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Voices from the edges: Tellings of women's spirituality narratives

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Abstract

There has been an absence of women's accounts of their experiences in traditional psychology. There has also been an absence of psychological interest in spirituality. However, there appears to be an increased interest, particularly within feminist and social constructionist approaches. This thesis contributes the voices of nine women from Aotearoa/New Zealand as they tell themselves and their spirituality. Four narratives are identified: journey/searching; self-knowing; life trauma/choice point, and fighting for life narratives. The researcher investigates the subject positions produced in these narratives and considers the effects of these subject positions on enabling and constraining women's accounts of spirituality. The narrative approach used in the analysis is informed by Labov's narrative structure and experiential narrative approaches. A Foucauldian approach to power relations informs the reading and writing practice of the researcher.

Acknowledgements

This study represents a year of my time and energy, and without the input of so many generous and wonderful people, this journey could never have been embarked upon...

I wish to thank my participants for honouring me with their stories. Without their willingness to participate, none of this could have existed.

I also wish to thank generations of women who have fought and resisted, in silence and in voice, and who kicked down doors and barriers creating spaces I have been able to speak from.

My thanks to my friends and family for supporting me, making me laugh, inspiring me, believing in me and keeping it real, especially the Wellington crew who kept me sane.

Thanks to my mother for singing me into a strong woman and never putting limitations on who I can be.

And finally, my thanks to my supervisor Mandy Morgan for her inspirational brilliance, her willingness to let me speak from the edges while guiding me through the hazards, and for being a guardian to my wilder thoughts.

Preface – the interconnectedness

Through my thesis I have placed three translucent pages each with an image and quote. These images are all found in ancient archaeology, and my own understanding is that they represent the natural cycles of existence and demonstrate the importance of understanding these cycles. Writing a thesis is a fascinating process and some of the journey cannot be included here. I have therefore introduced another aspect of representation with my academic writing – that of imagery and of expressions of spirituality. I believe that spirituality goes beyond our ability to capture it in words. I have therefore presented three images and three quotes which contribute to making meaning of spirituality. I generated these images quite simply using computer software.

One image is the Yin Yang which comes to us from ancient Chinese philosophy. It may be understood as signifying the moments of Solstice and Equinox, representing perhaps the movement of seasons and the interconnectedness of each, a cycle that is continuous. It has also come to signify masculine and feminine energy, and the completeness of the two, as neither can exist in the absence of the other. Similarly, the triple spiral is found on ancient stone carvings like at Newgrange in the UK, and it may represent the connectedness of the sky, the sea and the land. It may also represent the importance of the number three. The single spiral is found in many aspects of nature, from cellular patterns to galaxy formations. It is found in art forms the world over. So I have included these images to demonstrate spirituality beyond human words.

As each of the quotes suggests, once we name it, we didn't quite capture it, and perhaps our individual lives begin and end in the meaning we place upon things. I think this is a beautiful understanding and I am inspired to include these concepts in my research. We can potentially go beyond structure and constraints and each be inspired to be the highest selves possible. Interestingly the three quotes I have included here have male authors. This was not deliberate in terms of gender, although may reflect the availability of knowledge produced by males.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Silences and Edges

Psychology has been criticized in recent decades for legitimating certain knowledges and for marginalizing others (Eacker, 1972; Gergen, 1973). As a discipline, it has privileged the use of scientific procedure to gather statistical data, which is then used to generalize findings as knowledge. One of the assumptions made by traditional psychology is that women, and women's knowledges, can be contained within theories and knowledges based on men (Heckman, 1987; Irigaray, 1985; Keller, 1985). This has the effect of male becoming norm, leaving female in the position of ab-normal (Heckman, 1987; Irigaray, 1985). Language that privileges the position of man is still used despite raised awareness of the impact of patriarchal language on the silencing and marginalizing of women (Daly, 1990). Feminists however, are reclaiming language, introducing the study of thealogy (the study of goddess), and telling her-stories (Raphael, 1999). In reclaiming, the effects of language are considered and words are investigated from their linguistic roots and historical uses. Reclaiming concepts such as the study of deity using thealogy in place of theology (study of gods) allows feminist writers to highlight and resist the use of patriarchal language. Similarly, telling her-stories instead of histories allows voices from the edges to speak. Women's stories have been excluded from traditional psychological research, as has the subject of spirituality. And until recently, women were unable to speak from positions of power within psychology (Nicolson, 1992). Similarly, women have been excluded from positions of power in many of the world's religions. The effect of this exclusion has been that female experience of spirituality has been without spaces to speak. Raphael (1999) has suggested that religion has been distorted, perhaps constituted by sexism.

While this exclusion has existed, there has been an increase in research on spirituality, especially in social constructionist considerations of this area of human experience. There is also an increase in writing from other disciplines such as history/archaeology (Pollack, 1997); art (Lippard, 1983); thealogy (Raphael, 1999), and goddess spirituality (Benland, 1990; Kearney, 1997) that blends disciplines and contributes new voices to the discussion, whilst also reclaiming knowledge.

Additionally, health psychology has contributed considerable research on spirituality. Health psychology has explored people's beliefs and their correlates to wellness (King, Speck & Thomas, 1999; Thoresen, 1999).

Empirical psychology approaches the study of humans by making the assumption that knowledge exists in the world, and therefore can be uncovered, or discovered. The discipline uses rhetorical devices, which assume that knowledge can be discovered as if there is a truth there, which is simply covered over (Shotter, 1990). This dis-covering is done by theoretically unbiased observers (Gergen, 1973). Humans therefore become objectified, and can be observed by scientists who make claims from their observations, which constitute knowledge. One assumption is that research subjects do not know for themselves, but the neutral observer using scientific methodologies can know. This contains the assumption, according to Gergen (1988) that people are capable of revealing "valid biographies to others" (p. 29). Scientific devices can therefore be used to investigate people's reactions and interactions, to measure them and make generalisations about human activity. Seen as an uncovering of truth, or some unbiased reality, this approach takes for granted the power relationships that exist within situations, and ignores the context of social settings (Parker, 1990). This includes the social, historical and political influences within which we always operate. Because of this exclusion, many of the things that influence the way people respond to a situation are ignored or silenced. The effect of this silencing has also been to exclude women from knowledge production, and leave an absence of the process by which women create meaning. Women are not the only marginalized group to be excluded in this way. Because psychology has privileged scientific knowledge, quantifiable information has been privileged. This has excluded areas where people tell stories to make meaning from psychology, areas such as spirituality. Some empirical researchers have noted the frustration expressed by their participants who say that questionnaires do not capture their experiences. In their research on agoraphobia for example, Ochs and Capps (1995) found that quantitative research limited investigation into the experiences of their participants:

Stories have an architecture that begs to be dismantled and mined for meaning. Because speakers the world over use narrative structure to make sense out of their experiences, it behoves us to look closely at how stories are built to penetrate the sense-making process. We believe that to look at how narrators routinely recruit linguistic forms to tell their stories – a look not only at words but at their grammatical and discursive shape – is an important step in illuminating how people, especially those suffering from psychological disorders, maintain and struggle to transform their lives. (p. 12)

Within this approach, the process by which people make meaning becomes important, rather than the quantification of their responses to set questions, or the observations of another person.

To research individual experience of meaning making, self-concept must be recognized as a social construction. Traditional psychology has approached the concept of self as a unitary, cohesive, stable and consistent self that can be objectified and defined. We have, it is assumed, one true nature and set of characteristics that can be measured and quantified as personality traits. One of the assumptions of this approach to ‘self’ is that people will be consistent with their opinions and behavior, which will therefore be predictable. However, the concept of self can also be understood as an historical and social construction. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), we understand ‘self’ through the linguistic practices which people use in everyday life. The idea of having a self-concept is one that can only exist in an individualistic culture. Because the construction of self depends upon the linguistic resources we draw on, I have attempted to consider the assumptions of these resources.

One of the assumptions in language, according to Derrida (1988), is a traditional ontological privileging of presence. That which is present has voice, and that which is absent lacks voice, or is silent. Because of patriarchal language, male is privileged and therefore present, and its binary opposite, female, lacks presence. Female therefore lacks voice, and female subjects are absent. Binary oppositions are not necessarily logical and therefore contain within them the privileges of historical and cultural continuity and change. It is not simply logical that the male/female binary should exist, and this is a problematic way of understanding human gender. Binary oppositions contain within them privileging which leads to exclusion.

Because of the binary oppositions that patriarchal language constructs, women become secondary to men. This privileging of the first binary term gives oppositions such as good to evil, light to darkness, male to female, up to down, a hierarchical character where the first is privileged in our metaphors, such as going into the light being a positive movement, or being enlightened which compares to going down into darkness or being kept in the dark. According to Sarup's (1988) reading of Derrida, the meaning and significance of these binaries reflect cultural use of metaphor and:

...metaphors are not just the concern of the poet or the literary critic, not just figures of speech; they represent one of the ways in which many kinds of discourse are structured and powerfully influence how we conceive things. (p. 48)

Use of such metaphoric language limits the speaking voice of women as subjects, and privileges the voice of men as subjects. I am interested in the absence of women's voices in psychology and particularly in their experiences of spirituality. Lacking positive models of female presence, the ways of speaking as women are limited within patriarchal language.

I am interested in this lack of female voice in empirical psychology, and interested in female experiences of another excluded discourse, spirituality. Because I cannot make sense of my self without including my spirituality, I speak from the edges into the world of social psychology, reclaiming the presence of spirituality as a process of meaning making which can be investigated. It is important to me to give voice here to the experiences of women because through their process of making meaning, I am including marginalised ways of knowing in the field of psychology. Too long has this voice been absent, partly because of the practices that seek to control what is legitimate knowledge. One of the effects has been that women have been constrained by what they are allowed to speak (Coombes, 1996). 'Witchcraft' for example has long been an excuse for the fear and hatred of women, and epitomizes the deliberate historical attempts at alienating women who held knowledge and power, such as herbalists, midwives and priestesses. Just as spirituality became a binary opposite to science and therefore excluded, women's stories and constructions of spirituality have been excluded. Words have been limited, taken away and changed to privilege the masculine. Mary Daly (1990) in her exciting

work Gyn/ecology describes how connection is a part of women's voices which has been silenced:

It is about women living, loving, creating our Selves, our cosmos. It is dis-possessing our Selves, enspiriting our Selves, hearing the call of the wild, naming our wisdom, spinning and weaving world tapestries out of genesis and demise. In contrast to gynecology, which depends upon fixation and dismemberment, Gyn/Ecology affirms that everything is connected. (p. 11).

Many of women's ways of speaking have been subjected to this process of separation, and it has been unsafe for certain concepts to be spoken. It has been unsafe to speak of a goddess, and unsafe to speak of Mother Earth, to be connected, rather than being separate. It has been unsafe for women to be powerful leaders, to create rituals and to own their place in the ways of our world. Other ways that women use to tell themselves have been dismissed. Janice Haaken (1998) reclaims hysterical speech:

The term hysterical often implies a derisive, dismissive, and sexist stance toward the tales that are told. My use of this term carries quite a different meaning. As a cultural idiom, hysteria suggests the dominance of emotion over reason, a situation in which emotional arousal overrides the capacity to think rationally. Hysterics, it is commonly thought, are suspect story-tellers who generate more heat than light. But we may also understand hysteria as a battle for recognition and as a revolt against conventional discourse (see Showalter, 1985). Hysterical storytelling may be understood as signifying a crisis in normal discursive practices – and an employment of emotion, the body, and the imagination to tell a new story. (p. 249)

From a social constructionist perspective knowledge is constructed, therefore enabling alternative ways of speaking. Empirical research uses patriarchal language that enables and constrains subject positions for women. Social constructionism in comparison acknowledges there is a mechanism of enabling and constraining and gives voice instead of silence by treating language as an active process by which certain positions for subjects are taken up or rejected (Davies & Harré, 1990). This approach allows for multiplicity of meaning as knowledge is understood as constructed, rather than a singular truth that can be uncovered (Heckman, 1987). It allows voices from the edges, because the edges have become blurred, and allows inclusion of topics such as spirituality. It allows excluded texts such as everyday

experiences to be considered as a process of meaning making which can be investigated from a psychological perspective. This inclusion allows marginalized fields such as the everyday experience of spirituality. Women's experiences of spirituality contain meaningful stories and this is valuable knowledge and should not be silenced.

The social constructionist approach participates in the contribution to psychological research by acknowledging the influences on knowledge production, especially the power relationships inherent in all relationships (Foucault, 1982). From this perspective, knowledge is constructed and part of this construction is the legitimation of particular discourses. Language is understood as a set of linguistic resources that enable people to make meaning of social interactions and life experiences (Parker, 1990). I intend to give voice to my participants' tellings of their spirituality with the assumption this will allow me to explore the ways they are enabled and constrained in their narratives. I will explore their meaning making and analyse this in terms of the subject positions they are offered in their narratives, and the ones they take up themselves (Davies & Harré, 1990; Morgan, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Empirical psychology objectifies so that the objects of study, humans, don't know for themselves, but they can be observed by someone in a position of power – the neutral scientist, who can analyse. This approach to human study is problematic to me because it assumes that individuals can be observed and that the observer is the knower. I do not assume to know *for* my participants. I assume that we can sit together and for an hour we are co-creating a text which is unique and influenced by various social relationships and factors such as their relationship with me as a researcher, their relationship with academic research, and our personal relationship. I do not assume that I can take this co-creation and make statements about my participants' personalities, or about their beliefs. I have attempted to tell their stories by treating them as valid tellings and processes of meaning making. In this way, I am not objectifying these women as if I can take their words and define some measurable beliefs or personalities. In comparison to empirical psychology, I am treating these women as the holders of knowledge, and myself as co-knower.

