actualization.

The modern metaphor for self-actualization is *getting a life*, and as Katie explains, this means fulfilling one's sense of one's full potential beyond one's designated roles in life. Katie says in her questionnaire *I feel as if I have a life now, I am more than just a wife/mother*. In fact, for Katie becoming a "real mother" is part of her process of self-actualization. *Mothering* is depicted as a living being which dwells within her and comes to the fore for the first time when it is threatened. As a separated woman she fulfils herself as a mother for the first time. Getting a life by Katie's definition involves having control over her own interests, family and friends, being part of a community and working towards getting a job you can put your *life and soul into*.

In the questionnaires and interviews, the majority of positive comments about the separation relate to self-actualization. The four dumpers, who are also the students, are very positive about the separation, especially in terms of improved quality of life and increased opportunity for self-fulfilment. Lynn, the only dumpee in the study, is the only participant who does not present herself as actively engaged in, and preoccupied by, a

process of self-actualization.

The various facets of the theme of self-actualization are identified in these categories of analysis:

- Self-development
    - Self knowledge
    - Self esteem
    - Self improvement
- Health and well-being
- Self government
- Personal goals

Self-Development

Self-development is a major facet of the theme of self-actualization. Self-development is conceived by the participants as consisting of both new development and return to old/real/essential self. The language of self-development reflects the self-help culture of our times:

The main aspects of self-development are:

Self knowledge

This is conceived as the basis for self-development. All participants in the study report that transition was a period of intense introspection and increasing knowledge and awareness of self. Katie says:

It was a time of great learning about myself
Reflecting on who I am

It is interesting to note that in contrast to the theoretical position of the researcher, which is that identity is continuously under construction, the women in this study conceive of identity as something fixed and permanent, which can be hidden or revealed. For Pera self-knowledge reunites her with the "essential self" which she suppressed within the marriage. She expresses these ideas in the questionnaire and in the interview. She says:

[I] discovered myself in a new and different way

and

I found myself

The women all imply that self-knowledge was lost in the marriage, and rediscovery of self was an effect of the separation. Lucy expresses this rediscovery of essential self as:

Beginning to get to know myself all over again

Self esteem

The data reveals that self esteem is conceived principally in terms of positive evaluation of one's *worth*. A basic assumption that operates in the estimation of worth is that each individual has an intrinsic "value": A task of self-actualization is the recognition of one's "true value". Racquel declares:

I'm worth something more

Once their "worth" is established, women develop expectations of themselves and their lives in line with the value that they place upon themselves. Women who value themselves depict the relationship between "I" and "Me" as having the characteristics of respect, liking, and positive expectation. In the course of her separation experience Lucy gained:

Respect for myself

And she says:

I've got to like myself very much

Self improvement

When women recognize their value and potential, they feel an obligation to themselves to live up to their "worth". In this study the dumpers (who are also the students) give details of how they consciously challenged themselves, mentally, physically and emotionally, with increasing self-confidence, to undertake activities that they saw as appropriate for their own self-development. These include study, reading, *courses on self improvement, personal development, sport and exercise,* and new relationships with other people. Self-

improvement is conceptualized in terms of physical growth. Several women echo Pera's statement:

> *I was learning and growing*

Health and Well-being

The women in this study identify increased self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-improvement as sources of self-healing. The women imply in different ways that good health is dependent upon the harmonious relationship between "I" and "me". Metaphors for achieving this relationship include finding oneself and becoming one's own best friend. They also include metaphors of tuning and alignment and metaphors of sensory awareness, like focus and listening. The overall concept is presented as having an eye and an ear on one's inner self , and being responsive to one's own needs.

The women depict intuition as an organic connection with one's *inner self*. It is the recognition of what *feels right*. Katie says this:

> *I know I'm on the right track*
> *I know where I am now is where I'm supposed to be(?)*
> *Yeah, because it feels right(?)*

They experience a good connection with inner self as physical well-being. The dis-ease of the body signals breakdown in a harmonious relationship between inner and outer self; Pera says that she now realizes that:

> *my body told me things*
> *that I should have listened to*

She attributes years of physical discomfort to her failure to address issues within herself. There is evidence in her account that her deeply felt commitment to the marriage effectively silenced other closely held values and beliefs.

Women who can access their intuition know what *feels right*. And, as Pera explains, they can use their intuition to heal themselves mentally and physically:

> *I'm using my gut feeling more*
> *[..] directing it towards helping me*

The self-actualized woman is mentally and physically healthy, and in control of her own body and her own life.

Self Government

The women's interpretive repertoire for self-government includes these concepts:

- **Control**   *Control over my life again*
- **Time**   *Time to relax and think and be myself*
- **Freedom·**   *An immense sense of freedom*

                         I'm a free spirit

- **Independence**   *Being independent*
- **Choice**   *Complete freedom to live successfully or in failure*
- **Self- management**   *Can do anything I want to do*
                         Organize the house and children to suit me
                         Read all night if I want

Personal goals

The self-actualizing woman is goal orientated. The predominant goals of this group of women are goals related to education, career and travel.

The students/dumpers in the study identify their primary goals as *tertiary education* and a *qualification under my belt* to improve their *career prospects.* They want to *[Get] back in the workforce*, and they want interesting and challenging jobs that one can *put [one's] life and soul into.* They want to deepen their *knowledge,* through study and broaden their horizons through *a trip overseas.*

Metaphors of Self-Actualization
Renewal

Just as Pera experiences the dis-ease of the marriage through her physical responses, she experiences separation as physical renewal.

- *it felt like I was starting all over again and at the same time I was feeling young and [..] good*

- *my body felt ..like I'd got it back*

- *I felt [..] like a new pin !*

- *it's like the air went straight through my body*

  [..]

  like *a new thing went inside my body*

Release

Metaphors of release are a subset of the previously discussed metaphors of prison and captivity. The latter were classified as metaphors of transition, because transition is characterized in this study by feelings of being constrained, overwhelmed by circumstances and unable to move forward. The process of adjustment for the four dumpers in the study involves accessing the interpretive repertoire for self- actualization in the construction of a new self and a new future. Metaphors of release, of the impulse to break out and to spring into a new life, relate both to adjustment, which involves constructing the future, and to self-actualization, which is the approach to the task taken by the four dumpers. When Racquel is challenged to survive as a single woman:

- *That was like [..] a diving board for me*

She relates her decision to leave directly to this challenge. The most predominant feature of the self-image she presents in the data is her identity as a *survivor*.

Racquel, Katie and Pera all describe the impulse to leave the marriage as the desire to escape, to *break out,* to be free to be themselves. Pera's dream of being a beautiful horse tied up is very symbolic of her recognition of self and her desire to fulfil her potential. In the dream she:

> *[..] wanted to burst out and*
> *and be untied*
> *and be free*

Awakening

The women use metaphors of waking in relation to their experience of "discovering" aspects of their nature. The notion of individual potential lying dormant until it is activated

and cultivated is part of the discourse of self-actualization. Katie describes *mothering* in this way and Pera uses the metaphor of awakening to describe her recognition of the potential of her intuition. She says:

> *it was always there.*
> *It was like it's been sleeping.*
> *And it's come out and I'm using it*
> *and I still know I I don't use it to it's fullest potential*
> *but that's still developing*

A Woman's Nature

An objective of this research project is to explore the participants' understanding of a woman's nature. This exploration of a woman's nature provides a preface to the discussion of a woman's roles. The analysis reveals a very close correlation between women's perceptions of their nature and their main roles as wife and mother.

A profile of what it means to be a woman emerges in a variety of ways. These include: characteristics that the participants themselves identify as pertaining to women; the participants' statements of what is important or essential to their experience of themselves as women; and evidence of characteristics of women which are identified in existing research.

The data collected in this study is collated to portray the perception that these five women have about the nature of a woman. It includes three main themes:

- Need for support
- The path of least resistance
- Empathy/connectedness

Need for Support

All the women in the study refer to their need for support. Support includes *being looked after*, physically and emotionally, and having, metaphorically, someone to *lean on* and to *hold my hand*. Hand holding is symbolic of belonging and connectedness, and it evokes images of mother and child. Support includes partner support, family support and social network support.

In these women's accounts support has these inseparable components:

- Protection
- Helping
- Caring
- Sharing
- Belonging
- Self image

Katie identifies need for support as a motive for marrying:

> *When I met him*
> *I was at a vulnerable sort of time*
> *& sort of felt like I needed someone*
> *to sorta look after me and all the rest*

In the context of her self-definition as vulnerable, being looked after implies protection.

Racquel sees protection and practical assistance as evidence of caring. Her account includes a vivid narrative in which she is chased through the streets at dawn by a knife-wielding husband and is rescued by a milkman. The milkman in the story is a *seven foot* John Wayne style hero who snatches her to safety as the blade falls. In her reconstruction he firmly repels the murderous husband and speaks kindly and reassuringly to her:

> *He just held on to me tight*
> *And had me behind him*
> *[..]*
> *Are you alright dear?*
> *And he said, you're alright*
> *My wife's just gone to call the police*

So you'll be just fine
[..]
He really defended me you know
[..]
made me realize that wow you know
someone does care.

Similarly, her lawyer's reassurance and services are interpreted as evidence of caring:

[he] told me that um
I needed to be protected
[..] I was not to worry
but to worry about me and the children
and he'll do the other side
[..]
he was really compassionate and understanding
[..] made me feel like there is some normal people out there
who really care

Like Racquel, Lucy sees support in acts of caring and, like Katie, she expected that marriage would provide the kind of support that she wanted:

I was expecting something back in return
Like it's a joint and shared relationship
[..]
Support
And that certainly didn't come through
[..]
Yeh, to be made feeling special...
that never came through either.

Lucy does not elaborate on what it means to be made to feel special, but Pera suggests that an aspect of the support a woman needs is support for the image of herself as desirable:

I needed to confirm that I was desired, a woman

Older children are perceived as supportive in this study, because they can provide caring and companionship through shared troubles. Also, as Pera articulates, children provide a receptacle and focus for a woman's caring and sense of belonging:

I didn't lean heavily on him
but I know I know I used him as a companion
someone that I...
physical things that I could do with my love

For Lucy too, the relationship with her children is mutually supportive:

> *I've always had a good relationship with them*
> *because we were all there together*
> *and look.. and sort of yeh,*
> *supported each other*

Support is also derived through intimate companionship with people who are outside the nuclear family, especially "family of origin" and other women. The participants' accounts provide strong evidence of a woman's need for a social network and close confidants.

Of all the participants, Katie was the only one who had no friend to turn to in the transitional period prior to separation. She refers frequently in her account to her isolation and, in contrast, defines having an own life in terms of having one's friends and family around one.