Therefore this thesis becomes my own construction, but attempts to honour their stories and meaning making. I assume that we are constrained by factors including the context of history, culture, family, gender, weather, physical health, educational background and age (Mishler, 1999). I am interpreting only these texts and am aware there are multiple interpretations that are similarly valid. As Gergen (1985) suggests, knowledge is a shared activity, a negotiation:

from this perspective, knowledge is not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together. Languages are essentially shared activities. (p. 270)

I have assumed the texts are specific, but also drawn on the shared cultural resources of these women. Therefore I assume that each woman draws upon a shared cultural resource for making meaning (Gergen, 1985; Wilson, 1997) and of terminology and therefore that it will be possible to consider commonalities in their stories. I am influenced by writers such as Gergen (1985), Derrida (1988) and Edwards and Potter (1992), and their theoretical assumption that language is not simply reflective and representational, but that people actively use language to construct versions of reality. This process is considered to create, maintain and transform social reality (Shotter, 1992). Further, I have assumed that people tell themselves through narratives that are a means of cohesively making sense of experiences so they are recognizable to others within the same social group.

From a post structural perspective, meaning making is a human enterprise that allows for plurality in constructions. A person may give voice to varied and conflicting constructions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This plurality allows me to consider the voices of nine women important, and their meaning making to be a valuable account of spirituality that can be analyzed as a valid piece of psychological research. While there are many constructions possible, plurality may only be valued by some people. Therefore it is myself who is in the position of writing this thesis, not the women I interviewed. I am therefore creating something from their meaning making. I am trying to open up what they said and allow it to exist in psychological research, to create a place of understanding. I find this understanding conflicts with the need for control that I have found in empirical

approaches to psychology.

Because empirical approaches treat multiplicity as problematic, binary oppositions are formed. In this instance I have understood there to be a binary opposition of religion and spirituality where religion is privileged, perhaps because of the social values of institutions of religion over the more personal nature of spirituality. In comparison, within a poststructural paradigm, spirituality talk can be treated as a meaningful knowledge making process. Through talking about spirituality, I can investigate the subject positions created in the talk, and consider their enabling and constraining functions. According to Foucault (1988), we take up subject positions according to the power relations that surround us. Therefore this research will analyze the subject positions that participants tell in their narratives. This research is also interested in how the subject positioning included in women's narratives is related to power relations and to the legitimization of certain positions and the marginalisation of others.

With a post structural shift, Foucault (1982) influences the way we think about power, and suggests that there is power inherent in all social relationships. Through his theorizing, I am informed that power can be understood as a device that enables and constrains certain subject positions. According to Foucault we come to understand knowledge as connected to the conditions of our social knowledge. There are several threads running through my research and a central one, or a colour that influences all the other strands of thread – is power. From Foucault's writings especially on pastoral power and social control mechanisms I have come to understand the function of power as something that enables and constrains people. I can only speak here of Aotearoa, and from my own data. My assumption is that pastoral power is inherently patriarchal because god is represented as male, and the priesthood or clergy has been exclusively a male domain until recent times, so I am interested in how women narrate their positions in relation to this, and also how they make meaning, or spaces, from which to speak.

One assumption I have made about patriarchal pastoral power is that it is based on a concept of an abstract, removed, omnipotent god who is masculine in nature (see

Appendix A), thereby contributing to the concept of binary oppositions that allow “hierarchical relationships of domination” (Morgan, 1998, p. 362).

By being informed about power relationships, I choose to do narrative analysis as I feel this approach allows me to respect that which has been investigated. The concept of narrative psychology is one that appeals to me, as narratives can be understood as the ways in which we tell the stories of our lives, a way that we make meaning of our lives, as discussed by Freeman (1993):

Even if we do not live narratives of the same nature and scope as those we tell when we pause to reflect comprehensively on the past, the very act of existing meaningfully in time, I will argue, the very act of making sense of ourselves and others, is only possible in and through the fabric of narrative itself. (p. 21).

Narratives can be understood as a way of ‘telling ourselves’ and by investigating the narratives that are told, I can begin to investigate the ways spirituality is constructed. Sarbin (1986) suggests that:

To entertain seriously the proposal that the narratory principle guides thought and action, we can reflect on any slice of life. Our dreams, for example, are experienced as stories, as dramatic encounters, often with mythic shadings. It is a commonplace that our fantasies and our daydreams are unvoiced stories. The rituals of daily life are organized to tell stories. Our plannings, our remembering, even our loving and hating, are guided by narrative plots. The claim that the narratory principle facilitates survival must be taken seriously. Survival in a world of meanings is problematic without the talent to make up and to interpret stories about interweaving lives (p. 11).

I am informed by narrative analysts (Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995; Sarbin, 1986) to investigate the narrative accounts and therefore to consider this process of meaning making for the women in my study.

The only personal question I asked my participants was their age because I thought it might be of interest. However, we did not discuss their sense of identity.

Therefore this research contains the accounts of nine New Zealand women for whom the issue of ethnicity did not enter into their narratives of spirituality. There are no Maori women’s voices here, which I am sad about, but as a Pakeha woman I do not feel able to tell their stories. I have assumed the texts are specific, but also drawn on the shared cultural resources of these women. My participants were all

New Zealanders and I am not generalizing from them to other women or to other cultural or historical groups.

As discussed above, women's telling of their spirituality has been limited. There have been shocking moves to silence women's experiences, as the burning times stand as witness. *The Malleus Maleficarum*, translated to *The Witches Hammer*, first published in 1486 (Lovelace, 2001), gave clerical power of life and death based on assumptions of witchcrafting. History informs us that this power was often corrupted. Today, we are reclaiming our right to craft and weave and spin our stories of our bodies, and our connection to the natural world around us. There is a social influence to express ourselves as individuals. The cultural resources available to us in Aotearoa have been those of patriarchal knowledge, specifically the church and Christian belief. Only recently have other knowledges come to these lands, and the knowledges of the people before – the Tangata whenua, the Maori people – been acknowledged. Indigenous knowledges have been silenced. The perspective of the natural world around us being alive and interconnected has been silenced. But voices from the edges have persisted the world over. This research is taking up a space that previously has been impossible, and this space has been created by those before me who fought for equality on many levels. I take pride in my ability to be in this space.

I am constrained by this project, as I must write within academic boundaries to meet the requirements for my degree. I am heavily influenced by feminist theory even though I struggle to maintain resistance and I take for granted my right to speak which has only recently been possible for women in academic institutions. However, I may only speak from academia because of the arduous task of wild women before me who opened doors and forced their way back into positions of power. I write therefore as a woman who has not questioned her right to speak, from within a school where 30 years ago I would not have been allowed. So I speak from a privilege of education, which is also a constraint of wildish and hysterical speech. I am aware that the interviews I conducted were only possible because I requested these women to participate in my research, and that part of their

construction relates to this. Our communication was constrained by the context of the interview, and other stories could be spun other times.

I seek to give voice to women's narratives of their spirituality, by recording one construction of their experience and analyzing it using narrative analysis. My reading of the transcripts is influenced by my own approach, and I am aware there are other readings. This thesis is also a process of reclaiming. While the conventional avenues of knowledge hide women's stories, this does not mean they do not exist. Centuries ago women held positions of presence in societies, there are certainly records pointing to female warriors, leaders, and healers. I am therefore reclaiming by repositioning women, and questioning the assumptions made by certain producers of knowledge:

Modernity, rather than being regarded as the norm for human society toward which all history has been aiming and into which all societies should be ushered – forcibly if necessary – is instead increasingly seen as an aberration. A new respect for the wisdom of traditional societies is growing as we realize that they have endured for thousands of years and that, by contrast, the existence of modern society for even another century seems doubtful. Likewise, *modernism* as a worldview is less and less seen as The Final Truth, in comparison with which all divergent worldviews are automatically regarded as “superstitious.” The modern worldview is increasingly realised to the status of one among many, useful for some purposes, inadequate for others. (Griffin, 1997, p. xii).

It is likely women participated in all areas of society and by reclaiming another worldview, other positions can be constructed for women. And then there are older beliefs, indicating belief in a goddess where the role of woman as creator of life is privileged and honored. I believe that the absence of women has been an imposed value. Therefore I am reclaiming this place and I am also reclaiming our woman selves as legitimate speakers and knowledge producers. Additionally, I reclaim our connection with all things, and our right to be bright shining stars that have a valid place in the workings of the Universe.

Narrative psychology suggests that humans make coherent stories to tell themselves and this is the major communicative technique available to us. We string together scattered events and weave them together to construct meaningful totalities (Murray, 1997). How do women in Aotearoa in the 21st century tell their spirituality? How

do they tell themselves as strong women when there is a lack of strong wild women stories in our social resources? How do they construct being women and spiritual?

The next chapter explores selected psychological and feminist discussions on spirituality that informed my reading of my participants' narratives. It also discusses the thread that runs throughout this thesis, which is Foucault's (1982) theory of pastoral power.

Chapter Two

Threads and strands

In this chapter I will weave together the strands that informed my reading and writing practice in this research project. There are several threads that have coloured the entire work. I will discuss selected quantitative, psychological texts of spirituality, and selected feminist/goddess spirituality writings. Finally, I will weave these together with the strand of Foucault's pastoral power from which I have been the most influenced in my approaches to my analysis.

Quantitative Research on the subject of Spirituality

I have interpreted the literature of published empirical research as narratives in keeping with the way I interpreted my own research, as a cultural production that contains narratives making meaning of and bringing a sense of cohesion to scattered events or story lines (Murray, 1997). There was a marked increase of research into spirituality in the field of psychology from the late 1980's, and especially from the 1990's (King et al, 1999; Thoresen, 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament & Scott, 1999). The majority of research I resourced was from the field of health psychology and focussed on the statistical relationship between measurements of spirituality or religiousness, and correlated health outcomes. To make meaning of spirituality, these studies measure people's responses on spirituality scales and correlated this to health outcomes such as the outcomes from illness (King et al, 1999) or recovery from substance abuse (Pardini, Plante, Sherman & Stump, 2000). According to Thoresen (1999):

...empirical evidence based on over 300 studies has demonstrated in many but not all cases that a positive relationship exists between spiritual, or religious factors, and health. (p. 294)

The narrative told from health psychology research is that there is a statistical correlation between people's measurements on spirituality scales, and health outcomes. In this narrative, the participants in the research are given a subject position as individuals being observed and studied through quantitative measurements such as surveys. The researcher takes up the position of knowing

how to interpret their responses and make meaning of these responses through statistical analysis. The research report then tells the narrative as a scientific production, which brings meaning to the subject's responses to scientific measurements. Absent from these tellings is the experience of the participants, and also absent is their own meaning making process of the question, and of their responses as well as considerations of the context in which the information was gathered. It is this meaning making which my thesis attempts to address.

In the empirical research the researcher defined spirituality through creating a construct of 'spirituality'. This construct was then presented in a measurement scale on which the subjects were asked to position themselves. By presenting spirituality as a construct, the meaning making for individuals was constrained and also silenced. Empirical research treats the multiplicity of meaning as problematic and gives privilege to 'religion' over spirituality (Zinnbauer et al, 1999). In the research, religion was privileged as it was quantifiable by such things as how often people prayed or attended church. Spirituality is harder to measure and the participants in the research were constrained in their responses by being presented with predetermined possible responses. The researcher is then able to take the findings of the research and generalize about the meaning of spirituality that was understood in one study as a way to handle existential anxiety (Zinnbauer et al, 1999). To explain the interest of health psychology in spirituality research, the narrative spoken in the empirical research has been that subjects who have increased reports of spirituality or religiousness have statistically more positive outcomes from life trauma or anxiety such as illness (King et al, 1999) or substance abuse (Pardini et al, 2000). This link is not well understood and according to Thoresen (1999) there is scope for qualitative research to contribute to this field:

We need to realize that a comprehensive assessment of spirituality requires multifaceted approaches making it difficult to capture spirituality, for example, in a simple, brief questionnaire. (p. 293)

Further study is indicated in the current research, and my qualitative approach adds to this area of psychological research.

Feminist and Goddess Spirituality Reclaimings

As well as considering quantitative research, I have been informed by goddess spirituality writings and feminist psychological research. From a feminist perspective, writings on spirituality are a process of reclaiming knowledge and reclaiming a speaking position. Some of the knowledge being reclaimed is the right for women to know for themselves rather than being defined by or in comparison to men. This is a repositioning of women as speaking subjects, bringing women to the forefront. Women reclaim the right to feel empowered as individuals within their beliefs, and resist an abstract power 'knowing' for them. Goddess spirituality literature from the late 1980s and early 1990s, has been summarised as follows by Pollack (1997):

The idea that the personal is political allowed women to recognize their own reality as valid, to escape the belief that only experts could tell us how to look at our lives. To say that the personal is spiritual validates the sacred experience of individual women and men. It tells us that what we do, and the way we understand the world, matters. For those of us seeking to (re)create the religion of the Goddess this validation is vital. The established religions back up their authority with ancient texts, and rituals performed by official priests, and often great wealth and political organizations. In the Goddess religion we have recovered many of the myths and images, but we have lost many more. We need to respect the prayers and rituals we create together, the dances we perform under the Moon, the truths we tell in our circles, and the small miracles we encounter in our pilgrimages and in our daily actions." (p. 46-47)

I am therefore informed by writers outside of psychology who have discussed women's spirituality in terms of reclaiming goddess spirituality. Raphael (1999) reclaims goddess feminism as a way to reclaim female divinity, giving this area of study the name theology that goes beyond the study of divinity, to the political and personal lives of all people:

So while Goddess feminism can be counted a part of the Goddess movement, its political dynamic marks it out from other elements within the movement. For Goddess feminists, the reinstatement of the Goddess is an affirmation and sign of female spiritual/political power. It marks the renewal of a woman-centred or matrifocal system of values believed to have preceded patriarchy. With the renewal of this value system, the beauty and mysterious generativity of the female body, regardless of size and age, and as a part of that divine female body which is the earth or nature itself, can be celebrated and revered once more. The well-being of bodies becomes a sign of the health of their spiritual, political and

ecological environment. ...I have understood theology, then, to be a historically and intrinsically feminist discourse and project – a prophetic attempt to name and reclaim female divinity and to use the power generated by that reclamation to the ends of the single process of personal/spiritual/political transformation. (p. 22)

This reclaiming of women's tellings of divinities also constructs an enabling subject position for women. Women are repositioned as powerful and vital, resisting the patriarchal shackles of weakness and submission to the dominance and strength told of men in patriarchal language and institutions. Similarly, Pollack (1997) reclaims the body of the goddess as an understanding of ancient and modern connections with the Earth as mother that also constructs a position for women to be entitled to their own spirituality and power through a connection to the natural world. Lippard (1983) reclaims female voice by exploring the history of art and retelling the past as a systematic movement away from nature and cyclical patterns:

Loss of the garden as nature dominated and domesticated represented, to Francis Bacon, man's loss of sovereignty over the animals (including women, no doubt) and "domination over creation." Science was rationalized in the seventeenth century as an attempt not to take over God's own domination, but to restore the biblical promise that Man is the Lord of the Earth. Monotheism rejected not only nature itself, but its multiplicity, just as the linearity of Christianity rejected the repetitive circles of paganism. "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects," wrote William Leiss. He has detailed how the process of "despiritualization of nature," in which external domination overwhelms internal needs, was reflected in the process of the Industrial Revolution, when the working day was lengthened and child and female labor were more intensely exploited. Labor was then secularised into work as "the last vestiges of its sacred attachments disappeared"; the festivals and holidays connected with agricultural life were drastically reduced. (p. 225-226)

These goddess spirituality writings contain narratives of reclaiming, of challenging assumptions and of speaking where there has been absence of women's voices. They construct subject positions of women who are empowered, and able to define and celebrate their own spirituality that includes a connection to the cycles of the natural world around them. They also tell of the constraining effects of patriarchal narratives of separation from nature and each other, and boundaries from self-empowerment and spiritual knowing. I found in these writings a crossing of boundaries, a throwing open of doors and divisions and a radically refreshing interconnectedness. These are not specifically psychological texts, yet they inform

my psychological reading by addressing core issues that contribute to the knowledge production of our society. These authors inform me about the positioning that occurs in response to the power relations around us by reclaiming positions for women as producers of knowledge and retelling women's stories and meaning making. There is an anger and a desire in these texts which is overwhelming and exciting for me, as I have grown up and grown into a woman in the spaces these women kicked, wrote and wove into being.

Postmodern and poststructuralist repositionings

The research from within psychology into spirituality and the meaning making process for women are predominantly by postmodern or poststructuralist feminists (Daly, 1989; Coombes & Morgan, 2001). I have not explored here some of the mechanisms of feminism or some of the arguments of postmodern or poststructuralist feminism, and this is not the scope of my thesis, however I am informed by these women who write women back into the field of psychology, weaving women's stories and meaning making into absences and filling up the gaps. Goddess spirituality, feminist reclaiming is about moving women into the picture and challenging the privileging of foreground/presence and reclaiming the right of Background. Mary Daly (1990) through her innovative use of language confronts the patriarchal positioning of women and reclaims the back ground as a place where we are back in the picture:

The metaethics of radical feminism seeks to uncover the background of such logic, as women ourselves move into the Background of this background. (p. 12)

This is a call for women to re-claim speaking voices by be-ing. In be-ing, there is a shunning of constraints imposed by patriarchal language, and voices from the edges begin to speak. Only by taking up spaces and by speaking may these voices be heard and this is the aim of this thesis. To take up spaces I have first needed to investigate the assumptions that have been made about the subject of psychology, and then to challenge these assumptions and consider the effects of these on creating

speaking positions for women. McNeil (1993) reclaims Foucauldian vision by telling feminism as critiquing the acceptance of things as they are, and challenging assumptions:

In many respects, feminists are explicitly or implicitly adhering to Foucault's vision of critical intellectual work which he saw as involving the investigation of the conditions of the possibilities of particular systems of knowledge. They are engaged in Foucauldian forms of critique which are not matters 'of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest' (Foucault 1990c: 155). (p. 158)

This positioning demonstrates a link I have made between my research and the writings of Michel Foucault. In accepting his challenge to consider the assumptions and power relationships of social structure, and to consider these as constructed and functioning mechanisms, I have located my research as a Foucauldian form of critique. I have challenged the assumptions of women's experiences of their spirituality by considering the narratives they used to make meaning of their spirituality in terms of the power relationships that are inherent in all social relationships (Foucault, 1982).

The interconnective strand – Foucault

I end this introduction where I began, with a story of finding and making threads. Foucault's (1982) writings on pastoral power enabled me to make sense of such a complex and indiscernible topic as spirituality, and gave me a way to link this sense making to the concerns I had about women's positioning in their own spirituality. Perhaps the topic does not need to be clarified, but rather approached by considering the ways in which women make sense of their spirituality and the function and effects of this meaning making and the subject positions which they construct. Thus, a lot of my writing and thoughts began when I read Foucault's (1982) *The subject and power*. I felt one of those eureka moments – here was someone else who was concerned about investigating specific mechanisms in our society, or in western societies, perhaps in any social context. As I read about his concepts of pastoral power and of the mechanism of one religion which constructs an all

powerful god who is approachable through a hierarchy of increasingly powerful men called 'priest', I was able to make sense of this power relationship. It connected very much for me with the ways women are positioned in our society, and the enabling and constraining effects of these positions. I was especially interested in how woman made sense of their connection to the Earth and the natural cycles of the Moon in their own spirituality when these knowledges differ to the productions of knowledge and the positions of power found in patriarchal spirituality.

According to Foucault (1982), pastoral power is a mechanism that enables and constrains people. This form of power affects every aspect of our lives and creates individual subjects. Two meanings of the word subject can be understood as:

Subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscious or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and make subject to. (p. 781)

This pastoral power therefore creates subjects by claiming the production of knowledge and creating institutions such as the pastoral system that constrain people from access directly to their own power. Power is imposed through knowledge production, and power is internalised by the subject created in this positioning. This power is effective in society when people are enabled and constrained by the subject positions offered to them. Historical reference to certain people as witches is an example of constraint as a mechanism, where language and occupations have been marginalised. Mechanisms of patriarchal religion have enabled men to be in positions of power, and constrained women from these positions. Traditional gender roles have constrained men from being primary caregivers to children, and enabled certain women. By understanding power as a social mechanism, I am able to investigate some of its effects.

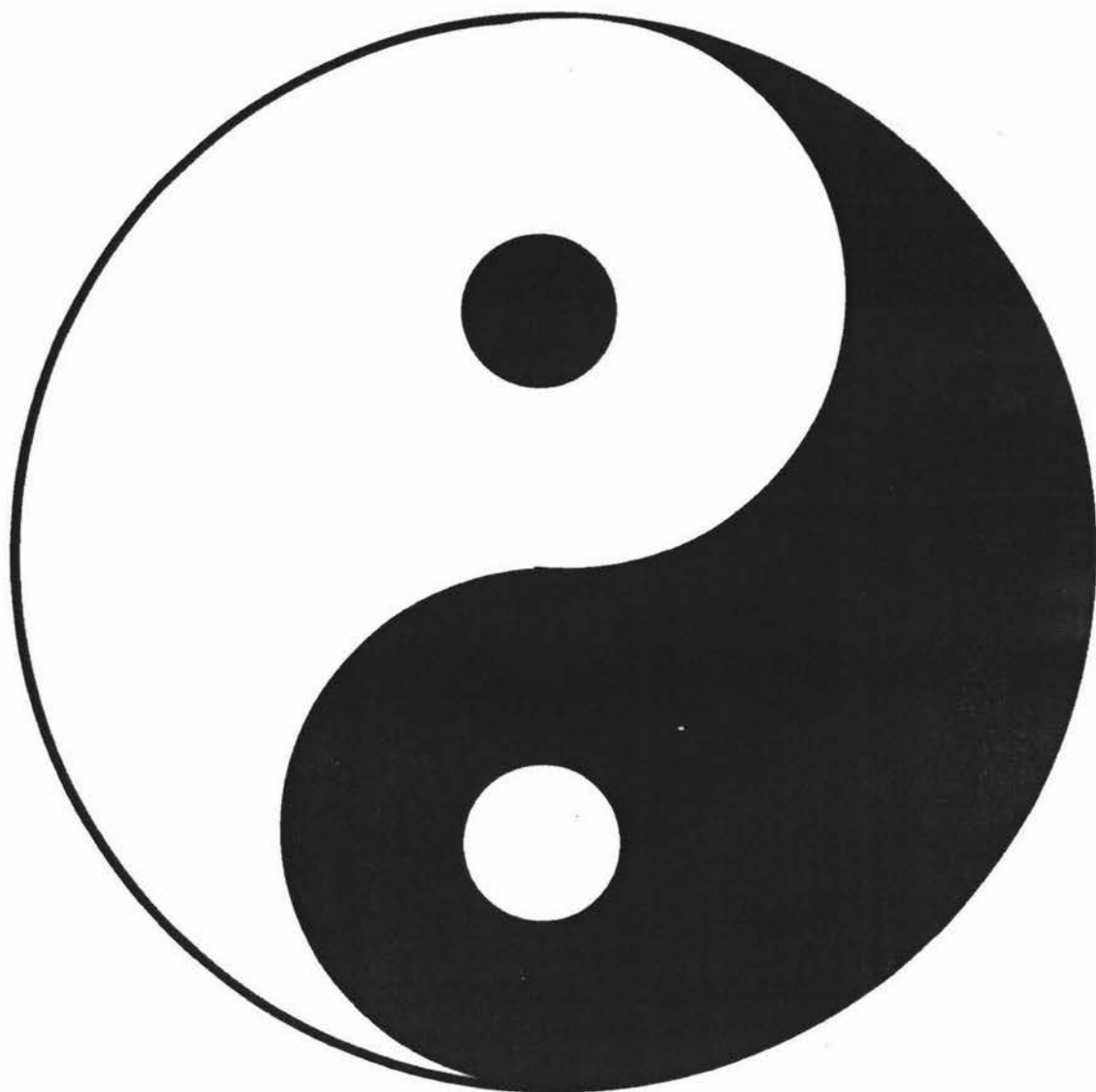
Finally, I am informed by my own time and generation. I am informed by the political and personal discourses and constructions that surround me. I position myself as a woman with the right to speak, having never been silenced in any specific way. I have been enabled by the fighting and resisting of generations of women and men before me. My generation is the first to be defined as undefinable,

the 'Generation X'. We move into and out of a time of structure and boundaries, and these institutions no longer make sense for many in my generation. This is demonstrated in the 1996 New Zealand census (Statistics New Zealand, 1996), where over one third of the population of Aotearoa does not define themselves by categorical religions. We are still breaking down boundaries, but increasingly we no longer accept their existence or their ability to govern us, to hold power over us and to produce knowledge for us. Instead we challenge the assumptions of knowledge makers and reclaim our own productions of knowledge.

We do not so much resist as our parents and grandparents resisted, but rather we do not consider the limitations, we are not constrained, from a Foucauldian perspective, by the same forms of pastoral power. My understandings of this time is that of a world which makes sense as a web of information which is accessible to everyone and the only constraint is human potential. I also stand in a position of extreme privilege for me to speak from, privilege of time, of physical and mental ability, of financial access and of freedom to indulge in an academic course of study. In doing so I therefore take up this privilege and attempt to contribute a voice of unspoken female wellness, of complete female joy and interconnectedness, and of deep, joyous em-power which takes away from nothing but cycles and re-cycles.

I do this in a time where it is possible to stand with the wand in one hand – straight, linear, active and the cauldron in the other – cyclical, understanding, passive. This has become an underlying and connective metaphor in my study. This metaphor of the harmonizing of traditional boundaries allows me to take up Foucault's challenge and confront the assumptions of binaries such as control and understanding and move into another place of inclusion, empowerment and interconnectedness.

In the next chapter I present and discuss the methodology of this piece of research and of the narrative analysis that I undertook on the co-productions of narrative gathered in interviews.



Tao Te Ching – One

The Tao that can be followed is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
Then nameless is the origin of the universe
While naming is the origin of everything.
Therefore, always desireless, you see the mystery
Ever desiring, you see the manifestations.
These two are the same –
When they appear they are named differently.

Their sameness is the mystery,
Mystery within mystery;

The door to every profundity.

(Muller, 2001, p. 1)

Chapter Three Method

In the previous chapter I outlined some academic writing that deals with spirituality in psychology, and tried to identify some of the narratives they tell, and the subject positions they offer. In this chapter, I will introduce my approach to gathering and analysing the narratives participants told of spirituality, which has been informed by my reading practice. My analytic method is influenced by my own concerns at the absences and silences I find in psychology. It has been my desire to reclaim the voice of women and their tellings of their spirituality, and to do this I have chosen a methodology that identifies the narratives women tell about their spirituality, and considered how these narratives enable and constrain women. I have not assumed the ability to be unbiased or neutral (Potter, 1996), but acknowledge that this is a production I have undertaken within certain academic boundaries, and that my own position influences my analysis.