Lynn held back from accessing the support of potential confidants. She attributes this to her reserved temperament and to her uncertainty about her circumstances. Like Katie, she was treated for depression. Lynn says:

> *Yes I didn't move on*
> *I didn't ..I talked to people about it..*
> *[..] I didn't tell acquaintances cos again*
> *[..] I didn't want to retell it*
> *so I didn't tell anyone*
> *I kept a very close lid on the whole situation*
> *[..] and they're people I see everyday*
> *some people unload,*
> *I didn't unload*

Nevertheless Lynn feels that she was ultimately reliant on the support of her social network:

> *Well it it was friends and family that helped me,*
> *I know I couldn't of done it alone*

Both Pera and Lucy refer explicitly to the support that female friends provide. Lucy says:

> *I've had lots of friends*

that have been great for [..]
I've been really pissed off at times,
*Yeh- let me verbal on (*laugh*)*
but I think women do that anyway

The derogatory term used here to describe a woman's intimate conversations with her women friends seems to reflect the image, common in our male-dominated society, of women as excessive talkers. Within this interpretive repertoire, women's talk is also trivial and self-indulgent. This is just one of many examples in the data where the women access repertoires which constitute models of identity and social life that are inconsistent with the identity that they overtly claim.

Pera uses images that we associate with concepts like connectedness, nurture, trust and healing in her description of relationships with female confidants. The intimacy one has with someone that one can talk to from the heart, is like a family connection, or a sense of belonging, and it is health giving and restorative:

I usually found someone who was
um very um that I felt comfortable with sharing
-and so that was the way I..
I ...I got it out in that way.
There was always somebody who was like
a a a arh substitute for a mother
[...]
doing that was another way of going to a doctor

The kinds of support that a woman needs can include the support that parents can provide. All the participants acknowledge their parents as sources of comfort, practical assistance and of the intimacy of belonging. Here Lynn talks about her father:

he's in my life
he's basically the man in my family
so he's there and
and checks everything's alright,
calls in everyday,
just even for a cuppa
[..] then if the lawns look a bit
[..] I'll do those

The Path of Least Resistance

The women in this study all report or imply the desire to avoid situations of conflict and give details of avoidance strategies that can be collectively described as taking the path of least resistance. For the sake of peace Pera was prepared to give up:

> *very important things..*
> *[like] how many children*
> *[..]And what you believe in*
> *and the way that you do things*
> *I let them go*
> *and I did whatever he wanted to do*

For both Katie and Racquel the decision to marry was itself a strategy to avoid conflict. Katie says:

> *I married him..*
> *cos he told me to*

Similarly, Racquel recalls:

> *I really felt weak and very controlled*
> *ay, so I went along with it,*
> *walked up the aisle*

In the marriage Katie increasingly gave up control of her own life to avoid conflict:

> *The more I resisted,*
> *the more conflict there was.*
> *The more I gave in to him*
> *The more he took over*

Likewise, Racquel complied with her husband's expectations for the sake of a peaceful life:

> *I tried to be submissive in any way I could*
> *to get on the good side of him*

Racquel's choice of *submissive* invokes an interpretation of a woman's nature and role that seems to belong to the past. But Katie, in her 20s, clearly felt forced into submission by her need to avoid her husband's anger. Katie's protection order was like a talisman for her, it would keep her safe, but in the face of her husband's opposition, she response was:

I think I want it but
If it's going to cause trouble
I don't want it

Pera knew when she married her husband that they had different dreams. Her response to the potential for conflict was to give up her own dreams:

things I wanted,
I never even said to him

The most outstanding difference between them was his desire for children and her strong desire not to be a mother after being a sibling mother to nine brothers and sisters since childhood. She gave in to him at the first sign of trouble:

I..took a contraceptive,
and then he found out about it
and that was our first big argument
so I decided..
I didn't take them,
so I fell pregnant

Lucy's response to her husband's drunken aggression was to *tiptoe* around the house so as not to provoke an attack and, when he did attack, her strategy was not to "aggravate" him by responding, but to block him out in silence:

I used to sit there and think ho hum
here we go again
you're not putting
me down with this
don't take it onboard
he'd be there - going away,
and I'm sort of singing to myself (singing)
don't take it onboard
you'll be alright,
let it go if you can,
don't take it onboard

Pera had two major avoidance strategies: She would *play the actress or portray a character* and *put up a front* to avoid confronting them both with what was really going on; and she tried to make herself *inconspicuous* and kept a *low profile* so that he would not be "provoked" to make snide comments and put her down.

Empathy/ Connectedness

In her comparison of men and women's accounts of separation, Riessman (1990) identifies "interpersonal orientation" as a characteristic of women that contributes to women's distress at separation and is one of the factors which distinguishes women's from men's experiences of separation. A woman will hold herself together:

> *not for yourself*
> *but for other people*

Pera elaborates on this theme and provides examples of how responses arising out of empathy for others can be at a woman's own expense:

> *so I really wasn't playing actress*
> *I was truly being myself*
> *[..] holding myself together*
> *and work through it.*
> *And that's not being an actress,*
> *that's real, that is um.. honest,*
> *that is um being caring,*
> *not only of my husband now,*
> *but of those that that are affected*
> *by..... by the the changes*
> *that are happening within myself*
> *but also within my family.*

Pera stayed with her husband for ten years after she knew she wanted to leave because:

> *I didn't wanna to hurt him.*
> *I just didn't wanna hurt him*
> *[..]*
> *And I knew it would hurt him*
> *[..]*
> *And I was protecting him and forgetting about me*

She left him with everything of value and made herself destitute out of her empathy for the impact on him of the separation. Arriving in Auckland she sold the jewellery she was wearing to buy bus tickets for herself and her younger son to Napier. She had:

> *no money yeh,*
> *and I and I left home and contents and car*
> *and and... um to my husband um*
> *thinking that he won't able to manage*
> *so he can have all that.*

He's also got one of the children,
[..]
he can't manage without us
so I'll leave him the older son
[..]
[his son] *was a comfort to him*
and I know my husband needs ...
to have something to keep him going
to live for

There is evidence in this study and anecdotal evidence that, unlike many men, most women maintain awareness of their children's needs no matter what is going on. A man may launch into an angry attack on his wife quite oblivious of the children, while she, being attacked, will try to shield and comfort them. As Katie's naked and raging husband was smashing her possessions, her *precious things*, Katie says:

I was screaming.
I was just.
I was, you know.
I was trying calm down a
two year old

Both Katie and Racquel left their abusive husbands several times, only to return again to worse treatment than before. Battered Women's syndrome is regarded in our culture as a physiological aberration but is this study profound attachment to the partner is the norm. Only Lucy gives no indication of it. Pera says:

I felt quite... so attached
that I made him,
um not my life
but I made him, someone that...
when you say marriage
vows then you say all those things
that no matter what
I took those quite literally, physically
and and meant them.
And I felt that what I say,
is quite.. um um close and sacred to me

Similarly Lynn shows very strong attachment to her husband. Without him she did not feel *whole*, there was *something missing*.

For women with children, being a mother is central to their sense of themselves and mothering is seen as an essential part of a woman's nature. Katie says:

> *my son was my world*
> *[..]*
> [my husband] *had managed to ruin*
> *every single other aspect of my life*
> *and now he was going to ... (pause)*
> *destroy .... (pause)*
> *that mothering*
> *in me as well.*

The women's interpretive repertoire for the role of a mother is discussed later. What is important here is that being a mother is not just a role but is at the core of what women see as the nature of a woman. Examples of statements the women made of their profound attachment to their children include:

- *regardless of whatever happened I'd always be a mother to my kids*
- *I would do anything for them*
- *I love being a mother*

In this analysis of the participants' repertoires for describing and interpreting their nature and roles as women, each of the themes has three related facets. The three facets of a woman's nature that are predominant in this study have been discussed in this chapter and are summarized below. These relate very closely to the three inter-related facets of the roles of wife and mother. Although the roles of wife and mother are discussed separately in the following two sections, the model that summarizes these findings, at the end of this chapter on page 133, shows that these can be conceived as a dual role in the family.

Need for support	Protection
	Helping
	Caring
	Sharing
	Belonging
	Self image
The path of least resistance	Avoiding conflict
	Taking a secondary role
	Giving up own dreams
	Giving up control
Empathy/connectedness	Interpersonal orientation
	Availability and involvement
	Altruism
	Attachment
	Mothering

Figure 6: Model of the participants' view of a woman's nature

The Role Of A Wife

The collective interpretation that the five participants have of the role of a wife is pieced together from several kinds of evidence. Evidence includes descriptions and definitions of their own actual role as wives; articulation of their own interpretation and expectations of the role; assumptions about the role, based on "common knowledge"; and reported interpretation and expectations of family and friends.

All the participants acknowledge that a wife's role is to stand by her husband. In the present data, what it means to stand by one's husband has three major components. These are support, compliance and endurance. For the purposes of description, because the themes are inseparable, they are discussed in the following text, under two headings only. These are support and compliance.

Support

In the course of her account Pera reviews in detail her understanding of the role of a wife. The views expressed here are repeated in different ways at several points in her account:

> *So how he reacts and responds to…*
> *saying we've gotta move*
> *or this is happening,*
> *I don't like my job*
> *well I I just want to be supportive*

and and um and be a companion,
and be as helpful as I could,
and that was in part of the promise of the
not so much the marriage vows,
but within myself I made a contract
that I love this person,
and I'll go where ever they will go
and if they move
if that happens,
then I'll go with it.

In this speech and elsewhere Pera invokes Christian concepts. Here she echoes the words of Ruth in the story of Ruth and Naomi. Ruth has come to epitomize loyalty in Christian culture, and her speech "Whither thou goest, I will go," is well known.

Pera uses phrases which she attributes to her mother, but which echo the cadence and intent of our Christian marriage vows, to explain why she kept trying to hold the marriage together for ten years after she knew that she wanted to leave:

- *you've got to see this through*
- *through thick and thin*
- *stick it out*
- *give it another shot*
- *keep on trying*

To fulfil the role of wife as she interpreted it, Pera felt that:

no matter how this person was behaving
or how I was feeling,
I would put up with anything.
And I did.

To make it work, she had to keep the peace and stand by him no matter what happened:

I could um make up stories
and arh (laugh) cover up for arh
incidences that happened between myself and my husband
in public
or the things that he said
and I stuck up for him um
because ..I had to...
stick up for him.

Lucy also demonstrated loyalty to her husband to preserve at least the facade of the happy family:

> *a couple of good friends*
> *realised the extent of of his drinking*
> *but my family really didn't*
> *[..]*
> *I didn't tell them*

Lynn demonstrates the loyalty of a wife in the following speech. She corrects her use of *incurred*, which implies debt and burden and goes on to describe his purchases as *assets*. Her speech shows how she supported his "own thing" by aligning her interpretation of his spending to match his:

> *financially [..] we both we were equal partners in the marriage,*
> *but he incurred -he wanted a boat, he wanted this*
> *so his financial*
> *[...] financially I was better off*
> *cos he was a spender*
> *and but I accepted him for that*
> *but he bought assets*
> *but they were for him,*
> *he had,*
> *he played sport*
> *he socially he had to have the best cricket bat,*
> *he had he had this materialistic thing*
> *but I accepted that,*
> *he definitely had a thing –*
> *he had to have the best of everything he wanted*
> *and I think that's his problem*
> *he didn't think*
> *he thought he could do better than me*
> *and that's basically*
> *what he saw was-*
> *the grass is greener syndrome*
> *and so when he left*
> *the bills like Sky went,*
> *cos he had Sky*
> *we didn't..*
> *you know and all these things went*
> *and I actually was better off financially*
> *cos of the drain*
> *but at the time- I didn't..*
> *as I say judge anything like that?*

This text also shows how pronouns are used to construct new alliances. She shows that her husband is excluded from the *we* of the new family group.

The participants identify sex and household work as the domestic requirements of the supporting role. Sex is assumed to be part of the package deal of her second marriage by Racquel:

> *I couldn't care less whether I had to sleep with him or not*
> *[..] my kids needed a father*

Lucy speaks of the expectation of a wife to provide household services with some bitterness:

> *Slave in a word..*
> *that he yeh he expected to ha*
> *he expected that I should cook dinner,*
> *he expected that I should clean the house,*
> *he expected that I should do everything,*
> *he he was self-employed,*
> *he expected that I should do.. run the business*
> *and then when the kids got old enough*
> *he expected that I should have a part-time or a full-time job*

In her questionnaire Lucy lists no negative effects of the separation at all. In terms of domestic changes she says:

> *Because I did everything around the house any anyway,*
> *that was no sort of big shakes*
> *[...] actually just one less person to clean and tidy up after (laughing)*

In comparing the workload before and after separation, participants indicate that a solo mother has more discretionary time than a wife. With the exception of Lynn, they imply that the actual demands on a wife in terms of time and effort investment in meeting her husband's needs, outweigh the potential benefits, in terms of time and effort to be saved, of having a partner contributing to the running of the household.

Compliance

In this study the role of a wife is to keep her husband happy and thereby to hold the family together. Racquel's father had been critical of her husband before she finally left him, but

at separation his reported response is:

> *"well you should go back to your husband*
> *you you should make it work*
> *and um.. there must be something you're not doing right"*

If the husband is not happy then it is the wife who is to blame. The women report blame by others and they blame themselves.

Lucy's alcoholic and abusive husband blamed her for their deteriorating relationship. The focus of their counselling sessions was her failure to communicate, while his alcoholism was unacknowledged:

> *Cos up till then it was all my fault*
> *Cos we weren't talking*

As has been shown, Lucy's strategy for peacekeeping was not to talk back to him when he was having a go at her.

Pera took the blame for her husband's unhappiness because she saw the direct effect of her social and career successes was to highlight his failures and make him feel diminished. Her role was to support and follow him, not to outshine him. She took responsibility for his anger in her response, which was, metaphorically, to lower and make herself less visible:

> *he would need to do something physical,*
> *of saying a joke*
> *or trying to be the the the life at the party*
> *to draw the attention back,*
> *and and then even if I just <u>sat in the corner</u>*
> *or ...<u>didn't make yourself so conspicuous</u>,*
> *I I felt that... because I knew that the reason*
> *he was doing ...*
> *[...]*
> *I kinda <u>keep a low profile</u>*
> *but but even his own work mates are quite at...*
> *they ..they find me attractive,*
> *and they find me nice to talk to*
> *and and and I really*
> *I like them*

Katie, by all accounts, was to blame for the breakup of the family. Her "official labels" and

her perception of the way that family and social services professionals saw her corroborated her husband's view:

> *I was a mental case*
> *And if I had been*
> *A bit more this*
> *Or a bit more that*
> *It would never have happened.*

If she had fulfilled the role of a wife and kept him happy, the family would not have fallen apart.

Racquel was to blame for being a burden and constraint on her husband. Racquel reports this barrage of blame:

> *it's all my fault that we got tied down*
> *it was all my fault that we got married*
> *and it's all my fault that I had children to him.*
> *It's all my fault that um life wasn't going quite the way he he wanted it too,*
> *and it was my fault that um his relationship with other women came to an end*
> *and it was my fault (laugh) that he wasn't advancing -in anything-*
> *you know, and he couldn't get out with the boys*

This perception of a wife as a burden and a liability is familiar in our society's discourses of marriage. It is a stereotypical perspective that runs counter to the more socially acceptable discourse of romantic love.

Lynn's husband left her because he was not happy and, in her interpretation, she is responsible for his unhappiness:

> *Cos he kept saying I love you,*
> *it's nothing to do with you,*
> *to the children,*
> *and it was all me*

A: So you were to blame for his unhappiness?

> *Yes, and he told the children that too – his life,*
> *he was miserable,*
> *[..]*
> *I still am partly in limbo*
> *specially when the relationship that he left me for failed,*

it has failed,
he's in another relationship but he's got two going,
he's still not happy (?)
and I'm thinking
well he's not happy with them
maybe he he'll see that he..
that it wasn't me

As seen previously, Lynn maintains throughout her account that she has no understanding of the breakup of the marriage and yet she feels, on the basis that he was not happy, that she has failed. Two years after the separation, she still feels, despite the contradiction of this by her family, that the failure is hers:

they keep saying to me you're fantastic
it's marvelous,
and they see the failure
as the lack of character of my husband
[..]
you know it's his.. it's
you know he's not right
he's the failure
and they're very supportive
that I don't see myself as that

In this study it emerges that a main role of a wife is to keep her husband happy, and thereby hold the family together. Lynn articulates this explicitly:

If I'd kept kept the family together
and he was happy
he wouldn't of left
and they would have had their father.

A Mother's Role

The three facets of a mother's role that emerge as dominant in this study correspond clearly with the three main facets of a wife's role. This is shown in the model on page 133. The facets discussed here are:

- Be there for others
- Provide a Real Family
- Keep the family together

Be there for others

The role of a mother is to *be there* for others. Katie felt she was not a "real" mother when, although she met her son's physical needs:

> *emotionally I wasn't there for him*

Similarly Lynn defines what motherhood means in the moment when she couldn't be a mother:

> *I couldn't be a mother*
> *I couldn't <u>be there</u> for anybody*

Having the children clean and well dressed, well fed and suitably accommodated are very important and all the women see these as success measures for motherhood. More importantly, they emphasize their efforts to ensure their children's other needs are met. They show strong awareness of children's emotional needs and describe various strategies for mitigating the emotional and psychological effects of separation on children that are identified in our society.

Provide a Real Family

When separated women talk about managing custody arrangements and their children's adjustment to the separation they refer, almost without fail, to birthdays, Christmas and other 'family' occasions. In the discourse of the family these are the "happy times", the magical moments of childhood, the snapshots in the family album where Mum and Dad look on smiling, while children have fun.

As mothers we want to provide our children with the warmth and security of a "real family" culture in which those magical moments, which continue to sustain and nourish us in later life, can occur. The "real family" is an ideal which we perpetuate in our discursive culture and which we want for our children even if we have no first hand experience of it.

Statistics and anecdotal evidence indicate an increased demand for refuge places and counselling services at Christmas time. At Christmas the pressure is on to be a "real family" and have a happy time. Christmas is confronting; if we can't live up to it we must face the abyss between dream and reality. The events that catalyzed Pera's separation

occurred on Christmas day. It seemed to Pera that her husband sabotaged her efforts to hold the family together by refusing to participate in a "real family" Christmas. After a heavy drinking session:

> *He slept all day on Christmas day*
> *And it drove my children..*
> *or the boys out of the house*
> *[..] spent the Christmas three of us together*
> *and they go off with their friends,*
> *and they find their mother crying most of the day*
> *[..] Family means a lot to me*

Racquel led a double life so that she could create the semblance of a "real family" for her children. She provided materially for her children by living a "life of crime", and she also met what she perceived as their needs for ordinary family life and a regular mum:

> *even though I was doing illegal things,*
> *my children would think that we living a legal life*
> *and every Sundays*
> *I would take them down to the park*
> *and we'd have a picnic,*
> *you know it was like to them,*
> *it.. their world looked like*
> *it was just a nice wonderful well-off life style*
> *[..]*
> *if I wanted to go out at nights,*
> *you know have a social life,*
> *I always put them to sleep and I ne..*
> *I wouldn't go go out before 9 o'clock*
> *and um they'd be in bed when I left.*
> *I'd be home before they got up*

In the light of the findings of this research the usual interpretation of that cliché "for the sake of the children" seems narrow. The women relate strongly to their roles as wife and mother but they identify themselves as being mothers by nature. Becoming a more involved mother is part of self actualization The wife's role is keep her husband happy, and the mother's role is to hold the family together, to provide a father and the other essential components of real family culture. It is in a woman's nature to want to have a family, to have the support and caring, companionship and a sense of belonging that the discourse of the family implies. For women with children having a real family is essential to their sense of themselves as "good wives" and "real mothers" and it also meets a

woman's basic need for support and connectedness. Whatever is "for the sake of the children" is also for the sake of a woman's sense of her own identity.

Katie clung to the idea of a "real family" to the bitter end. In her interpretation of her experience she shows that her desire for "a real family" was at odds with her concept of being "a good mother". She blames herself for not protecting her child by taking him away from the abusive environment, but offers validation in the terms of our society's discourse of the family and the advantage to the child of the ideal two parent family:

> *I didn't protect him*
> *And I'll always feel guilt (?)*
> *For that (?)*
> *Even though I know*
> *That I didn't perpetrate the violence*
> *I was his mother and maybe I should of acted sooner*
> *Than I did*
> *But then*
> *I was always trying to explain it away*
> *By saying*
> *I didn't know what it was like to have a father*
> *I wanted my son to have a father*
> *You know*
> *Even if he was a bastard (*laughing)
> *I wanted that real family*
> *because I didn't have it as a child myself*

Later Katie shows evidence of how structures of beliefs and values are changed as part of the process of reconstructing one's life. Katie explains that a real family *is not really an issue for me now*, since *my son is part of an extended family now*. Katie has broadened her concept of an ideal family for her child to grow up in, to include *adoring grandparents, a wonderful relationship with his grandfather* and other young male *role models*.

Keep the Family together

A father for the children is an essential part of the dream of the real family. Racquel married again so that her children would have a father:

> *My kids needed a father.*
> *So he was a likely candidate*
> *and he suited it,*
> *he loved them*
> *and um he loved me*

and that's all that mattered.
So he filled the shoes of a father
and that's all he was ever,
that's all he ever meant to me

This would appear unduly self-sacrificing, but in the context of this research, providing the children with a father meets the essential needs of the mother and the woman.