To gather these narratives, I invited nine women to participate with me in an individual interview, explaining to them it was for my Masters thesis and for the field of psychology. The context of each interview influences what these women shared with me, as well as a multitude of interpersonal dynamics such as our relationship to each other, and their attitude towards academic research. How they perceived my own approach to spirituality may also have been a consideration in the way they responded to my questions. Through my readings I am informed that these interviews were co-productions and have attempted in my analysis to acknowledge the constructive nature of these productions. In a story the narrator constructs the relevance of the telling and therefore the narrative becomes a co-creation within the research pair (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). There are multiple readings that can be done of these productions, and a variety of other analysis. This thesis presents one analysis of the transcripts as informed by the academic reading I have discussed.

With the assumption that language is constructive and that we make meaning through story structures, I looked at the transcripts in terms of what narratives were being told. I understand narrative as a way to make sense of the many moments of

our life, to bring them together cohesively and construct the meaning of these events (Murray, 1997; Riessman, 1990). I have treated the narratives as active since I have also assumed that language is active (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Therefore I have considered what these narratives are doing – what social action is happening through their telling. I also considered whether some of the narratives told may present difficult and problematic situations for the women, and the effect of these narratives is taken into account. Primarily, I looked for the subject positions offered to the women in their narratives, and what subject positions they have taken up. I have understood subject positions as positions/spaces available in the text for women to be located within a set of rights, duties, and obligations by the use of particular resources (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Within the interview environment, which I have assumed was a mutual process of meaning making (Davies & Harré, 1990), each participant has told stories of their life, or used narratives to construct meaning and convey a sense of this meaning. The interview environment was co-produced by myself as a researcher, and by the women who are participants in my research. Between us we created meaning from the stories we told. The purpose of their meaning making may include a desire to help me in my research, a desire to speak about themselves or a way to discuss a personal subject in a safe environment. There are multiple purposes that these research participants may have had for their particular constructions. From their constructions, I have also used a process of meaning making to produce another text, which analyses our co-creation. This thesis therefore represents several constructions which the participants and I have used to talk about spirituality for the purposes of an academic research project, and includes a variety of meaning which we each brought to this process.

The women are positioned in various ways in their narratives, and I have not assumed these positions would necessarily be consistent (Tuffin, Morgan & Stephens, 2001). I have assumed that communication is a negotiation between the speaker and the listener, and that:

Speakers are positioned by their selection of specific discursive resources and by the resources others use to interpret and respond. Positioning is also constrained

because resources are indexed to particular social contexts: choice of resources is not unlimited. (Tuffin et al, 2001, p. 57)

Finally, I have considered the effects of the available narratives and subject positions on enabling and constraining women, such as silencing them or giving them a way to reclaim traumatic experiences in their life. Because of the enabling and constraining function of particular discourses, I have paid attention to the way my participants take up and resist particular subject positions.

Through discussions with various people about I met the nine women who participated in this research through various discussions about my thesis with others who suggested women who might be interested. With each participant I attempted to approach them initially to talk about my research, and ask if they would be interested and this process has led to the development of continued friendships with several of them though a bond of common interest. I did not attempt to include or exclude any particular beliefs, although it has turned out that none of my participants identify themselves with any particular religion, and they all had a connection with what they call variously Nature, the Earth and Mother Earth. Spirituality has therefore not been defined as such, and this project attempts to capture an active process of construction, rather than define what spirituality is.

The nine women all willingly participated and this was the main reason for their inclusion. They are a range of ages from 73 to 17. Chronological age was not considered to relate to wisdom nor with the ability to contribute meaningfully to the research. I have investigated the ways in which these women were able to tell their spirituality and considered the effects of these tellings and age was something they took up in the positions that they told. Age is part of our subject positioning and I did not therefore seek to control for age in the participant selection process. I have however, decided to include each woman's age at time of interview for reader interest. They were: Artemis, 59; Agnes, 44; Belinda, 23; Caesal, 29; Drizzle, 25; Fathom, 24; Jonesy, 73; Maria, 23 and Sianan, 17.

To protect their anonymity I asked each woman to give me an alias, which I have used in all references to them in the research process and final reporting. The choosing of an alias was an interesting aspect of these tellings, and they took up subject positions through this alias such as an alternative self, an unknown biological mother or a goddess entity.

Much psychological research depends upon large population bases and assumes that through statistical analysis we can identify trends and characteristics of human behaviour. I am informed by other qualitative researchers such as Potter & Wetherell (1987) in narrowing my scope and choosing to give voice to the individual stories of just nine women:

If one is interested in discursive forms, ten interviews might provide as much valid information as several hundred responses to a structured opinion poll. Because one is interested in language use rather than the people generating the language and because a large number of linguistic patterns are likely to emerge from a few people, small samples or a few interviews are generally adequate... (p. 161)

Originally I had intended to interview ten women, however, during the time I was interviewing, I decided to change this number to nine. I began to question the number ten and why it was chosen, changed the number of participants to nine, as it is three lots of three which represents a sacred number in several ancient traditions (Pollack, 1997). In challenging assumptions I have challenged the use of ten as a number of significance in scientific writing (Edwards et al, 1990). I do not assume these women speak for any others, or indeed for 'woman' as a group, but that they draw on cultural resources to make and convey meaning (Davies & Harré, 1990). Each interview was a co-production between myself individual participants, and I am written into each transcript as I was part of the reason this discussion took place. Our discussion was influenced by my position as researcher and academic, and also by the way each woman perceived me in terms of my own spirituality. There was also the awareness that this interview was for formal academic purposes, which affected the way women talked about themselves and which stories or narratives they have chosen to tell. I assume that people wish to tell themselves in a positive light, and that they were each influenced by whatever they assumed that I wanted to

hear from them, as I have assumed from a Foucauldian (1982) perspective that power is present and productive in all social relations including these interviews.

Once invited to participate, I met with each woman to discuss my thesis, my assumptions about their stories and the value of each story to my research, and the interview style. We discussed the information sheet (Appendix B) that I left with them. They also signed a consent form (Appendix C). Each interview was approximately an hour in duration, and was taped using a Dictaphone that I felt was discreet and allowed as natural as possible conversation. I interviewed five of the women in my home and four in their own homes.

The interviews were held in a conversation style, so that women were prompted to tell me about their spirituality and what this meant to them, and then I actively listened as they spoke. We discussed before the interview how much they would like me to speak, and for some it was important that I express my ideas, like a normal conversation – and for others it was important for them to have a lot of space to speak. I asked if they were comfortable for me to take notes during the interview, and they were all happy with this. I had a list of prompts (see Appendix D) in front of me and I explained these were to remind me to focus on some areas if there were things I wanted to discuss. For most of the interviews I used these prompts a couple of times, and generally I let the conversation flow and the subject matter go wherever felt right. I think spirituality is a very hard concept to talk about, in the interviews the women often expressed difficulty at finding the right words to express what they wanted to say. It is also a deeply personal subject that many people never discuss with others. Some of my participants said that they had not even thought about it much until I talked to them. Therefore I wanted them to be able to explore the concept in the interview, and felt that this style provided a safe, friendly environment in which to speak. I did not define spirituality but let each woman interpret the word and as they did that our interview, a co-creation, includes their sense-making. Each woman has put words to the un-named and told it to me in a cohesive manner which linked events and characters and context together, to convey the character or energy of that story.

How my participants perceived me depended on their relationship to me and many other factors such as their age and their educational background. Some had an academic background, to others this was an unknown field and perhaps awarded some prestige as a place in the production of knowledge. Those who had also travelled an academic road may have identified with the research and with my attempt to position myself as a co-producer. From the interview as a brief snapshot of two women interacting, I have sought to analyse the meaning these women made of their spirituality. What is presented here is a representation of social interaction, suspended in a moment through a textual record, one dimension of an interaction between two adult women. I have attempted here to honour their narratives, and to bring together some narrative of my own, a cohesive telling of these voices from the edges. I am influenced by the meeting I had with each woman before the interview, some in person, some over the phone. I am especially influenced by the conversation that continued after the microphone went off, when the interview context was stripped away and two women continued to talk about their lives: a time of sharing. These conversations must influence the way I have analysed the transcripts.

Each interview tape was then fully transcribed word for word, including as much punctuation as necessary to make sense of the text. I have also indicated pauses, measured in second amounts (see Appendix E). These transcripts were then returned to the participants to change, edit and comment where they felt was appropriate, and I included a cover letter to reintroduce the research and to thank them for participating (Appendix F). Most of the participants did not change or add much to their transcript, if anything. However, I have included some additional information in my analysis, treating the additions and changes as part of the complete transcript (see Appendix E). The women I interviewed were made aware that they were welcome to withdraw their material at any time if they did not want it included in the analysis. I returned each transcript in person, and discussed it with them because the content was so personal, but also because spoken text looks different when transcribed. Several of my participants mentioned they didn't realise

they spoke “like that”, but others said it was great because it really captured the way we were talking. All the feedback was positive. They all expressed pleasure at reading their transcripts and several asked to keep them. There was a sense of joy for me as a woman and as a researcher in the feedback, and I felt very honoured by their sharing with me.

I then began to analyse the transcripts according to the narrative analysis methodology that is discussed in the next section. For the extracts used in the analysis, I have indicated the participants name followed by the page number which that extract is from, and then the paragraph number on that page (Appendix E).

Narrative Analysis

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in stories because there are stories inside stories and stories between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is in the getting lost. [For] if you're lost, you really start to look around and listen. (Metzger, 1986:104, cited in Oliver 1998)

A narrative links past events, or stories, together to explain a how a final outcome might come about, or how meaning is given to certain aspects of their lives. (Oliver, 1998, p. 244)

I have analysed the narrative of each participant as a text that, as a co-construction with me, has made meaning of the subject of her spirituality. In this narrative telling, each woman has constructed scattered events that she has then woven together in narrative, to make meaningful totalities (Riessman, 1993). My analysis includes my own weaving of narrative, including my conversation with each woman after the interview, and my repeated readings of the transcript. To make sense of these narratives, I have found Labov's (1972) model to be useful as it offers a structure for considering and identifying narrative. According to Labov, a fully-formed narrative may contain six possible components that are: the abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution and the coda.

The abstract can be understood as a device many storytellers use to summarise the point of the story. The orientation is where time, place, persons and their activity, or

situation is given. These may occur at any point in the narrative as “free clauses” and do not depend on the “temporal sequence of the complicating action” (Tuffin et al, 2001, p. 58). Each woman used this form at the beginning of their interview, as demonstrated by this abstract from Artemis:

1. K: Ok so just starting out in terms of spirituality what is that to you, and how is that for you. What does that mean to you spirituality?
2. A: well spirituality for me mean everything that's about spirit everything so there isn't,
3. and I mean this has been a journey but for me now and that's all I can talk about
4. is that spirituality is is everything
5. it's the way I live my life it's the way that I interact with nature and with people
6. I mean it's the air I breathe it's it's my heart and my mind and my body and it is a totality
7. spirituality is everything its about being in the spirit

Artemis opens with an abstract that introduces the subject and summarises the whole story. This is about everything for her, and it about being ‘in’ the spirit. Here she positions herself as being on a journey, and also of interacting with nature and people. She then goes on to position herself within a natural world, the air she breathes (line 6). Artemis equates spirituality to totality (line 6), and then to it being about everything. The sense here is that this question of spirituality goes beyond the individual, to something that is part of a life journey, and also something that belongs to all things, not just the individual.

The complicating action consists of clauses that are temporally ordered, and their order is important as any change to this order will affect the meaning of the narrative. These clauses are ordered in the same way as the sequence of events in the story, and are the essence of the narrative. So the complicating action tells what happened in temporal order. In Artemis’s transcript there are several stories of parts of her life. They are temporally ordered, and take the listener from her childhood and growing into adolescence, into marriage and divorce, and then a time of ‘warrior woman’, motherhood and into grandmother or crone stage.

The evaluation component is where the narrator tells the point of the story – “why it is told, and what the narrator is getting at” (Labov, 1972, p. 366). Evaluations are found throughout storylines, and often used by the narrator to convey the point of

the story to the reader or listener. They answers the question “so what?” For Artemis there is a thread of patriarchal domination signified by the Presbyterian Church initially, and then general male domination, and of resisting this through warrior woman, resisting traditional gender roles of mothering. The result or resolution clauses tell what finally happened, or what the outcome of the complicating action/s has been. Artemis is finally able to claim a sense of self and of coming ‘into’ her own ‘spirit’, and being enabled to celebrate the crone and nurturing side of herself, which was constrained earlier in life as she was busy resisting the dominant male positions offered at the time.

The coda functions to locate the listener to the temporal placement of each complicating action, thereby taking the listener or reader from the story to the present of the storytelling (Tuffin et al, 2001). It is also a device which: “provides more than a mechanical solution for the sequencing problem: it leaves the listener with a feeling of satisfaction and completeness that matters have been rounded off and accounted for” (Labov, 1972: 366).