The view of our society that a father is essential to a "real family", and that it is the mother's role to provide this, is summed up by Lynn:

Cos I didn't feel I was a family,
the three of us,
I do now,
but back then I didn't,
I thought that we weren't..
we were one of these..
disjoint
you know these statistics they talk about
the type you know
there's something wrong with you,
yah know
and you'd read things in the paper about fatherless families
and and I felt very guilty
cos it was me that...
cos he'd told me it was me,
and I took blame
for the children losing their father
and I felt this guilt

A: So you were inadequate as a wife

Yes and a mother
because I failed the children too
cos they had lost their father
where if I'd kept kept the family together
and he was happy
he wouldn't of left
and they would of had their father

In this research it appears that women with children may not leave their husbands until the mother recognizes that the father's actual role is damaging to the children and detrimental to the realization of a real family. She leaves because, even though a father is a component of the real family, she believes she will be better able to meet the children's need for a real

family without him. In these cases the mothers ensure that the children have role models or substitute father figures.

Summary

The model show the internal consistency between the women's concepts of a woman's nature and a woman's roles. The implications of this are discussed in the conclusion (Chapter 14).

Figure 7: Model showing correspondence between the participants' view of a woman's nature and their view of the roles of a wife and mother

A wife's role	A mother's role	A woman's nature
Provide support Companionship Availability Loyalty Service	**Be there for others** Prioritize the emotional, psychological and physical needs of the children Be totally available	**Empathy/ connectedness** Interpersonal orientation Availability and involvement Altruism Attachment Mothering
Endurance Make it work Take the blame	**Provide a real family** Safety Security Magical moments of childhood Family culture	**Need for support** Protection Helping Caring Sharing Belonging Self image
Compliance Keep him happy	**Keep the family together** Provide a father Provide role models	**The path of least resistance** Avoiding conflict Taking a secondary role Giving up own dreams Giving up control

13 EVIDENCE OF THE USE OF SELECTED VALIDATION STRATEGIES

We construct ourselves through the images of ourselves that we successfully present to the world. Positive self-image is essential to us. We must find ways of interpreting and presenting our actions in a positive light as justifiable, valid and true. To secure acceptance of our preferred self image in our society we must align ourselves firmly with what is justifiable, valid and true in that society.

There are so many ways in which we do this that the transcripts can be read as statements of self-defense. Witnesses are invoked, evidence is verified, reasonable explanations and justifications are provided. A major aim of each of the women's accounts is to persuade and convince, and to appeal for favourable evaluation and acceptance by others of the preferred self image under construction.

Validation is also self assuring. As we put things into words we reassure ourselves that we have done the right thing, that we had good reasons, and that we are not out of line with the common values and understandings of our social group.

Validation strategies can be approached from different angles. The approach taken in this study is to ask, "What is evoked in support of the case being presented?" and secondly, "How is it done?" A large number of validation strategies were identified using this approach. Those developed here involve the evocation of spokespersons for society.

Women interpret their experiences, and validate their interpretations, within a cultural and social context. The knowledge, values and beliefs of our culture are evoked through the accessing of the discourses available to us in our language. The discussion, in the previous chapter, of the ways in which the women access these discourses, focuses on concepts and language rather than strategic use of the discourses, in what can be seen as arguments in defense of the speaker.

This final section of the analysis is confined to an analysis of how, for the purpose of validation, the women evoke the authority of the institutions of our society, other

protagonists and commentators on the events described, including family members and friends.

These are discussed under the main subheadings

- Quoting others
- Producing witnesses

Quoting Others

When we use direct speech in our talk we imply to the listener that we are recalling the exact words that were spoken, in detail and with accuracy. To quote is to claim, implicitly, that these are the words that were spoken. Since it is a convention of our discursive culture to accept quotations as authentic (Tannen 1989), the use of direct speech in reporting what was said, is in itself a validation strategy. In this study the women use quotes as vehicles for supporting evidence, especially corroborating opinions or commentary from those that are, in various ways, presented as qualified to comment.

Here Lucy uses the form of direct speech to report the advice that she was given by a support group for people who live with alcoholics:

> *I went to Analon*
> *and they said*
> *[..]*
> *Orh um it's a support it's a support group*
> *for um people who live with alcoholics*
> *So I figured I better go and see them*
> *and see what they say,*
> *and they said*
>
> *'get a life together,*
> *get your own life,*
>
> *realise it's his problem,*
> *it's not your problem*
> *so take don't take his problems on board*
>
> *and go from there*
> *and if you make a threat to leave him,*
> *carry it through'*
>
> *I'd made this threat,*
> *he didn't believe me*
> *so I carried it through*

Lucy implies, in the assumption that she makes that the interviewer is familiar with it, that this organization is well known in the mainstream, and therefore has credibility. What is presented here is the essence of advice given by people who are qualified by their experience, and imbued with authority, through their organization, to dispense advice.

Although quoted, this is clearly a summary of Lucy's view of the three main points of the communication. Each of the main points is emphasized through repetition. The final repetition is most significant because it shows how, in Lucy's view, she translated the advice precisely into action. Her actions are validated by the exact correspondence between what she was told and what she did.

In Katie's transcript, like Lucy's, onlookers are quoted exhorting the speaker to *get a life*, in this case it is the Family.

Katie's total sense of failure after the separation is related to not having *a life*, both by her own definition, and from the perspective of the Family. Describing her perception of the wary reception that her family gave her, she assumes the voice of the Family.

> *'We helped you last time*
> *Are you gonna*
> *You know*
> *If we help you this time*
> *You're only gonna go back*
> *You know*
> *And when are you gonna get your life together?*
> *When are you going to sort out*
> *You know'*
>
> *I think the worst was*
> *When a family member said to me*
> *You know*
> *Um .. something along the lines of*
> *Um.. you know..*
> *'You're 26 years old*
> *You know*
> *Your life is in such a mess*
> *When are you going to get your life together?'*

Katie's life was officially in a mess. She had acquired a number of labels and statuses in

the course of the breakdown of her marriage: *severe post natal depression* and *battered woman's syndrome*. Through the involvement of the court and social services she became a "protected person" a "victim" and, having been in a refuge, a "refugee". These labels and Katie's perception of how these labels and the events of her life are perceived by her family contribute to her sense of worthlessness.

Katie says, *I was in a mess* in connection with her various *disorders*. To the family *mess* describes both the messiness of the broken marriage as well as the lack of a "clean break". The expression *get your life together* suggests reassembling the fragmented parts. Both Katie and her family view Katie's life as incoherent, as something that has fallen apart. In this reconstruction Katie demonstrates how the family put pressure on her to take responsibility for restoring her life to some sort of socially acceptable order, and she validates the actions that were necessary to achieve this, such as testifying against her husband in court.

Social pressure to take control of one's life is also a feature of Racquel's story. Racquel validates her decision to resort to crime in many ways and this is one of them:

> *People expec.....*
> *Treated me like*
> *I was expected to know*
> *What to do with my life*

Both Lucy and Pera use their children's commentaries on the situation to validate their decisions to separate. In Lucy's case the children's verification is implicit rather than articulated:

> *Um well put it this way,*
> *in the two years after the separation,*
> *for the first 6 months after the separation*
> *they never stayed a night with him*
> *The youngest, um was ....*
> *when he got his own place*
> *would go and stay*
> *the other two wouldn't bother.*
> *It was two years after separating*
> *that the older two eventually went and stayed a night*
> *So that speaks for itself*
> *[..]*

They weren't pining greatly for him
[..]
They they.... the ol... they the older two
acknowledge he's an alcoholic

For Pera it was her sons' implied and articulated commentaries which were the catalyst for separation. In this study major turning points in the women's lives are frequently represented by means of direct quotation. The words of Pera's son are quoted twice, with some variation, to emphasize the significance to her of his speech. His words are prefaced by her summary of the context in which these words were so significant:

Family means a lot to me
And I'd found it quite hard
In the last five years of marriage
to hold it together
[..] then my oldest son comes in
and this is what really did it for me
I had to say something
'I get so hurt when you cry
and I know why you do
and I'm so teared up about it all
I think you should do something'
[..]
he's 16 years old
and he said
you've got to do something about it
[..] I would do anything for them
so that's why I decided to do it

As with Katie and Lucy, the movement from thinking that she was doing the best for the children by staying, to believing that the separation would be to the benefit of the children, is quite sudden, centering around one significant conversation.

Pera also reverts to direct speech to report the significant moment when, after thinking and dreaming about it for ten years, she finally told him:

and he says,
'I've really done it this time haven't I,'
and I said, 'yes you have'
He says, 'don't go'
and I said, 'I will go'

In Katie's account of the relationship she quotes her husband extensively, and the effect of

these "quoted" speeches is to justify her inability to resist his power by demonstrating how he controlled her with her own fears and hopes and through the commanding authority of his interpretation of the situation:

> *'You'll never leave.*
> *You can't leave.*
> *You're too um, you know,*
> *What are you going to leave to?*
> *You know*
> *Are you going to leave me and go on the DPB?*
> *Why would you do that?*
> *You know*
> *You won't*
> *You won't be able to survive*
> *Umm, your friends and family don't really give a damn about you*
> *They're just doing this to piss me off.*
> *No, they don't really want to help you.*
> *If they did*
> *then why aren't you with them now?'*

The repetition of *you, you, you*, the hammering style, the authority and finality of the statements, and the barrage of unanswerable and threatening questions shows how Katie experienced his delivery as blows raining down on the places of greatest vulnerability and effectively undermining her sense of control over her own life.

Similarly, he wields power by harnessing her greatest hopes as he convinces her to return to him. Again repetition drums the message home but the rhythm this time is soothing and mesmerizing. These lines have the poetic structure and lyricism of a popular song:

> *He kept on saying*
>
> *'Its going to be OK*
> *We're going to work it out*
>
> *You know*
> *This has just got to stop*
>
> *I'm really sorry*
> *I'll never hit you again'*
>
> *And he said*

'How about we go away?

How about we go away over New Years?'

He says

'Pack up
Leave your mother's
Get a bus back to Auckland

'I'll pick you up

He said

I'll pack up the car

We'll go up north
We'll have a holiday

We'll go up north and stay in a motel
We'll have a good New Years

Put it all behind us
Make a new start for next new year'

So I'm on the next bus

The symmetry and steady rhythm of the proposal corroborate Katie's perception of him as *calm and collected* as he delivered the words that she ascribes to him here. Katie's interpretation of her husband's words as promises of a new and happy future together is apparent both in the content and the form of the reconstruction. This rendering is Katie's preferred version that matches the feelings which were aroused by the original. Katie describes herself at this time as *in a mess* and *emotionally in the gutter*. Her longing for cleanliness and order manifested in obsessive compulsive cleaning and tidying. These words, recalled in tidy couplets, were *everything I wanted to hear*. The orderliness of the discourse, the reassuring repetition, the affirmation of family values and culture were straws to grasp at. The focus now is on *We*, the partnership and family, and what *I'll* do for you. The imperatives within the discourse are framed between apology for the past and a vision of hope for the future. Prefaced by friendly suggestion in Katie's account of the speech, these orders were clearly not perceived as coercive. The overall effect is to promise everything that Katie wishes for.

Providing Witnesses

The women evoke the testimony of friends to verify their stance towards the relationship. Friends of Lucy's marriage, as protagonists in her story, validate her story by confirming her husband's alcoholism and abusive behaviour:

> *Most of them realise*
> *that he did have some sort of problem*
> *cos they used to make side remarks to me like-*
> *'It's only the drink talking*
> *only the drink talking*
> *take no notice of it all'*
> *you know*
> *similar comments like that*
> *[..] 'Just drink talking'*
> *or 'Has he been drinking again?'*

Pera thought she was doing a good job of covering up the reality of her relationship with her husband:

> *To everyone else*
> *what they would say*
> *they'd say to me that*
> *that's the most perfect marriage*

In the events of the last crisis of the marriage, Pera realizes that she cannot cover it up any more. Not only did her sons know exactly what was going on, but also even the friends of the marriage *saw through the game*.

Lynn's friends confirm her view that her husband desertion of her seemed totally contradictory to the *reality* that they presented as a couple:

> *I don't know why he was unhappy,*
> *cos he appeared very happy,*
> *all our friends were shocked*
> *he appeared that he was .. (*pause*).*
> *you know everything was fine*
> *and out of the blue*
> *he wasn't*

It is interesting that Pera, one of the two Maori participants, invokes not only immediate

family and immediate responses, but family elders and family lore. A deep division between conflicting impulses characterizes Pera's story. The authority of the family also pulls Pera in two different directions. Family heritage validates incompatible positions; to reject the marriage and to endure it.

Her upbringing by her grandparents provided models for marriage and the family against which her own marriage did not measure up:

> *I saw things*
> *That the picture didn't look right*
> *It didn't sound right*
> *My grandfather and father*
> *Told me things that this person wasn't doing*
> *Or just pooh poohed*
> *Or threw it off*

In her self development activities during the marriage Pera tried to cure herself of her chronic discomfort:

> *This line of thinking developed from my grandmother*
> *[..]*
> *'Think and feel well to be well'*

The better she felt, and the more she shone, the more frustrated her husband became. In this case, as in Katie's, the wellness and self esteem of the wife was the major threat to the marriage.

The family voice supports Pera's perspective on the marriage and her impulse to cure the dis-ease of her life. But on the other hand :

> *I was hearing things in my head*
> *Like you've got to see this through*
> *And through thick and thin*
> *And that came from words*
> *My mothers used to say.*

In Racquel's account, it is not so much the events that led to her hospitalization in the final stages of her pregnancy but the implicit and explicit comments of the hospital staff that were the catalyst for separation. In Racquel's account the hospital staff were indirect witnesses to the marriage and put pressure on her to make changes in her life. Their

attitude is summarized in Racquel's report by reconstructing a conversation with that figure of authority, the surgeon:

> *And he told me*
> *that I'd said a lot under anaesthetic*
> *And he really felt for me*
> *and um was rather concerned*
> *about what I was going to be doing*
> *after I left the hospital and um and*
> *that I should consider seriously*
> *what I was going to do*
> *as far as my marriage was concerned*
> *and um and think about my safety and my son.*

Racquel reports, in notes that she wrote after the interview, that she isolated herself from other new mothers in the hospital and was very depressed for several weeks. She made the decision to leave him after much reflection, and carried this out after she was discharged.

Witnesses to Racquel's story also include the milkman, who rescues her and takes her side and verifies her perception of the situation, and her lawyer who confirms, from his position of authority, her need for support, as well as her responsibility to take control of her own life:

> *He told me that um*
> *I need to be protected*
> *And um help*
> *And I need to get my life sorted out*

Katie lists the organizations and persons of authority who supported her in her perspective on the marriage:

> *there were just so many people I guess at that point*
> *cos there'd been police involvement*
> *and there'd been court involvement*
> *and there'd been an assault*
> *and there was Womens Refuge aware of it*
> *there was just so many people*
> *after that arrest*
> *who became involved.*
> *Not involved but on-lookers(?)*
> *[..]*
> *they were aware.*
> *So we, so I had constant phone calls coming in*

> *from Women's Refuge ,*
> *Victim support,*
> *my lawyer,*
> *my therapist (laughter),*
> *just so many people.*

Assessments of her situation by her lawyer and her counsellor are reconstructed using direct speech:

- *My lawyer was saying*
  'You're suffering from Battered Woman's syndrome'

- *This counsellor was just wonderful*
  and I was you know
  He had said
  '[..]you have this anxiety
  this compulsive disorder'

These official definitions of the situation are useful to Katie for self-validation. She is not crazy or *an idiot*, but reacting justifiably to circumstances which are recognized in our society as destructive.

The women use the specialized terms of various disciplines and subcultures for the purpose of validation. Katie uses the language of the law and social services to define what was happening. These distinctive jargons align Katie's self defense with the judgment of institutions that represent our society's position in relation to Family justice, health and safety:

- *I had a protection order in place.*

- *there was never ever any evidence of severe domestic violence*

- *there was a lot of um conflict going on in the home*

- *he um assaulted me on three separate occasions within a week*

Lucy validates her story by invoking the stereotypical image our society has of The Alcoholic.

I mean alcoholics
if they want it
they'll just drink anything,
like cooking sherry
wine and Christmas cake stuff went,
all that sort of carry on

The caricature image of The Alcoholic is also sustained by this use of jargon, which evokes sleazy bar rooms and social dropouts:

- *he would lay off the grog for a while,*
  but then he'd go back onto it

- *Well he hit the grog one night*
  and got abusive,

While alcohol in general, in the form of glasses of wine and beer, is sanctioned in our society, *hitting the grog* is substance abuse.

Pera uses the language and concepts of popular psychology to validate her rejection of the marriage. The path of "self discovery" is justifiable and valid in our society.

Summary

The previous chapter focussed on the women's evocation of patterns of thought that prevail in our society and how they position themselves in relation to these discourses. This chapter shows that other ways in which the women align themselves with the values and beliefs of our society, and validate their positions include quoting authoritative views, quoting and reporting the views of other protagonists and onlookers, and using the language of the experts.

14 CONCLUSION

Transition

The concept transition is common to the work of several change theorists reviewed for this project. These were, principally, Bridges (1991) Marris (1974), Orbuch (1992) Becker (1990) and Vaughan (1986). Of these, only Vaughan's work relates specifically to separation transitions

Bridges introduces an approach to organizational change based on the concept that transition is a continuum, beginning with an ending, with losses and letting go of old concepts, and ending with a new beginning and new sense of self. The work of both Marris and Orbuch focuses on the transitional period following a traumatic event or sudden and major change. Vaughan (1986) discusses the effects on transition of the events or turning points immediately prior to separation. None of these researchers acknowledge that a transitional period, having the characteristics that they describe as effects of change can precede the implementation of major change by many years. A finding of this research is that, while in the case of dumpees, transition begins with sudden change, for the dumpers, transition often well prior to the separation. Transition begins with an awareness of irresolvable conflict and a growing realization that change is inevitable. It is not only sudden and major change that is destabilizing, as suggested in the review, but gradual recognition of the inevitability of major change can be highly destabilizing over a long period of time.

Marris (1974) examines people's responses to a range of different types of change. In particular, he focuses on the universality of the conservative impulse to resist change, because of our deep-rooted need for continuity and stability. He also looks at the ambivalence that characterizes people's response to both positive and negative change. In this study there was much evidence of the conservative impulse to resist change. Women will endure bad marriages for years because the implications of change are deeply threatening. In this project the conservative impulse to resist change is seen not only as a generalized human need for stability, but in the context of a woman's nature, as a need to preserve the unity of the family and a sense of belonging, whatever the personal cost.

Of all the theory reviewed for this project, only Becker's (1990) work focuses specifically on women's experiences of change. Her central theme is the anxiety that arises through the conflict between traditional concepts of a woman's nature and roles in life and the modern concepts of the liberated woman. This thesis also finds that anxiety is a characteristic of transition arising out of the tension between the discourses of self- actualization and discourses of a woman's nature and roles. All the characteristics of transition identified in this study , such as homelessness, loss of control, illness and loss of self, can be described as causes or effects of anxiety.

In Becker's view, women have cultivated their "natures" (1990, p36) to suit the demands of a social organization that is disadvantageous for them. The modern woman is hampered by identities and roles that are at odds with her desire to fulfil herself. An alternative way of looking at this central conflict of the modern woman, is that the demands of our modern society, with its focus on the individual, on self-fulfilment, and on rights, create anxiety because a woman's natural orientation is interpersonal. Becker implies that notions of the nature of a woman are constructs that are imposed on women and internalized by them. To what extent women's experiences of themselves, of their "natural" inclinations, are socially constructed, and to what extent the traditional concepts of a woman's nature actually reflect characteristics of women that differentiate them from men, is not the issue here. It remains that women have a deeply held perception of themselves that seems incongruent with the identity of the liberated woman.

The modern liberated woman wants to be seen as independent, self-actualizing and successful. She wants equity and the chance to prove that she can stand up and be counted in a man's world. Traditional "female traits", like caring, nurturing and peacekeeping, have no place in a world of hard competition and power struggle. In constructing the identity of the self-actualizing modern woman, women need put distance between themselves and ideas of needing *someone to hold my hand,* caring and *being there* for others. Claiming a new identity can include having to reject deeply ingrained and valued ideas of self.

At the time of the separation three of the women had regular jobs. Having a 'work persona', a side of one's self that is functioning successfully in the world outside the

marriage, significantly influences the experience of transition. As Lynn explains, the familiarity and reality of work are a mainstay for women in transition. At work nothing has changed, everything is under control and positive self-image is untarnished. Level of income also significantly affects women's separation experiences. All the women make explicit connection between professional/material success and positive self-image. Poverty is a major issue for separated women who rely on benefits and allowances.

Implications for supporters and support groups

Our society expects consistency between the self-image we project and our behaviour. Evidence collected in the course of this study suggests that supporters of separating women feel betrayed if reconciliation occurs. They feel that their emotional investment in the self-image projected by the separating woman has been wasted if that image proves to be inauthentic. Since, as this thesis shows, transition is characterized by shifting ground, polarities of feeling, contradictory impulses, and instability, inconsistency is to be expected. The construction of a new identity is a process that is worked through in social interaction with others. It needs to be recognized that image is fluid, that self-presentation is a matter of negotiating acceptance from moment to moment.