In her research on divorce talk, Riessman (1994) analyses the narrative of a divorcing woman and shows how in the context of a supportive listener, she “reconstructs and reinterprets her husband’s sexual abuse of her”. She analyses the text in terms of the reason the participant gives for her divorce, but then discusses the point being conveyed in the narrative. The structure used by Riessman (1994) fits with the structure outlined above by Labov. For this reason I have been informed by Labov’s structure, using Riessman (1990, 1994) as an additional guideline. Riessman’s research has influenced the way I approached the telling of women’s stories, as she was also interested in the missing or absent narratives that women tell about their experiences. By giving women the opportunity to tell their stories, and by analysing these telling in narrative form, I also seek to contribute to the field of psychology a voice of meaning making for women.

Narratives tell stories, and they give the nature of the representation of the stories being told. This enables the teller to convey the relevance of their narrative by stringing together the stories of their life in a cohesive way. Narrative is the way we

string together all the little stories of our life to give meaning to our life or to a particular telling, such as the meaning of spirituality. This also allows the teller to position themselves in particular ways to the audience. A story can be understood as ‘a partially formulated construction of the event’ (Murray, 1997, p. 22). The narrative goes beyond the words used and constructs meaning in an active way:

In constructing a narrative account the author is creating something new and is not merely reflecting reality. Even more important from a narrative perspective, the narrative brings psychological cohesion and creates meaning. Without narrative there is only a disconnected and meaningless sequence of events. (p. 22)

The narrative is then, a story that is made up of linguistic resources, given character that creates coherence and expresses the nature of the psychological meaning of the story. In tellings of spirituality, this is done by telling stories about experiences in life in narrative form that then gives meaning to the experience of spirituality. The story provides a recollection of experiences using language, and a negotiation between people of shared meaning. In this way we can tell of past experiences in our lives and negotiate meaning for these experiences.

So for my participants, they knew the words such as spirituality, soul, spirit, death, separation, or harmony – many words were at their disposal. However, when it came to making sense of these words in a coherent way, they told stories, and gave these stories character and meaning, through narrative structures. The narratives which I have then analysed, were coherent and conveyed meaning. My analysis was about asking: what meaning is being given to these experiences or these stories? What is created in this narrative and what resources are being used? And why are they telling it this way, why are they telling this at all?

Empirical research on spirituality is often found in health research, and my own research often led me to the nursing journals, rather than psychological journals (King et al, 1999; Pardini et al, 2000). This relationship between health and spirituality is interesting, and suggests to me that the medical profession has an understanding of the importance of people’s beliefs in their health and well-being. This also confirms for me the importance of spirituality in our psychology, and highlights also the absence.

Each story was about spirituality – specifically it was about a woman’s response to the initial question asked by me (including all the context) of: “what is your spirituality, what does that mean to you, how do you make sense of spirituality for yourself?” So the story is also the process they used to make sense, to create meaning. The author of the narratives is the participant and their narratives make meaning of their stories. However there were other characters especially children, partners and friends. Characters are defined as representing: “the people who create or live the events of the narrative. The stories and actions of these individuals are used to construct and shape the narrative” (Oliver, 1998, p. 252). As a researcher telling stories, I have had to be aware of the characters in the narratives and especially of how incredibly hard it is to verbalise something as personal and private as spirituality. I have especially therefore paid attention to “understanding the actions and choices of the main characters, as well as the emotional and cognitive aspects or meanings attached to these actions and choice” (Oliver, 1998, p. 253). This allows me to consider the content of the story and also the reason for the telling. What is being achieved as these women tell their stories the way they tell them? I was also very mindful of how personal these interviews were and that most of the women said that they don’t usually talk about such things, or even think about them. I wondered as I transcribed did they mean to go so deep and would they react to what they had verbalised? The context was therefore a factor in the storytelling and the meaning making.

So contextually these women are set within a time and place and I have tried to consider this within my analysis, although I also am bound in this time and political place and sometimes it is hard to reflect on knowledges as constructions when they are your own ‘realities’ of existence. It is important though that these things are considered because these women’s stories are in some ways responses to this climate of political and personal awareness.

The temporal dimensions of the setting reflect the time-bound and pervading cultural norms that bear directly, but often implicitly, on the unfolding events. The temporal location places the narrative in its historical position. That is, the setting is the result of a chain of events, or interpretations of experiences, and

therefore, it has a history. This history helps explain the rituals, customs, traditions, and modes of interaction. The temporal dimension of a setting also helps explain the shared meanings the characters give to the objects, activities, or people of the events. (Oliver, 1998, p. 252).

I have also identified storylines as containing social acts. I have analysed these narratives in terms of storylines that are the underlying structure, which is then plotted to create narrative sequence (Polkinghorne, 1995). I have chosen to use the view of discourse as containing three elements, the storyline evolving in an episode, the relative speaking positions of speakers and the social acts they perform, which is discussed by Harré and Gillett (1994). With this framework I am able to analyse the speaking positions available to the participants in the narratives they tell, and consider the effects that these narratives and subject positions have on enabling and constraining the women.

To investigate how each participant has made meaning of my question about her spirituality, I have identified clauses that fit with Labov's six-part narrative structure. By looking at these clauses, I have analysed what narratives have been told. It is difficult to sift through these complexly woven tapestries and pull out individual strands. I have identified narratives that enable the teller to construct a story in which they give the relevance of the telling (Polkinghorne, 1988). This narrative is a co-creation within the research pair, myself and the participant (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). I have analysed the subject positions offered in their narratives, and the ones that the women take up themselves. And I have considered the effects these narratives and subject positions have on enabling and constraining women.

In the next four chapters, I will present selected narratives of my participants transcripts, which I have analysed into four storylines which I have labelled: searching/journeying; self-knowing; life trauma/choice point, and fighting for life. These narratives will be discussed in terms of the research questions.



There is no more to all of this than what we see.
There's less than what we've dreamt of in our failed &
fucked up frail philosophy.

& that is all my friends existence will have ceased.
This universe I've built around me will have mortally
decreased

(Knox, 2000, p. 3)

Chapter Four

Searching/Journey Narrative

In this chapter I will discuss a narrative that I identified as the searching/journey narrative. In the searching/journey narrative women tell their spirituality as a journey they are on. This journey or search is an ongoing, organic process that is contributed to by various sources. It is an individual journey, and group participation in traditional institutions is resisted as being limiting of the individual journey. Being self-empowered is an important part of this searching narrative, and having access or a connection to the natural world is an important part of the search. This narrative allows the women to position themselves as independent and empowered women, with a connection to nature and the ability to learn and grow. In this chapter I will present extracts from the women's transcripts that demonstrate how they tell, in narrative form, stories of their spirituality. I will discuss the subject positions offered to women in these stories, and the subject positions that they take up themselves. I will also consider how this journey/searching narrative tells of subject positions that enable and constrain women.

For Drizzle, change enables her to be a different person from who she was as the beginning of the year, and a different person each moment, always. This position enables her to claim change as a resistance to sameness that is constraining:

D. I'm a different person now than I was at the beginning of the year you know um. I'm a different person than I was each moment you know always. That's what I like. (Drizzle 8.13)

Likewise for Caesal, spirituality is told as a journey of growth and inner strength. It is about where she is going. She is enabled by this telling to claim growth and development as a person. She also claims the right to journey through life and to experience moments rather than be defined by others or to have an answer:

C. I think it's about my inner strength and my growth and what I believe in. um there's not one like when I think of the word I think well what does it really mean to me. I haven't got an answer, I don't know. It's just how I think at the time but mainly about (.) just where I'm going and what (Caesal 1.2)

Fathom also tells of this journey. She takes up a subject position of being open to new ideas and therefore able to add to who she is. She tells herself as a proactive person, an active traveller. In this extract she positions herself as someone capable not only of being open to new ideas, but also of being aware that she can decide what she takes “on board” and therefore what she rejects.

F. yeah. I was thinking about it, like I've been thinking about it ever since I met you basically. Like what is spirituality to me. And it is that word a journey. Going along but being conscious of it being a journey (.) because that way you're open to new ideas and you're open to things that make you feel good and you're also aware that you don't have to take them on board. Kind of proactive and internal. Not like searching like a lost soul but searching because you're adding a little bit more to yourself. (Fathom 12.7)

In their narratives, the women also tell of searching in other people or a variety of books. The narrative is told of gathering pieces of information from a variety of sources and adding to one's own understanding. This is compared to structured religions which are told as being rule bound, limiting the ability to explore and the ability to take pieces of knowledge and leave other pieces as is right for the individual. For Drizzle in the following narrative, she takes up a position of searching in books and claims the right to connect what she had learned to the natural world around her. This position enables her to reject the church because it didn't seem absolutely right to her, and to tell herself as connected to the natural world that empowers her:

D. yeah I can remember being 18 and reading those um Celestine Prophecy books cos I was in Australia at the time and somebody had given it to me and when I read it I thought this all made sense and I can remember sitting there on a rock trying to see the aura and you know trying really hard and I think I did follow all that or tried to make some sort of sense of it for ages and then realised that I think I just thought no no I cant do it and now I'm probably much more at peace with the Earth and must more spiritual with the Earth in the sense of I can feel you know aughhh feel it much more than when I was reading the book and they were telling me how I should be doing it you know sort of thing um and then I mean at school I went to church every Sunday you know blah blah and I never had that urge it never made me go yes this is right you know sort of thing so I don't think I've ever really never had anything I've actually gone right like I've never gone Buddhism's right I want to study this I'm going to get into it as such (Drizzle 2.4)

Instead of looking in books, Maria tells of searching in other people who then guided and taught her. This enables her to reclaim self-esteem and therefore to

position herself as a more socially interactive person. This position is one of openness that enables growth and learning. In this extract Maria claims a position of producer of knowledge:

M. Like I had one woman telling me about my spirit guides which were women – thus easier to identify with. And it was always like a secret sort of magical relationship that I had that no one ever sort of knew about and it was something that I always had access to and it was really good for me like that and then I think um from that point I developed I guess it was getting more self esteem and stuff and I became more social. And it was like as soon as I got into a more social scene that spiritual stuff was sort of put on a back bench or sort or was still there but not so I wasn't like I was spending so much time meditating or thinking about it or (.) doing much around that because to me now its not just meditating it's just going and being by yourself somewhere and thinking or just um going off into another dimension you know and I found that the more I spent time with other people the less I did that but then I started to meet other people that um like we were talking about before which introduced me to new things or talked about some of those spiritual things and they had their own interpretations or their own ideas which sort of makes me (.) open up new doors (Maria 1.6)

In the next extract Maria tells herself as enabled through her spirituality to develop, assisted by other people. The journey or searching narrative enables a subject position of movement as a person, claiming the right to be influenced which enables ongoing development:

M. yup and I think that um as far as the path and journey thing it always was with me as I like went on and did my new things like when I moved to Christchurch and I moved in with this woman who was like a Witch and um she influenced me a lot by even just by being around her not so much as talking with her but the way she did things (Maria 2.2)

This spirituality journey is told as something that enables the tellers to talk about a process that results in inner peace. This searching often began when looking for the support and sense of family or community offered by established institutions such as churches, but also is clearly an individual search as these places were rejected as not providing what the women were looking for. In the following narrative, Sianan resists the institution of church through claiming her right to determine what is right and wrong. Her narrative of searching allows her to investigate and then reject the religion from a subject position of knowledge producer:

S. I went to church (.) bout 5 years ago or something and I went there a couple of times I went there basically because my friend went there and I thought (.) it seemed

*like a lot of fun because this church was just like basically music and singing and dancing and stuff and it was really funky stuff like it was (.) And but the whole fact that I only went there because it was fun not because it was (.) like when they started sitting down I'd just get bored shitless because I just didn't it didn't interest me how we should treat god and you know stuff like that. And telling you all this sort of stuff when basically you do what you want anyway and if you've got that influence then you do otherwise you know. Like I have respect for people who believe in god or whatever you know but that's their decision. I think my own mind can tell me what's right and wrong and what I can do rather than like a Bible or a law you know like law I know you have to otherwise you'll get arrested and put in jail but you know *laugh* but otherwise nah I wouldn't I just think I can make up my own mind. (Sianan 3.4-7)*

Fathom also tells of searching in a church initially, for support and to be part of a family. However, she positions herself as individual thinker, unable to rely on 'faith' alone. She claims an academic reading of the church and the bible, enabling her to question their foundations. Fathom constructs a subject position of knowledge producer through this searching in institutions, and rejects the constraining position of the faith required to receive the support offered by the church:

F. definitely um (.) I think when I was younger my friends went to church and I went to church too and my mum was really into going to church but that's her kind of spirituality but no denomination whatsoever she spreads around the churches like she likes the services at the Baptist church and um and then I came to the decision that church wasn't for me and so (.) I didn't really I think I went through a stage when I was really searching inside of myself really depressed and stuff like that probably around 13 to 17 and then I decided that not so much for the spirituality but maybe for the support that I wanted to go to church and I wanted to be part of that family. so I guess whenever I'm really down it's almost like I would love to have that much faith as people who do go to church do have but um it's not for me simply because I'm I don't know I'm quite cynical about have a belief system based around the bible because I have academically looked at it in that kind of way. I believe that people probably do get the kind of healing and um what they're looking for through the church mainly because of support maybe and yea (Fathom 1.4)

Through the following telling of searching, Maria resists the formalised religions that were available in her society. She positions herself within a Wiccan belief, which is told as less organised, and therefore allows the ongoing journey to continue. This telling enables her to reject the constraints of the patriarchal Christian religion and take up a position of individuality:

M. oh its just totally that that it's a Christian that's a religious thing that doesn't satisfy me in any way I mean I know um when I was quite young that I wanted to I had um some inclination to do something sort of spiritual religious and all that seemed that there was available was the Christian thing so I'd sort of gone toward that and then my mother had stopped me and said she tried to look into the Baha'i's faith because that was what she was into sort of leaning in that direction but it didn't happen so I didn't go that way but I think that was one of the points where I did come to realise it wasn't for me anyway that Christian thing and I mean there were a couple of other spiritualist churches that I went to and they give you a piece of paper and its got their little songs and that on it and its got the there's three or 4 tenants of the um spiritualist church and I always had a problem with all of them because they'd always say 'the brotherhood of man' and 'his souls' or there'd always be a reference to a male thing and I always felt like standing up and complaining about it because it felt like they were being this real sort of I hate to say it but new agey or sort of more open more universal kind of thing but yet they still put these male references in it and it always sort of annoyed me so I stopped going to the spiritualist sort of churches sort of because of all that and sort of because they didn't really fulfil me with what I wanted I mean when I was going to one when I was younger it was good but then as I grew older it it became less I didn't feel like I needed to go to that sort organised thing and even with the organised witchcraft or the organised Wiccan thing you know how now it's real popular you know those little witch covens like that I've never been drawn to that because I felt like it was too organised (Maria 3.4)

The rejection of being positioned within the formal settings of patriarchy is told as being disempowered by the patriarchy. The journey/searching therefore enables the construction of speaking positions of empowered women capable of finding their own truth, and placing an importance on the constant state of the journey – telling themselves as strong, independent women who are self-determining and resistant to the patriarchal positions that disempower them. The search or journey included the desire to find a family, or social support, and then rejecting the apparent rules of the institution. In the following extract, Caesal claims a position of living in the present that enables her to reject the stories of Jesus as unrealistic and therefore hard to believe in. This claim incorporates the ongoing nature of the searching/journey narrative. Her search has informed her about several world religions, and she is then able to take up a speaking position of resistance to believing in any one of them:

K. have you ever like looked for and found like religion or a spirituality and sort of found something and then its not been right

C. I've never I mean (.) there's never one there's not one religion that I totally believe in because it's so unknown and I try and think about it and I get so frustrated even angry sometimes

K. in what way?

C. um probably that I'll (.) the strongest one to me and the one that I tend to kind of when I think about it or read about it or talk to these people would be the Hari Krishna's because I feel it's the fairest and I can understand it like um Karma to me I really do believe in that um being a vegetarian I believe in like we should not kill animals to me I can understand that I can understand lots of parts of it um so I tend to go more towards that but then there's areas of that that I don't believe as well. I don't know enough about all the others and it's only because I choose not to go there because I, I don't know I just (.) it's an area that I choose not to go in because sometimes I don't want to know. or not not wanting to know but (.)

K. is it like you know for yourself and you don't need to read some book or something to know about it

C. yeah it's like I don't even know I think it's part of me still lives in the present and when I think about all that I think to me it's just been so unreal and I read things and I think gosh that's beyond this world like how can that even have happened and I read some of the stories that um I mean even how Jesus was put on the cross and I think I dunno I just think how can that be because sometimes it just sounds too, too crazy and so it makes it really hard for me to believe (Caesal 3.2-7)

Maria takes up a position of 'rebel' that enables her to journey and explore excluded knowledges such as 'witchcrafty stuff'. This journeying enables her to form a sense of identity and reclaim her self-esteem. Her journey also empowers her and gives her a source of power:

M. its almost like it's a big thing which is always there but you get access to it in all these different ways and even to define it I don't know what words I'd use to like I say different days it might be different but I think as a path as a learning thing of internal growth and discovery that for me it started with an interest in ghosts and living in haunted houses and in then I think it developed like being a teenager and having um problems at home and problems with (.) like social life my social life wasn't that good and then I went to a new school and um met a girl there who was into (.) and you reminded me of it before because we were talking about it into the more WitchCrafty sort of more black magic kind of stuff and to me it was um a (.) source of power ohh in a way more like um you know if I'm not going to interact with all my peers that well because or a kind of identity that I thought and in a way it was a lot more comfortable getting into spiritual things or meditating or um (.) playing sorts of games like Ouija boards or um reading about witchcraft and spells and (.) things like that that were really interesting and a lot more relaxing I find a lot of solace or enjoyment getting into that kind of thing (Maria 1.4)

Maria tells the journey through the challenge to find spirituality in New Zealand culture that is not Christian based. In this telling, she resists the monopoly of

Christian presence, and claims the right for access to other spirituality. Maria tells of the constraining effect of this monopoly on her as an active seeker of spirituality:

K. yup yup so to explore some of the other knowledges

M. totally yeah the ones that aren't promoted that aren't out there all the time in our face all the time like Christians and there's all these different sects of Christianity you know when you look in the newspaper and there's the churches and they're all Christian and I think it's a real shame that way because I definitely felt like when I was younger that I wanted to get into a spiritual thing but it was a real search to find something that wasn't Christian (Maria 10.6-7)

Through the journey/searching narrative, the women are able to resist the constraining positions offered to them by the Christian church, and by patriarchy. They can reclaim their position and resist the passivity of taking what they have been offered by the patriarchy. Part of this resistance is to develop and speak their own sense of spirituality. In this next extract, Fathom claims the journey/searching to be something expected of modern New Zealanders. She claims an individual search, resisting group conformity. This is told as a reaction to the patriarchal institutions that limit women and other groups, and also constrained individual growth and development. In this construction Fathom is positioned as someone within a greater movement of society:

F. ok within a patriarchal society how do I see women's positions within that. Um I dunno my views I guess it's all changing. In the past I guess we just had to take what we were given and I think that's why something like this, like what you're doing in coming out because so many people are searching and there's a lot of pressure to search and find your spirituality and find your place I think you're almost (.) you almost look kind of ignorant if you're not searching and doing lots of stuff and trying to find a place because there is so much freedom I guess the pendulum has been this way for so long that we're taking it right back the other side and we will find our place in a while but I think there's change afoot you know you can feel it (Fathom 3.10)

Fathom takes up a position of resistance to institutions that seek to constrain behaviour through controlling understanding through the threat of a removed, judgemental and all-seeing god. From this position of resistance, she is able to challenge the concept of imposing morality through fear, which enables her to reclaim the individual journey as an empowering process. She also resists the subject position of powerlessness created by rule-bound beliefs that she tells as

operating from fear and punishment. The watching reference to god is similar to Foucault's (1982) description of the mechanism of pastoral power and contributes to the argument that this structure is inherently about power relationships.

F. yeah I guess that's what annoys me as well about it I do it really does slack me off like the fact that you have to come in line with those kinds of religions like, finding your spirituality should be a journey that you go on and you and every little step you get you kind of get that feeling inside like you know that real buzz like yeah like I just found that out about myself and this adds to who I am this little, I'll take this little bit and add it to me. But when people kind of (.) get hit on by the rules then it's really damaging like you know kids who I've known her mother told her that, she had a terrible dream and it had heaps of religious connotations in it like her father passing away and stuff but you could just see them they were just connotations and her mother told her that's gods way of punish um it's god's way of telling you something you're doing wrong, or the devil punishing you and that that's just pegging someone down and using that to maybe bring them into line within you be good you do what I say, you know we're watching, god's watching. (Fathom 4.11)

Artemis tells of resisting the assumptions of the patriarchal church she was born into. Through the journey of resisting the church, she claims the right to freedom and resists the claim of the church to produce knowledge. In this telling of resistance she takes up a position of entitlement to think for herself and be empowered:

*A. ok well I mean it might just be some Scottish preachers who knows but I mean that was very and it was incredibly um it was very rigid it was very prescribed and it was also quite paternalistic well not quite very paternalistic incredibly paternalistic and I was fine with that because you know we all went to clubs and we were all part of the same thing until I was about 16 and 16 obviously with burgeoning sexuality and um just my particular way of being un you know freedom is really important to me you know about being a free spirit and I really relate to that and up at about the age of 16 I think when you're getting into discourse and reason and whatever is that um I just realised that if I did things a little differently it was not allowed or if I saw things a little differently it was not allowed or if I asked a question in bible studies I was given a rote answer and there was no discussion no discussion was allowed so there wasn't any room to move and within a very very short space of time I had gone from being full-on to full-off and just so disillusioned with the church disillusioned with Christianity I was probably also starting to read quite a lot about how about the whole power trips of Christianity and I was starting to learn about St Paul and St Augustine because the moment I think you start to become a rebel you find other rebels and so then you start sharing knowledge and you go what (.) I'm not doing this *laughs* absolutely I mean its an ageable thing with your parents and everything else and so I mean it was flicking all the time*

K. I need to say something here about the rule-bound-ness the no-room-to-move-ness is Christianity ok up to the point that you start to question it

A. well that would be my experience is that if you if you're totally (2) that's an interesting thing if you're totally submissive then its fine and but you see that's the external power you know what I mean (.) oh in fact you've just made me think of the most wonderful thing I wont say it now its probably not in the right context. So so the minister the church the whatever they knew what was right and wrong so as long as you subscribed to that you were fine the moment you questioned the smallest thing about whether the minister was right or whether there might be another view it just went bang like that. (Artemis 2.3-5)

As discussed above, women are enabled through their tellings of the searching or journeying of their spirituality. I will now discuss how spirituality is also told as an organic process. This telling of organic-ness allows a resistance to rule-bound institutions and incorporates an entitlement to self-development and self-empowerment. Religion is also resisted as a process of separating people from nature, and the women use this resistance to reclaim a connection to the natural cycles around them, therefore able to position themselves within nature which reciprocally empowers them.

Maria positions herself as someone always learning something new from a variety of sources. She claims the right to change, and tells this through the organic metaphor of spirituality as a moving and flowing process:

M. what I sort of discovered is that every time I sort of think that I knew what was going on or I'd sort of think that I knew what was happening with my spirituality or what it was all about I'd always learn something new from another person or another book or something which would always not take everything that I thought before away but change it and so it really pointed out that it could never be a solid thing it was just a flowing moving thing that never stops (Maria 4.2)

In the following extract, Maria resists the church and identifies its knowledge as constructed, which enables her to claim her own knowledge making. Through this claim she is enabled to position herself within nature that is related to the cycle of death and birth. Nature is told as removed from the man made religions. Maria resists the constraining effect of this removal, and tells her spirituality as an organic process connected to nature:

M. Well they're not I think its (.) um like they're removed from it but they're also not encouraged to (.) get back to it and that was the thing I found I guess that put me off a lot of the organised religions is it was more like I guess I always had that innate

understanding of spirituality was something more natural was something the nature thing like a death thing or a birth thing and if I go into any kind of religion it's a man made thing and yeah it's removed from nature I mean they might base some of their things on nature but it's still gone a long way from it (Maria 6.5)

In the next excerpt, Belinda also identifies the detachment from nature as a cause of problems in our society as a way that we as a society have lost our purpose. She tells this loss of understanding of the whole process as an inter-generational phenomenon which enables her to relate it back to her own spirituality and position herself as a person who has lost the community of love in which she grew up. This loss of community then positions her as stranded alone. Belinda positions herself within the greater society as being separated from nature and therefore having lost her ability to rejoice in nature and the purpose of being here. She makes sense of her current distance from her own spirituality by showing how her role of mother has disempowered her journey, and her ability to have the time to connect with nature.

B. complete breakdown of society and of communities and its because of a detachment from nature I think it goes hand in hand we have become a completely materialistic society where we um you know the farmers want big crops and they want them quickly and they want they'll put anything on the soil to get big money straight away we don't think about future generations we don't think about the generation past we don't see ourselves as a slot in the whole process of this is our period here on earth and um what is it all about we've lost our purpose about what the hell we're doing here and I always thought growing up that the purpose of us being here was to have lots of love and lots of people around and just to rejoice in nature and it was really simple really basic suddenly I'm thrown into a world where I'm all by myself and nature um doesn't exist cos I'm so damned busy you know doing this because I've got so little support because that community's broken down and it goes hand in hand um you know I'm gonna throw a plastic nappy on the baby because I'm too stressed out to bother washing it because I've got no support no other one here to help me um my mans done a runner he's going living the lap of luxury you know drinking and doing whatever he wants to do its all on my shoulders and it's that break down of society and the breakdown of women coming together um to legitimise what they're doing to legitimise all the feelings that they're feeling and that's what we do in our little sort of mothers meeting and you know when I meet other women its sort of like that we just legitimise. (Belinda 12.8)

For Agnes, the journey is told as a continuous cycle that is life, and also the monthly cycle of women's menstrual cycle. She reclaims women's cycles as natural and connected to the cycles of the moon enabling women to be in tune with the natural world. By positioning women within a greater natural cycle of planet Earth and the

moon cycles, she is able to reclaim women as natural and resist constructions of women such as hormonally problematic. This cycle is continuous and therefore Agnes positions her spiritual journey as a continuous cycle.