This thesis also shows that some features of women's transitions resonate with aspects of a woman's nature, such that women in transition feel that their most basic needs are not being met. It is in the nature of a woman to need to feel connected to others, to be a part of a real family, to have a sense of belonging and to feel at home. Feelings of attachment persist long after any love between the partners has been irreparably damaged. Even partners who do not meet the support needs of a woman are attachment figures who do meet the strong need of a mother to provide, as part of the package deal of the "real family", a father for the children.

The information gathered in the course of this study suggests that women reconcile because feelings of homelessness, lack of direction and sense of unreality overwhelm them, and because it is in their nature to be conciliatory and to prioritize what they perceive as the needs of their children. The effects of transition are not dissimilar to the effects of culture shock. When we feel alienated and like foreigners in our own lives, we just want to go home to those feelings of belonging and familiarity that make us feel comfortable and safe.

In some other cultures, in which the extended family is the social unit, a woman is expected to return to her parents when the marriage ends and in cases where the marriage ends through death of the husband she may be expected to move in with her brother-in-law. In our Western society the nuclear family is the social unit, but increasingly there is acceptance for the idea that the individual stands alone. As adult women, we are expected to live alone (with our children) after separation, and to cope with all the responsibilities that were traditionally split between man and wife or shared amongst members of the extended family. Liberated women of the 90s are expected to be able to cope alone with all the demands of the family and to have direction and purpose. It seems pathetic to us to admit that we feel that we can't cope and don't know what to do, or who we are, when suddenly we have no partner. But these are the feelings of women in transition and if they cannot be acknowledged then a separating woman's sense of aloneness and of failure is exacerbated.

In the discursive culture of support groups experienced by those involved in this project, men are bastards and we are better off without them, and women are strong and able to fulfil their real potential now that they have got rid of their husbands. This is all very inspirational, but the needs of separating women may be better met if they had a forum to discuss those things that are inconsistent with the goals and aspirations of the liberated woman. The women in this study were very confident in their use of the discourse of self actualization but they admitted shyly to attachment to their partners and to concepts like *I need someone to hold my hand*, as if to failings and weaknesses. Emotions like grief are inconsistent with the self- image of a dumper. How can we admit, and still preserve our integrity, that we cried when we drove past our old home and wished we could go back and throw ourselves into his arms and say, "I can't bear it". How can we say, "I don't know how to change a wheel and I don't want to know, I just want a man to do it for me", without being seen to be "letting the side down".

As well as supporting a woman's efforts to sustain the self image of the liberated, self-actualizing woman, support groups should provide better support for the feeling of unreality, for the tension between conflicting discourses, for the shock of feeling like a foreigner in your own life and the difficulty in dealing with extremes of feeling and massive contradictions. This could be done through providing information derived from

this study about the nature of transition and by creating a discursive culture in which women are able to explore the inconsistencies and anxieties that they live with.

It is well established in theories of change and divorce literature that there are similarities between the effects of separation and the effects of the death of a partner. Counsellors and separation support groups make use of material derived from grief research that was designed to model people's responses to the death of a loved one. The overlap between responses to death and divorce is established, but the differences seem insufficiently acknowledged. For example, Presbyterian Support Services are currently offering a programme of group counselling for children "who have lost a parent through death or divorce". Although grief is a common response to both events, the children's needs may not be well met through an approach that differentiates insufficiently between them. The "loss" of a parent for the child of a separating family is an entirely different matter from the loss of a bereaved child.

The participants and consultants of this research expressed that they could relate their experiences of separation to concepts like the unreal city, dis-ease and disconnection much better than they can relate to the seven stages of grief or other commonly used linear and cyclic models of adjustment that derive from grief research.

This research into the characteristics of transition adds to existing research by offering unique insights into women's experiences of transition. No research reviewed for the project explores the characteristics in such depth and specific detail or focuses exclusively on women's separation transitions. The principal characteristics identified in the study (Figure 4, page 85) amount to a model of transition that could be a useful framework for the provision of information and facilitation of helpful discussion in support groups and counselling situations.

Adjustment

The findings of this research correspond closely with the findings of existing research on adjustment to change that was reviewed prior to the collection of the data. In particular the model of adjustment based on letting go of the past and grasping the future merely confirms existing theory. This research project does, however, add some insight to the different

experiences of dumpers and dumpees. Since only one of the participants was a dumpee no generalizations can be made and this research merely indicates a potential avenue for further study.

Adjustment was explored in terms of the categories proposed by Spanier and Thompson (1984), which are acceptance, anger, guilt and loneliness. Previous divorce research reviewed for this project that makes comparisons between dumpers and dumpees focused on the extent to which the two groups expressed responses to the events of their marriages and to their situations which could be categorized as grief, pining, guilt, remorse, failure and so on. No research reviewed for the project approached the comparison from a social constructionist perspective, acknowledging the social and cultural influences, and the individual's need to construct, moment by moment, a self image that is both congruent with the events described and socially acceptable. The dumpers in this study do this in a number of ways. The discourse of self-actualization is woven through their accounts, and in many other ways they distance themselves from their former partners and former selves and claim vast improvement in their lives.

It was expected that dumpers would demonstrate better adjustment because of their advanced preparation. This research indicates that a factor in the apparent adjustment advantage of dumpers is the fact that dumpers are highly motivated to present the image of a person who has taken control of her own life and made positive changes. Dumpers must be seen to stand by their decisions and they must necessarily demonstrate acceptance of the situation in order to meet our society's need for consistency. A dumper is unlikely to admit to loneliness for the same reason. On the contrary, the dumpers in this study claim to be less lonely now that they have separated. The adjustment demonstrated by the dumpers is seen to be as much a product of our society's interpretation and expectation of the role of dumper as it is of any actual adjustment of the individual.

Based on the literature reviewed it was expected that dumpees would show more shock and grief, continuing attachment and less acceptance, and these are certainly the observations made about Lynn's account. Lynn's experiences as a dumpee are markedly different from the other women's experiences. In the coding of Lynn's transcript whole areas of the index tree were used which had not been used in the coding of the previous four transcripts

On the other hand, dumpers were expected to express more guilt but this was not found to be the case. The three participants, one dumpee and two dumpers, who demonstrate the least adjustment, all express feelings of guilt and failure.

Spanier and Thompson's (1984) work suggests that when the relationship prior to the separation is characterized by conflict, disharmony, incompatibility and distance, adjustment is easier than when feelings of companionship and involvement continue until the actual separation. In this study all the dumpers experienced the months preceeding the separation as characterized by disharmony and distance, even when there was no open conflict. The dumpee in the study experienced the relationship as companionable and peaceful to the end. This connection between perceptions of the relationship and initiation of the separation is not made in the Spanier and Thompson project.

The classification newly separated/ formerly married is based on assessment against indicators of adjustment rather than duration of the separation. This study confirms that duration of the relationship and of the separation are poor indicators of adjustment. It is not time that heals.

Implications for supporters and support groups

It is already well established in existing theory of change that goals and plans are central to the process of adjustment. In the review, "closure" was described as the overall goal of the separation story. People in transition long to "get over it" and they do this through obsessively reviewing and laying the past to rest, and constructing a new future. This research into women's adjustments to their separations provides detailed information about the strategies that women have used to help themselves get over it

All the participants consciously made changes in their lives that included moving to another country or town, redecorating the house, taking up new activities and challenges, developing new interests, returning to pre-marriage hobbies, visiting new places, doing familiar things differently and developing a new social life. The underlying aim of all these activities is to differentiate the past from the present, to create a new environment and culture for the family. The narratives of the participants show how this aim was achieved through many small steps rather than great leaps into the future. The social expectation that

separated women will be able to reinvent themselves as purposeful self-actualized individuals causes anxiety in newly separated women. A woman who is caught up in the turmoil of transition cannot see the future. She is totally preoccupied with survival and has difficulty making small decisions let alone developing new personal goals. But as Katie observes, changes can be made in very small and satisfying steps. Every time a woman does something or says something that she would not have said or done in the past is a milestone in the adjustment process. Supporters would do well to encourage women to set themselves very small and easily achievable goals.

Discourses

A factor that seems to have bearing on the interpretation of their experiences which these women present, is the fact that four of the five participants are enrolled in degree programmes. In the accounts of these four, the discourse of the individual and self-actualization is a dominant theme. Lynn shows no evidence at all of a drive to self-actualize, but since her circumstances, as a dumper, are entirely different, this cannot be said to indicate any difference in the accessing of the discourse of self-actualization by students and non students. It may be, as suggested previously, that the salient difference is between dumpers and dumpees.

The women's concept of "finding myself" contrasts with the social constructionist view of self. In this approach there is no "true" or "essential self" waiting to be uncovered or rediscovered, but throughout our lives we continually construct versions of ourselves. The women in this study, on the other hand, all share the impression that they are searching for themselves, exploring and rediscovering who they really are as individuals.

Notions of finding one's true self, getting in touch with one's "inner self", and being "authentic" are all regarded in our society as positive and healthy pursuits. The idea of the "personal journey" and each individual's right to live authentically are approved in our society despite the fact that the claim for authenticity validates a range of anti-social behaviour. This study finds that a woman's interpersonal orientation is at odds with the modern concepts of individual authenticity and personal fulfilment and this causes inner conflict and anxiety. "Finding myself" or the construction of a new identity also implies "losing myself" in the dis-establishment of the old identity. Women like Pera find that self-

discovery is highly destabilizing and threatens deep-seated values and beliefs.

The main facets of the roles of wife and mother presented by the five participants closely reflect what they perceive to be the main features of a woman's nature. If, as Wetherall defines them (1999, p 269), interpretive repertoires are "relatively internally consistent bounded discursive themes" or "global patterns of explanation, evaluation and description or sets of connected arguments which often depend on tropes or commonplaces", then all the themes of a woman explored in this analysis are aspects of one interpretive repertoire.

The interpersonal orientation of women is manifest in the supportive role of the wife and infinite availability of a mother. The tendency of women to take the path of least resistance is reflected in a wife's role to keep her husband happy and a mother's role to preserve family unity.

Aspects of a woman's need to be supported include day to day practical assistance, intimate sharing and a sense of belonging, and support for one's preferred self-image. A wife's role is to create the context in which the relationship can flourish so that everyone's needs are met. A good wife is dedicated to the success of the relationship, which is her responsibility. A good mother provides the context in which the whole family can experience the unity, togetherness and belonging that she longs for, for herself and for her children.

It is important to note that the attitudes and observations of these five women about the nature and roles of a woman are those of women whose marriages have been unsuccessful. A group of happily married women may have an entirely different perspective on these issues.

Validation strategies

The use of validation strategies in personal narratives is an area where little previous research has been done. The coding categories set up for validation strategies were best guesses based on the researcher's observations. In the processing of the transcripts, large amounts of text were coded in validation categories. The potential scope of the analysis, indicated in a preliminary reviewing of the coded text units, was huge. An outcome of the

project was the realization that a full analysis of validation strategies, using the approach described in Chapter 13, was beyond the scope of this thesis, and a potential avenue for further research.