A. and the Earth and the Moon and the whole cycle (.) I mean life cycles its just a continuous cycle, continuous circles and woman is a total embodiment of that you know I mean our periods go on on a monthly cycle whether its 3 weekly or 4 weekly its this repetitive cycle of time frame I mean some people who are very in tune with themselves or very in tune with Earth actually cycle with the full moon. (Agnes 17.5)

Artemis reclaims the right to have knowledge of the divine from the priest, or the person in a position of power. The journey for her is a spiral, not a linear movement and involves a journey from the external to the internal – from learning to knowing. She resists disempowering positions offered by the church through a submission to a god, and claims her journey as a process of empowerment:

A. is through the priest and you must have the priest and that was the most interesting thing has all the power and so it was that whole thing about you can't talk to god directly

K. you can only know through the minister

A. through the priest yup

K. makes me think about that disempower thing

A. well it does and you see the thing is that here I am now and particularly

K. that's a good joke

A. no it is its so funny because when I said that um you're submissive to the external what I realised my journey has been is going from submission to the external to surrender to the internal and that thank you for that because I've never seen it like that but that's absolutely true so submission to the external is disempowering and surrender to my god within the divine within is the most empowering powerful thing you can ever do or I could ever do it empowers me in every way so its it isn't a circle it's the spiral I guess as you go from there and then you come up to this and my whole journey has been about going from there from external to internal. (Artemis 2.9-3.2)

Artemis tells of separation with nature that creates positions of power for men and constrains women from the production of knowledge. She rejects the need for domination and tells it as a mechanism of claiming power. Absent in this telling is the position of women in relationship to the power taken up by men. In this

absence, there is a connection between women and nature who were dominated by men, and a positioning of women with the connectedness to this nature as not needing to take power through domination:

A. well that's what power does I mean that's that whole domination and that and I mean in a way I mean you have to sort of understand domination in that um probably that's how we've survived through the ages is that we have learned not unfortunately we haven't learned to live with nature but I think there was a time when we did but um and the industrial revolution is probably the time where um nature was to be dominated not so much that it really did I think but because that made men feel powerful that they needed to have to feel that they had power over nature I mean for me that's what so much of science is about their science is about the domination its actually not needing nature because we can do it ourselves thank you very much, and that and for me there's another paradox because there is some great good in that, there is great evil you know but and not to use an emotive word, there is great separation. And that's what happened. (Artemis 15.3)

The journey/searching narrative is told through reclaiming knowledge from structured religions. To tell spirituality, the women in this study told of journeying and of searching for spirituality in a variety of places, and then of the internal journey or search which is organic and is positioned within the greater cycles of nature. To make sense of spirituality they claimed the right to an ongoing process of growth and change that also relates to the cycles of nature. In the next chapter I will discuss some of the self-knowing claims that these women also made in their tellings and consider the subject positions that were created and taken up. The narratives I have identified are interwoven and not discrete and the extracts may overlap between the identified narratives.

Chapter Five

Self-Knowing Narrative

In this chapter I will discuss a second narrative that I identified as the self-knowing narrative. In this narrative the participants of this study claim the right to know for themselves what they believe. This is told through reclaiming the right to know and be the knowledge producer of their spirituality. They also resist the concept of a single truth as there is no proof possible, claiming the right to determine the truth about life for themselves. They claim the right to be self-empowered, told as taken back from the patriarchy, and they also empower others to have the same right. The self-knowing narrative, like the search/journey narrative discussed in the previous chapter, involves nature and the women's connection to the natural world that is the source of energy and peace for these women. I will present extracts from my participants' transcripts and discuss how these women take up or reject the subject positions offered. I will also consider the enabling and constraining effects of the subject positions told in the self-knowing narrative.

There is an overlap or an interweave between this narrative and the journeying/searching narrative. In the self-knowing narrative, spirituality is told as something the women can only know for themselves which relates to the process of journey or searching described earlier. They position themselves as resistant to rules being imposed on them by an external source. They reclaim the right to know for themselves, to have a direct connection to what they understand as spirituality, and they claim the right to determine what is right or wrong for themselves. In resisting, they claim the ability to 'write their own book' of rules or beliefs, as much as any other person could. This is demonstrated by Sianan who claims the right to speak, positioning herself as someone who does not need someone else to tell her what to do. She empowers other people to find out for themselves what way is right for them. She cites the bible as an example of people using something to tell them what to do, but claims the right to determine this for herself. This is also compared to school in this narrative, two structures which she sees as providing rules and boundaries for people, which she rejects as necessary for her. In this narrative she

positions herself as someone who is able to think for herself and gives that right to other people:

S. I don't think my ways right. I don't think any way is right. I think you should find out for yourself. What makes your spirit feel good. If you believe in reading a bible and listening to what it tells you to do, then that's fine that's the way you want. Me personally I find I don't need something else to tell me what to do. I suppose I've been like that my whole life like through school and stuff like that. I was like I always spoke my own mind. Let me speak. (Sianan 5.8)

Like Sianan, Drizzle rejects the need for a structure. She tells of religion as a way to define spirituality, which she rejects, positioning herself as someone who doesn't follow a defined religion. Instead of following, she creates her own spirituality, learning new things all the time. She resists the need for the structure of 'religion', and claims her own spirituality. Rather than a set of rules, her spirituality is an ongoing process of dealing with life as it comes. Again she resists the need for something to tell her how to think or what is going to happen to her, claiming the right to deal with life as it unfolds:

D. um well to be actually honest with you um I find it all really confusing for the pure fact that I find spirituality I don't know people seem to put it down to religion and you know um and what and that sort of side of it whereas I don't really follow any set religion as such and for me spirituality is is my self it um (.) oh I change all the time with it you know its sort of like I find I learn new things every day and I put that into myself which is which becomes my own sort of spirituality its like I don't know if I can really explain it you know

K. yeah so its like um when you say it changes all the time like things around

D. My ideas on things and you know just my perception on like um being seventeen and at the age of seventeen um really really wanting to have a grasp on you know some sort of religion or something to believe in you know and now um I don't feel I need that you know its like I don't need a religion to tell me how to think or what's going to happen to me or what should be happening you know its more of an everyday thing it's whatever sort of life throws at me you know (Drizzle 1.2-4)

The self-knowing narrative is told as a rejection of following, claiming the right to know for self, rather than follow. This positions the speaker as an individual, rejecting the structure of a defined belief. The process of self-knowing is one of finding out for oneself, not from someone else's telling or construction. This telling is related to books, and the women position themselves as capable of writing their own book of knowing, rather than being told what to do by an existing book. They

are therefore positioned as authoritative, but also as people who choose to reject the position of follower, preferring to know for themselves. They do not want to be part of a religion, nor feel the need to create a new one as shown in the following extracts:

D. completely honestly I just I think (.) I don't know I've just always been just me you know and I can't follow any of these other things I have no disrespect for other people and I love to sit down and listen and hear what they have to say about their religion or their beliefs and things and I think that's really important um and sometimes I learn loads from it and I agree with bits and pieces from each thing you know and if I could maybe put it all together and come up with one big bang (Drizzle 2.6)

D. I am open to anything you know if somebody came along and said to me well (.) um again I think you would have to go right back to the beginning with me tell me exactly how we as human beings we work and how we got here and they can come up with perfect reason this is it how we got here I would love it if somebody would do that you know I really would maybe I need to go and you know discover it for myself and make up my own reasons for it

K. that's the thing I wonder about it is that if there are already systems out there that you can pick up books and you've already rejected the ones that are available

D. that's because its someone else telling me you know I need to do it for myself I need to find out you know I need to really write my own book on how it all is (Drizzle 8.2-4)

M. yeah or I think like I could try to like if I actually devoted some lot of time and energy to doing something I'm sure I could come up with something but um (.) I don't see any reason to do it in a way unless I was um trying to start up a whole new religion or something (Maria 2.6)

In the next extract, Jonesy tells her spirituality as something she 'feels' which has to flow, rather than something that she intellectualises. In this telling, spirituality that is intellectualised constrains her and causes her to tell it as something it ought to be, rather than what it is for her. Here Jonesy claims the right to know for herself and resists the need to explain it or be able to talk about it intellectually:

J. maybe I have got, I feel about it now is that (.) I (.) I feel that I have to be comfortable (I) feel comfortable ah I don't have to feel I have to intellectualise (.) my spirituality (.) ah (.) I just feel it (.) it has to flow (.) and I think this has a conflict with my (.) personality because if I start to (.) um, if I start to try to explain or

intellectualise it to any degree (.) I then become (.) um (2) almost um pedantic it it it I start to um (3) perhaps mix up (.) ah what ought to be rather than what is

K. right so if you sort of adhere to the standardised ways of talking about things then it's not suitable for you

J. yes its it it is, probably um maybe my spirituality is more has evolved more to what I feel than what I think about it (Jonesy 1.4-6)

Fathom also claims the right to know for herself in this next extract. Here spirituality is defined by the feeling of inner peace. Her spirituality enables her to find inner peace, and also gives some direction or destination to her journey or life. Fathom positions herself as someone who is able to find her own direction, rejecting the need to show religious devotion to something:

F. um (.) I guess for me it means (.) trying to find my inner peace and where I'm heading to. Spirituality doesn't mean worshipping something to me um it just means finding my direction and feeling at peace within myself. (Fathom 1.2)

Here, Fathom tells of the limitation of a rule bound set of beliefs. She is able to reject these beliefs as she has researched them academically. This creates a subject position of a self-determined individual rather than a follower of an external source, and enables her to determine her own understanding.

F. um I think the limitation comes with (.) having to believe whole-heartedly in something and I just don't believe it, I don't, I find holes in the (.) maybe the rules that go along with belonging to something like that but I wish I didn't. so I don't know I would love to have that much faith, I wish I didn't, but I do. I think that might come from having studied it a wee bit (Fathom 1.10)

F. ooh yeah definitely um (.) just the place of women being in no way associated with the leadership and the rituals which is so much a part of it, it just says you're the followers. This is where you stand we make the rules um you look to us for guidance, they're in control

K. what's the problem with that because why, what's your issue with that

F. my problem with that um (.) I dunno I don't allow myself to be treated like that, I've got more to offer um and it's just not right because it's making out that we should accept it because it's something that's good for us, it's our well-being and our um you know eternal life is based on bringing yourself down and I know it's not right because I know in myself the situation it was written in and the service it is going to serve, the reason or the purpose of it and it just blows me away that people still, well

I know why people still follow it you know it gives you a feeling of support and something to believe in and pray to (Fathom 3.2-4)

Self-knowing is also told as the ability to construct your own reality. This positions the woman as the knower but also as the creator of her own reality:

A. but I don't believe in hell you know I don't believe in the god and heaven and hell concept you know but I believe that we create our own heaven and hell you know. I mean if you go around being the world's human form of bitch (.) you can't expect anything but hell around you because you create it, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. So I don't do that (Agnes 5.10)

In claiming the right to know for self, a single truth of the universe or life is told as unknowable and therefore something one should remain open about. In this self-knowing narrative they tell of the need to seek proof before they are willing to believe any one perspective, claiming the right to have their own understanding of how things are. This position enables the women to reject particular versions of spirituality and claim the right to define this for themselves, therefore being told as self-empowered. In the following extracts, the women resist being told what to do or believe because they have the right and the ability to do this for themselves:

C. yup definitely. I mean I would like it more if there was just something like this pen – this is it. I mean I can understand that. I mean if someone said this is your god I'd go yeah cool ok

K. would you though?

C. I mean not a pen but

K. but they do they say this is what care is from god

C. but then it's like I need proof and that's not enough. Hearing a story about the maker the god creator who created woman and man and I mean (.) dunno I just think it's like a big, it's a fairytale (Caesal 4.3-8)

D. I think the main thing for me is proof I need which personally I need proof before I before I can possibly say yes I'm going to believe in god because you know like the bible I find it really interesting to read and all that sort of stuff but I couldn't actually say right this is absolute true fact (.) um and I'm sure if I studied into it more and then maybe they could prove something for me but you know as it is you know I'm not going to go yes I believe that you know um I think I probably more follow the scientific view where as you know if they got you know scientists have got proof but even then you know I feel a bit dodgy because that's only the scientists proof you

know it's not I think I have to discover these things for myself (.) before I can fully um (.) yeah believe in it (Drizzle 1.6)

This telling of the need for proof enables the women to position themselves as part of the greater society that is unable to provide proof or a complete and acceptable theory of the workings of life. It also allows them to resist institutions that claim a single truth as shown in the following extracts:

S. yeah. I'm not saying that I'm better than anyone else I'm just saying that we're I think everyone is their own person and their own their spirituality and soul and stuff is brought out by the way they think and like if religiousness or god or whatever is the way that you want your mind to think then I don't think I think it's fine ok for them if that's what they want but I don't actually think its letting their own spirituality out like its sort of telling the stories of someone else. (Sianan 7.5)

K. so when you say they can be told a thing and they'll believe it do you mean that um or taught are you saying that that's different to finding it within yourself?