Of those validation strategies that are discussed in some detail in this thesis, the use of quotation in personal narratives appears to be potentially a very fruitful area of further inquiry. Narratives of separation are built up by contextualizing and reconstructing significant moments, or turning points in the psychological process of separation. In this study it was found that direct speech was a principal means of conveying turning points and validating subsequent actions.

Method

Some observations about the methods used in this project to collect and process the data may be of interest and use to other researchers.

In terms of the useful information it provided, a much simpler questionnaire could have been used. The essential biographical information on the first page of the questionnaire was necessary, but the information provided in the questionnaire about the separation, transition and adjustment of the participant was pale and scant in comparison with the wealth of data obtained in the interview. It is not known whether the questionnaire did in fact serve the purpose of preparing the participant for the interview. It seems likely that the preliminary meeting was sufficient preparation since it included discussion of the issues that were of interest to the researcher. It was expected that the questionnaire would be a useful reference point in the interview but in fact the questionnaires were not referred to at all.

The preliminary meeting had a procedural aspect but in the main it took the form of a chat about the project and the background to it. The informality allowed the researcher to establish common ground with the participant and set the scene for intimate sharing by describing some of her own experiences prior to the interview. Similarly, the loose structuring of the interview and informal style were found to be a most successful ways of eliciting personal narratives. In particular the attempt to preserve the natural dynamic of conversation, despite giving the floor almost exclusively to the participant, seemed to work

well.

In reviewing relevant publications for the project, an article entitled, "Some Features of 'Invited Stories' about Marriage Breakdown" (Cuff and Francis, 1978) was expected to be provide vital insight into narratives of separation. The method of collecting data was to request the participants to relate the whole story of the marriage breakdown. Needless to say the participants were nonplused and didn't know how to begin. Participants were also invited to record their own stories in private if they wanted to. This method yielded mere summaries of the milestones of the person's life and, contrary to expectation, the article was only useful in so far as it provided a warning for this researcher.

Further insight into data collection was provided by the work of a colleague (Finch, 1999) who analyzed the language of violent men. The interviewer was sometimes clearly unable to agree with the sentiments expressed by the participants or support the self-image being presented. This created distance between the interviewer and interviewee, which, in the opinion of this researcher, resulted in the collection of a poorer quality of data than would have been obtained had the interviewer empathized with the views expressed by the participants.

The beauty of a linguistic approach to the data is the analysis included what was unspoken as well as what was said, and it explored the underlying meanings that are created when words are combined in specific ways, in specific contexts. Through discourse analysis the researcher was able to examine how the language of the participants implied complex networks of connected concepts and attitudes, how these patterns of associated ideas were manifest in the language of the five participants, and structured the way they interpreted their own lives.

NUD.IST Software proved to be a useful tool. The main advantages were the user friendly system for organizing the data into categories, and the fact that it saved a lot of word-processing, because coded text could be copied directly from the node reports into the working papers, and pasted text units converted automatically to the correct font.

The method developed by the researcher to process the coded information involved tabulating the text units by theme. The method may seem labour intensive to some, but it

suited the researcher's preference for high organization, clarity and control. Through this method it was easy to distinguish between central and peripheral themes and to identify the key text units for analysis. The tables also provided the necessary framework for writing up the analysis.

Consultation was an important feature of the method. It was seen as essential to the integrity of the project to have a totally transparent process in which the participants were fully informed and given the opportunity to read and comment on the analysis. While this was thought by some colleagues to be a risky step, inviting debate and possible dispute at a point where timing was critical, in fact no participant was in any way dissatisfied with the accuracy or interpretation of the transcripts. The participants' feedback was validating and helpful. Consultation with colleagues and friends was also hugely supportive and an essential part of the process of distilling the ideas that are presented here.

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NOTICE

INFORMATION SHEET

Massey University
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Language Studies
LINGUISTICS AND SECOND
LANGUAGE TEACHING
Private Bag 11 222,
Palmerston North,
New Zealand
Telephone: 64 6 356 9099
Facsimile: 64 6 350 5633

Would you like to participate in a research project

on

The language of separated women?

If you have separated recently from a long-term partner or if you separated a long time ago and you would like to find out more about the research project please collect an information sheet from

The Student Association Reception Desk.

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Information about the Research Project:

Title: Some Features of Women's stories of Self and Separation

Researcher:

Alison Schmidt works at EIT. She is separated and lives with her two children. This project has arisen out of personal interest. It also fulfills the requirements of a Masters degree in Applied Linguistics

Aim:

The researcher is interested in the stories women tell. The aim of the project is to explore the way in which separated women use language to express their thoughts and feelings about their separation experiences.

Method:

Participants will fill out a questionnaire, which asks general biographical questions and questions about the circumstances of the separation and the consequences of it. One of the purposes of the questionnaire is to explore ways in which the participants can be grouped. Each participant will be interviewed once. The interview will be about the story of the separation. The 30 – 45 minute interviews will be taped. The tape will be transcribed and analyzed. Information from the analysis will be related to some of the information given in the questionnaire. The language of separating women's personal stories will be explored to find out more about Women's beliefs and their response to the experience of separation.

Participants:

These will be women who were in relationships in the nature of marriage and who have separated recently or a long time ago. They will be volunteers. They will sign a consent form to say that they understand what the project is about and agree to participate. They will agree to the taping of an interview. They can withdraw their consent at any time before the thesis is submitted if they change their minds. **Confidentiality is guaranteed.**

If you would like to participate or if you have some questions to be answered before you can make up your mind please contact:

Alison Schmidt
At work: 8448710 Ext 5012

QUESTIONNAIRE

CONSENT FORM

INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION SLIP

School of Language Studies
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LANGUAGE TEACHING
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Questionnaire

(Please take your time and write as much or as little as you like. If you want to make longer comments please use the backs of these pages. Use your own words or, if you like, look at the attached list of words and pick out some which describe your situation.)

1. **Name:**

2. **Telephone number:**

3. **Pseudonym:**
    (I.e. What name do you want to be identified by in this study?)

4. **Ethnic Group:**
    (E.g. Maori, Pakeha, Chinese or other)

5. **Highest Qualification:**
    (E.g. School Cert., Diploma etc)

6. **Occupation:**
    (What paid or unpaid work do you do?)

7. **Children:**
    (Please give ages and sexes)

8. **Sources of income:**
    (E.g. Salary, Unemployment benefit, DPB, Child support, Student allowance)

9. **Duration of relationship:**
    (How long were you together before the separation?)

10. **Duration of separation**
    (How long has it been since your separation?)

11. **What were the important roles you played in the relationship?**
    (You may like to look at the list of words)

12. **How would you describe your relationship shortly before the separation?**

13. **Whose decision was it to separate?**
    (Circle one or make your own comment)

    Mainly mine
    Mainly his
    Mutual

14. **What were your dominant feelings at the time of the separation?**

15. **How would you describe life in the year following separation?**

16. What were the good and bad sides of the separation?

(Use your own words or words from the list to describe what you feel you have lost or gained)

Changes I felt bad about:	Changes I felt good about:

(e.g. lost my home
    giving up my job
    loneliness)
	(e.g. no sexual pressure
	    more time for myself
	    don't have to cook)

17. How do you feel now about your former partner?

18. **Do you still think about your former partner and relationship?**
(Circle one or make your own comment)

Very rarely
Sometimes
Quite a lot
Most of the time

19. **Do you feel now that the separation was the right decision?**

20. **What are your important roles in life now you have separated?**
(Look at your answer to Q11. If you like, comment on how your roles have changed)

21. **How would you describe your life now in comparison with your life in the relationship?**

Some words which might be useful to you when you are filling out the questionnaire

Feelings and states

calm, angry, companionable, distant, co-operative, sad, fearful, hopeful, trying, caring, hopeless, stormy, tense, lonely, confusing, exciting, optimistic, pessimistic, exhausting, depressing, great, full of opportunity, frightening, tense, worrying, desperate, full of conflict, committed, abusive, incompatible, living in the past, close, careful, fragile

freedom, independence, hopes and dreams, stress, peace, confidence, rejection, guilt, fear, pity, affection, dislike, blame, respect, regret, distance, love, friendship, no feelings, joy, revenge, humiliation, inadequacy, frustration, despair, relief, tolerance, acceptance

Roles

lover , mother, breadwinner , household manager, servant, caregiver, victim, cook , companion advisor, 'other half', supporter , teacher , learner, good\bad wife, good\bad girl ,equal partner , free spirit , fool, dependent, idol, invalid , queen, princess

Conditions of life

status, standard of living, social life, routine, responsibility , money , support, life style time , sex life, home, children, , work load, companionship, employment, possessions, family, friends,

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CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

Information for Research Participants to Consider:

The information sheet on the next page outlines factors to be considered in giving your consent to participate in a Research Project. The consent form is on page 3.

Massey University supports a policy of informed consent. This means that not only is your consent required, but that you (the potential research participant) have received and understood all relevant information pertaining to the research proposal. The responsibility for this is that of the researcher.

As a Research Participant you have the right to:

* **Withdraw at any time**

* **Decline answering questions**

* **Ask further questions**

* **Have a support person present (this may be a member of family/whanau or other person of your choice)**

* **Have access to the research findings**

* **Ask for a copy of the research document on completion**

Name of Researcher:

Alison Schmidt
Telephone ███████████

Massey University Supervisor

Any concerns or queries you may have about your involvement in a Research Project, may be directed to the Researcher or alternatively to:

Margaret Franken.
Tel: 06 3569099 Ext. 7403

Title of Study:

Some Features of Women's Stories of Self and Separation

Purpose of Study:

The aim of the project is to explore the way in which separated women use language to express their thoughts and feelings about their separation experience.

Procedural Requirements:

Preliminary meeting - 30 minutes
Interview- 45 minutes

Potential Benefits of Participation:

The participant may benefit directly from participation if she exercises the right to read the final draft of the thesis. It is expected that the thesis will be of interest and value to all separated women in so far as it encompasses many different theoretical perspectives and explores and provides information about women's experiences of separation.

Potential Disadvantages of Participation:

Separation is a major life change and traumatic experience. All the participants and the researcher have experienced it. The method of obtaining data is through requiring the participants to focus on it and recall it in detail. It is possible that people could become distressed through the use of the research instruments. Arrangements to provide counselling back up have been made to deal swiftly and appropriately with this eventuality.

Funding/sponsorship of study:

EIT Staff Education and Development Section and EIT Research and Ethics Committee and Massey University School of Language Studies have allocated funds to the project.

How Confidentiality and Anonymity will be assured:

Pseudonyms will be used in the interviews and in the thesis text. The typist will sign a confidentiality agreement. The questionnaires will only be seen by the researcher and supervisor of the project. Completed questionnaires will be kept in a filing cabinet in the home of the researcher. All information linking real identities to pseudonyms will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information for research participants to consider.

I have had the research study explained to me and been provided with an opportunity to ask questions.

I have read all of the information and made a decision whether or not to participate in this study.

My signature indicates that I have been <u>informed</u> and have decided to participate at this time.

I agree/ do not agree to allow my interview with the researcher to be audio-taped.

Date: _____

Signature of Research Participant   _____

Signature of Research Participant's
    Support Person (if applicable):   _____

Signature of Researcher   _____

I want to receive a copy of the transcript of the interview	Yes	No

I would like to read the final thesis	Yes	No

Interview Confirmation Slips

I _____ agree to attend an interview with Alison Schmidt

on _____date

at _____time

at _____venue

Signed: _____

I _____ agree to attend an interview with Alison Schmidt

on _____date

at _____time

at _____venue

Signed: _____

I _____ agree to attend an interview with Alison Schmidt

on _____date

at _____time

at _____venue

Signed: _____

I _____ agree to attend an interview with Alison Schmidt

on _____date

at _____time

at _____venue

Signed: _____

SUMMARY OF STEPS IN THE

PROCEDURE

SUMMARY OF STEPS IN THE PROCEDURE

Procedure	Documents	Means of contact	Participant opportunities to decline participation
1. Survey literature and formulate hypotheses	Draft Literature review		
2. Survey literature on qualitative analysis procedures	Draft methodology section		
3. Prepare research instruments	Draft Questionnaire Draft interview guide		
4, Prepare information and consent form for participants	Notice Information leaflet Consent form Interview confirmation slip		
5. Conduct pilot study following steps 7- 12.	See 7 -12		
6 Review research instruments	Final Questionnaire Final Interview guide		
7. Inform potential participants	Notice Information leaflet	Potential participant telephones researcher	Does not contact researcher
8. Preliminary meeting	Consent form Questionnaire Interview confirmation slip (Stamped envelope marked confidential)	Face to face	Does not attend preliminary meeting
9. Participant returns forms	As above	Mail	Does not return forms
10. Interview	Interview guide	Face to face	Requests tape off Terminates interview Declines use of typescript
11. Participant reviews typescript (Optional)	Typescript	Mail	Declines use of typescript Deletes parts
12. Analysis	Notes		
13. Participants review draft (Optional)	Draft Thesis	Mail	Changes by negotiation
14. Submission	Thesis	All information linking real names to pseudonyms is deleted. Real names and contact detail are retained in case of need to get permission for further uses of the information.	No further opportunities for withdrawal.

CONFIDENTIALITY

AGREEMENT

9 June 1999

RE: <u>CONTRACT TO PROVIDE SECRETARIAL SERVICES</u>

I **TANIA PATTISON** **HEREBY DECLARE** that I shall not disclose, discuss or display any information relating to areas of my position as Secretary for Alison Schmidt. I further declare that any transcriptions of interviews, relating to the project **SOME FEATURES OF WOMEN'S STORIES OF SELF AND SEPARATION** undertaken by me shall be kept completely confidential.

Signed by: .... Date: ....

Witness: .... Date: ....

CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS

1 TRANSITION

1. Loss of Self ———
1. Descriptions & definitions of Self ——— 1. Official labels
2. Wellness   2. Alienation
3. Betrayal of self
4. Comparison future/former self
5. Perception of being whole/ nobody knows me
6. The value of Life ———— 1. Coersion of the law
7. Perception of time   Powerlessness of the Police
8. Perceptions of control

Wellness ——————— 1. Wholeness
9. Metaphors   2. Fullness
                                  3. Realness
                                  4. Direction
                                  5. Dirt
                                  6. Prison
                                  7. Seeing
                                  8. Hearing

10. The Unreal City——————— 1. Home
                                  2. Relationship/Marriage
                                  3. Belonging
11. Betrayal of self   4. Unfamiliar self
12. Failure of intuition

2. Ambivalence ———
1. Descriptions of opposing forces
2. Expressions of dilema & uncertainty
3. Contradictions
4. Shifting points of view
5. Indecisiveness
6. Difficulty in sustaining positions

3. Anxiety ———
1. Reported symptoms of anxiety
2. Statements of anxiety
3. Language of powerlessness — Passive voice
4. Obsessive focus on perceived causes of anxiety
5. Plans for alleviating anxiety
6. Metaphors ——————————— 1. Violence
                                  2. Anxiety
                                  3. Hurt
                                  4. Shock

4. Grief ———
1. Vivid recall
2. Denial of change
3. Emotional involvement with the past
4. Evaluation of the past
5. Reckoning of losses
6. Expressions of bereavement

5. Survival Strategies ———
1. Busyness
2. Role play
3. Blocking
4. Control
5. Exoneration of self
6. Stealing

6. Health & Wellbeing———
1. Poverty

2 ADJUSTMENT

1. Acceptance
1. Declarations of acceptance
2. Positive evaluation of change
3. Future orientations
4. Goals and plans

2. Emotional Involvement/ Distance
1. Emotive and relational language
2. Images and detail
3. Superlatives, intensifiers — Extremes of feeling
4. Name and pronoun use
5. Frequency of referral to former partner
6. General focus of the story
7. Rehearsed VS Spontaneous

3. Guilt
1. Expressions of guilt
2. Regrets, sympathy and empathy
3. Positive statements re: former partner esp. in comparison with self

4. Loneliness/ Social network
1. Expressions of loneliness, neediness, emptiness
2. Pronoun use
3. Expressions of social loss/gain

5. Obsessive Review
1. Reports of obsessive information seeking
2. Reports of obsessive thinking about former
3. Obsessive recall/planning
4. Recognition of role of account making
5. Vivid detail and cinematic immediacy

6. Conservative Impulse
1. Unwillingness to let go of the past
2. Reluctance to acknowledge change
3. Positive evaluation/ continuing involvement in past
4. Lack of focus and investment in future
5. Focus on losses rather than gains

7. Completion tendency
1. Identifying the potential value of change
2. Focus on gain
3. Finding meaning
   1. Implicit meaning
   2. Found meaning
4. Distancing oneself from the past
5. Storying a new and better future

3 DISCOURSES

1. Self Actualisation
1. Obligation to self — 1. My life
2. Self development — 2. Self containment
3. Personal goals
4. Self knowledge/ identification
6. Health/ welllbeing
7. Self government
8. Quality of life
9. New social network
10 Metaphors
  1. Natural World
  2. Organic Growth
  3. Light
  4. Release
  5. Birth/ newness
  6. Power
  7. Chemistry
  8. Waking
  9. Standing/vs downtrodden
  10. Voice

2. A woman's nature
1. Concepts of femininity
2. Concepts of motherhood
3. Empathy/ caring/ nurture
5. Support/ protection
6. Connectedness/Commitment
7. Social network
8. Path of least resistance
9. Intuition
10. Home/ Family
11. Work
12. Metaphors
  1. Organic Growth
  2. Organic unity
  3. Bondage
  4. Cosmic
13. Concepts of family
14. Being special

3. A mother's role
1. Protection
2. Nurture
3. A father
4. Role models
5. A real family
6. Education

4. A wife's role
1. Partner support
2. Household service
3. Sex
4. Compliance
5. Edurance

4 V A L I D A T I O N   S T R A T E G I E S

1. Assertion ———————————————— 1. Finality
(I swear it's true, it really happened)

2. Observation
(I saw it with my own eyes)

3. Quotation
(He said "you'll never get the children)

4. Rationality
(It makes sense, it stands to reason)

5. Passion
(my involvement and my feelings give authority to what I say)

6. Intention
(my intentions are good so I must be right)

7. Witnesses
(she saw him do it)

8. Verification ———————————————— 1. Legal & social services jargon
(my mother never trusted him)   (the legal system supports my view)

2. Criminal jargon

9. Credentials
(I'm a good person so you can believe me)

10. Evidence
(Authenticating details)

11. Blame
(If he had just shown a little kindness)

12. Excuses
(I couldn't help it)

13. Appeal to common sense

14. Appeal to a woman's understanding

15. Justification
(There are good reasons for my behaviour
His behaviour was beyond the pale)

16. Intensification
(Totally adoring grandparents)

17. The Party Line

18. Cultural truisms

SAMPLE SECTION OF

TABULATED RESULTS

Evidence of the discourse of self-actualization

(Italics indicate transcript, no italics for questionnaire excerpts)

	Katie	Pera	Racquel	Lucy
Health/ wellbeing	· *I was suffering from every disorder you could possibly imagine* · *I was a mess* · *Postnatal depression..obsessive compulsive disorder…battered woman's syndrome*	· I felt lighter, free, alive, energetic · Feeling good inside · Feeling healthier · I have endless amounts of energy	· Sought healing through psychiatry and psychologist	· Great self worth · Respect for myself again
Self government	· No longer required to cook and clean for him and have sex on demand · Control over my life again · Time to relax and think and be myself · An immense sense of freedom · *Losing sort of too much control over my life –my friends, my family, my interests* · *I felt trapped* · *The only part of my life I had control over was the house*	· Being independent · I'm a free spirit	· Freedom · Moved to a new town, new friends, new life · Independent · Complete freedom to live successfully or in failure	· Can do anything I want to do · Organize the house and children to suit me · Read all night if I want
Personal goals	· Making plans for my future · I have set goals for the first time in my life and I am determined to reach them · *I could start making plans for the very first time in my life* · *Once I get my degree and I'm working*	· Looking forward to the future · Optimistic · Returning to study	· Looked at career prospects and tertiary education · Career-determined	· [the relationship was] not going anywhere · Doing things I want to do
Self development	· Testing the water · Gaining confidence · *I took on some voluntary work* · *The only way to get off the DPB was to do some training* · *I wanted a job I could put my life and soul into*	· It was a time of great learning about myself · I read and attended courses on self improvement, personal development and I returned to sport and exercise · I wanted to experiment, travel and learn · I can face my fears – I've learnt the lesson	· Educated myself · Had an overseas trip · I've filled my life doing things that will benefit me - and only me · I own and have more than both relationships back then- Car, property, career, knowledge and class of friends	· Back studying
Quality of life	· It improved · Don't need to worry about when he will next explode · *It couldn't be any more different*	· No more arguments		· Bloody great
New Social network	· Renewed contact with family and friends · Daughter/sister of a close knit extended family · Part of the wider community · Supportive family and friends	· Meeting new and positive people		
Self Knowledge / identification	· Reflecting on who I am as a woman/mother · A mother who is emotionally there for my son · I feel as though I have a "life", I am more than just wife/mother · *I felt like a mother for the first time*	· I needed to confirm that I was desired, a woman · I love being a mother and sharing time with my friends · I enjoy my work	· Discovered myself in a new and different way · I'm on a roll. I'm me. · I hold down a part time job,I'm a full time student	· Beginning to get to know myself all over again