J. Yes very much so because that's well some people have a spiritual maturity quite young but I think that what they are doing is taking on board somebody else's spirituality or somebody else's concept of spirituality and because it's it's working for that other person they feel that it is working for them and and they become in tune with that rather than in tune with themselves (Jonesy 2.1-2)

The rejection of rules is an important part of the self-knowing narrative. Rules imply there is a single truth, which is rejected as shown above. The position constructed is one of individual thinker and producer of knowledge, rather than needing a set of rules to believe in. Maria rejects the singular truth here and takes up a subject position of free thought through the ability to learn from a variety of sources:

M. so just from saying that spirituality is something which (.) shouldn't have that it cant have it if its going to be something which is to honestly truly grow in one person or in people any kind of rules or standards or icons or something like that is always going to limit it in some way because it takes away the free thought and the self-exploration because it guides and it should be something that isn't guided at all but then at the same time saying that there are some things in either different religions or different organisations that I do appreciate and enjoy but I couldn't ever stick with one organisation and like the theosophical society there's a lots in there that I really appreciate and like but I couldn't fully devote myself to them because then there's all these other areas which they are not interested in which I do appreciate so I guess then you can take that freedom for yourself by reading all different books and getting a little bit from each book (Maria 3.8)

Artemis positions herself as a guardian who creates spaces for other people to then be empowered. Her spirituality enables her to empower other people by giving them spaces, rather than constraining them by interfering. She enables others to be self-knowing and therefore self-empowered. This enabling includes healing and through the claims of self-knowing, people are positioned to ‘work their own miracles’:

A. absolutely actually guardian is a very good word because I often feel like that my older warrior woman is that I do stand as guardian and I stand as guardian for certain people who are really but I stand in love and I stand in compassion and I can create a space and I don't have to stand in making it right or in interfering because often I mean the thing is that I think that if you interfere or go oh well I think this is what you should do what you've done is you've disempowered that person you've said you are not capable of working this out yourself and if I can create some space which is often all that people need they need unconditional love and a safe space they can work their own miracles which for me is what healing is about that's all that healing is (Artemis 7.3)

In the following narrative Artemis resists patriarchal institutions as a power mechanism. This telling is supported by the pastoral power mechanism identified by Foucault (1982) and offers a subject position of being disempowered and constrained. Later in her transcript she reclaims the right to know which resists this mechanism of patriarchal power. This claim relates back to the rejection of one single truth that was discussed earlier:

A. I well I'll be totally brutal and I think it was a total male power trip because I mean the church at that time when they took over you know the bible writing the bible and putting out the laws

K. the Romans

A. yeah exactly you see the churches also owned all the land so there was a whole how were we going to keep these people down when they were thinking about loving your neighbour and starting to think outside and also of course it wasn't until I cant remember I think about the third or fourth century where in fact the church decided to take reincarnation out of the teachings because reincarnation was too dangerous because if people thought they had another go they weren't going to follow the rules you know they were going to go oh well if I sinned that's ok I get to come back and do it so it was I do believe total lust for power that meant that you wrote it down and remember that's a time of great illiteracy so literacy was power the word was power only the priest could read it or the monks and they kind of gave it to the people well what did they do they gave their interpretation (Artemis 9.2-4)

A. *and that's all you can say that is your truth that when you're on that land you sense you have a sense of spirit and that is the story you are telling no more no more less*

K. *and that's all it needs to be*

A. *cos that's your truth and that's all it ever can be for anybody and there can't be anymore need for it to be anything else because how splendid because if each of us stands in our truth that for me is about standing in the spirit (Artemis 12.1-4)*

Agnes also resists the subject position offered by the patriarchal institution of a particular religion which encourages only rote learning, and is told as constraining of self knowing:

A. *we was young hippies living in the suburbs these Jehovah witness people caught [husband] when he was watching the kids and ah (.) cos he chats away and decided that maybe we would be worth saving and ah [husband] said we've been invited around to these peoples place for tea and I said who are these people and its like I'd oh really nice people and I said are they religious oh I don't know he said oh I don't think so and we get there and Jehovah witness so anyway*

K. *welcome to the Truth*

A. *so anyway it was a very light dinner but (.) as soon as they said grace we knew and um anyway so very nice but we went home well every weekend we started getting these people round on a Saturday I think we went through about seven couples there was two men a woman and a man you know three people a couple of little kids' prams anyway um I started saying to them look what I would really like is for this discussion to go any further I need you to tell me from your heart why you believe in that (.) oh well this chapter nah close your book please close your book cos I've got that book and I can read that chapter I want you to close your book and tell me from here why you believe in god. Oh well and do you know out of seven couples thirteen people not one of them could tell me. Not one of them. And yeah so what does that say brainwashing there's no individual thought there's not depth of feeling or knowing or um awareness. (Agnes 6.1-2)*

This telling of self-knowing includes a rejection of rote learning from external sources. This creates a subject position which is enabled by self knowing, and tells of the constraint of knowing via an external source which is rote learned.

Like the journey/searching narrative, the self-knowing narrative is told as something that relates to nature, a relationship between the woman and the natural world – the ocean, the earth. In claiming self-empowerment they resist patriarchal structure and

become empowered as part of the natural world. This self-knowing narrative seems to move from individual freedom to collective existence within the whole of nature. In telling themselves as self-knowing, they create a subject position of women capable of finding peace and revival in the natural world around them which then enables them to carry on with their lives as shown in the following extracts:

K. um so in terms of your spirituality then have you found a way for yourself to express yourself spiritually?

S. yup if I if I don't deal with stuff like sometimes I feel as though just doing like that day like I'll just go somewhere so quiet. Not that it's quiet away from birds or anything like that just away from cars and trees oh not cars and trees cars and houses and like the beach is awesome like I just go there and I actually think hard into things and then I come away feeling like revived sort of. (Sianan 5.1-2)

K. so for you, you are you and that's what you are. It doesn't need to go any further than that maybe

D. no I don't think so. I want to learn I want to expand every day and I'll do that through reading books and talking to people you know and everyday experiences and but (I) nothing else that I wanna that I (.) I love not being the only time well I feel most in tune with myself when I'm sat down um (.) personally if I'm sat down at the sea looking out to sea (.) that is when I feel most at peace you know just content with what I'm doing and who I am and all the rest of it and I always feel a lot more refreshed when I jump in the car or walk off to go back home or whatever but um I look forward to that connection you know sat down looking out to sea (Drizzle 7.7-8)

M. totally and I think that with like this big thing with my spirituality is the nature thing and the magic thing because spirituality and magic are a big interchangeable thing as well and so for my magic it was totally nature bound like you know I learned from the Native American things that there's life in rocks or in trees and stuff and so when I did or do magic its related around that and its never around the um some person from a few hundred years wrote this book about here's a spell to do this and this and this its never about that its always about you know you've got to make up your own that suits you and you find a peace with nature and a sort of interaction with nature (Maria 4.6)

M. and I feel definitely a lot more comfortable with that um interacting with nature than with people even like talking about spirituality and I think of like other people that I've talked with about it or have some interaction with um its really different as far as everyone's got their own ideas and everyone's got their own words or understanding of things and you can never really communicate it with each other because you never really have the right tools to communicate so then interacting with nature its more (.) ah (.) true because you're not using words your just using

thoughts or feelings or (.) energies or something which I mean you might have with people but its on a totally different level (Maria 5.2)

B. nature the earth is definitely it. Sunset, trees, the waves um those things are what are actually going you are going to find your happiness in those pure things because if you place your happiness on those material things you're going to keep striving and its never going to be good enough and you're just going to be running too fast for your own legs. You know just get back to the basic you know. If you have baby and you know you're sore and you're painful and you're pissed off just go out somewhere go for a walk leave your baby with someone don't feel so guilty all the time. Leave it with someone and go to the beach and have a big scream into the sea and let it go and that's ok and who cares if there's five people on the beach saying look at that crazy woman that fucken crazy bitch little do they know that you've had a fucken baby fuck you you know (Belinda 15.10)

The connection to nature is told as important within the self-knowing narrative, and losing this connection is told as losing the ability to be in tune or be empowered. Disconnection from nature is told from a subject position where the women are constrained by this loss and disempowered in this position. The women position themselves within the natural world and the cycles of this world rather than within the spiritual world constructed by books and institutions, and when they lost their connection to this natural world they need to get it back to be self-knowing and empowered:

J. it affects what you eat it affects what you are doing in the garden because your mind is being absorbed with something else it's not you disharmonise yourself you disharmonise yourself

K. so did that, did that start to take you further and further from the orthodox teachings then? That feeling of yours?

J. Definitely because they can't that can't help you at all it's pushing it onto someone else and you still um you're not growing you're not solving you're getting someone else to take that responsibility and you're not putting it onto yourself and so you haven't grown in anyway and it's been so easy but not that it matters but if it, if that's what people want to do and if it makes them feel better then good luck to them but as far as I'm concerned it doesn't do any good for me because it's still there at the back of my mind that um I'm not in tune with myself (Jonesy 4.10-12)

F. and that's why I say it's not like I almost wish I could have that much faith because I don't look down on people for having that but it doesn't suit me, my things are different. What makes me feel re-energized. It's almost like plugging yourself in and like recharging like going for a surf. I think, and I've just been doing reading as well like about realising that the ocean is energy itself and each wave carries a

certain amount of energy and there's this really interesting article I was reading was saying that because we are all made up of certain energy and the wave is energy can you, cos you know how sometimes things happen the way you want to and it was all about can you influence the way that it moves and stuff like that, and that was quite cool. Like you say, I think I like the magical and stuff, you need to have a little bit of magic. (Fathom 12.1)

Fathom positions herself within nature which she then tells as energy waves, enabling her to be self determining. Agnes also claims the cycles of the earth as part of her femininity in terms of the birthing process, the menstrual process, and the cycles of the moon. Below, Agnes also positions herself within nature and tells how being separated from these cycles can be disempowering for her:

A. um for me it's about the essence of how I live my life. Um I wouldn't say I'm a religious person but it's just understanding the Earth and it's a feminine thing really. While men certainly give life we create life and we mature it and we give birth and to me that's about as spiritual as you can get and the essence of everything that we are. Like I said before a sense of where we are I mean just recently in the last couple of years I've been sliding and I lost it for a while there I was just so busy being and doing and um I stopped seeing things whereas every day now I look at the sky just as much as I can and just enjoy it. I watched um the eclipse of the moon last year. I think we're so busy hiding in our boxes that we forget too what we're actually about. And I mean I know some people think they're I don't know a word to describe they know I'm not religious I don't go to a room or an area once a week and make out that I'm some kind of so I think I'm like this every day and it's real it's honest it's not oh because I'm Christian and I have heard the word there's a lot of those around I mean there's a lot of genuinely religious people who have true faith and I wouldn't want to knock their faith but for me it's not that. (Agnes 1.2)

Being connected to nature for Agnes enables her to tell herself as living her life, rather than losing touch with it. For Artemis, she also tells of not being separate, positioning herself within 'everything' which then enables her to be connected within something that is all things:

A. well I don't know whether I do think I mean I think I have over the years and then always gone no no it's bigger than that it's bigger than that and so (.) what I'm very aware of where I am now when I say about you know it's everything is that I'm aware that I'm not separate I'm aware that there is a (.) a divine power for want of a (.) I never know for me I've come to terms after having been in the expression I've come to terms with being able to call it god and we interpret what god means but I think sometimes I also call it the divine which is it's an energy it's a power that is not just in everything but actually is everything so that's what I connect with and it is bigger than me it is not external to me um but it's not not either like if you know the god within the god without divine within the divine without and um everything um

inanimate or alive is imbued with the same spirit so it's so big I don't find words for it and then it's so simple that is just it's the is-ness (Artemis 1.6)

These women tell themselves as well through the self-knowing narrative and therefore entitled to own and tell their spirituality in ways that are right for them. This connection with nature entitles the teller to reject rules and to reject the need to be told what to believe in by a book or a religion told through the claim of no single suitable theory. In this rejection, they claim their own power to know, and to connect with something that is both beyond them and also within them. In this position, the subject is both individual, and also placed within the cycles of the natural world.

In these tellings, the self-knowing narrative enables the women to be empowered and to be part of the bigger, natural cycles of the natural world around them. This position claims the right to define for the self. Thus empowered, the women find peace and harmony when they are in nature, such as being at the beach. They also claim a connection to the feminine quality of the earth and the cycles of the moon. However, losing this connection means losing their spirituality for a while, and being out of touch, thus becoming disempowered. Through the self-knowing narrative they claim there is no one truth, and therefore claim the right to speak for their own knowing which changes and develops over time. This entitles them to resist patriarchal institutions that impose rules and definitions, and enforce a separation from the individuals' ability to access their own sense of power.

Chapter Six

Life Trauma/Choice Point Narrative

The third narrative I have identified through this analysis is called the life trauma/choice point narrative. This narrative enables the women to tell their spirituality through the hardest times in their life and the times when they have had to make important life choices. This narrative contains a subject position for the women as able to make positive decisions in their lives and also to own the experiences in life that are the hardest. In this reclaiming of the hard times in life, the women tell of experiencing pain and trauma as part of their growth which enables them to be in touch with, and own, their spirituality. As discussed in the previous chapter, the women tell themselves as being connected with the cycles of nature and when they are separated from this feeling, they lose their sense of empowerment. The hard times therefore constrain them from being in touch spirituality, which consequently disempowers them. However, the life traumas are also told as an enabling process that allows them to grow as women and become more empowered in their lives. These tellings also provide a way for the women to legitimate their claims to ongoing self knowing as discussed in previous chapters, since they can tell how their spirituality enables them to make it through the hardest times in their life and survive as more enabled people after the experience.

In the following extract Sianan positions spirituality as something that enables people to cope with life trauma experiences. This subject position allows the women to be enabled in their experiences of conflicts in their life. It also enables them to determine their own morality that is resolved through this spirituality:

S. Yeah and your deepest thoughts and what you think but you would never say if you know what I mean it's just like if you really like think about something and think deep into it you're actually seeing like you have conflicts between what's right and wrong and things like that like if you decide to have a baby you have to think like oh the money and you know stuff like that I think spirituality is just like (2) I don't know that the way you think about any pressures that's your spiritual side coming though (Sianan 2.4)

In the life trauma/choice point narrative the women tell themselves as enabled to learn from the hardest experiences in their lives. They tell these experiences as

important as a process of finding out about themselves and becoming stronger, more powerful women. From this position, the experiences can be claimed as important as shown by Fathom:

F. that was like my first painful experience in my whole life. Like I've lived the fairy tale life. You know my parents, we didn't have a lot of money but we grew up in Marfel so we had a lot of money and um you know my first boyfriend was my best friend and we studied the same thing and that was my first lot of pain and it was, I would do it all again in an instant even though I went like this low became the lowest sort of low person I could be for a while there because it was totally meant to happen and I know lots more about myself and I know that if I find myself in that pain again it will hurt but I wont fear it was so important to find that out, I guess the fear of hurting I wasn't sure what to do (Fathom 7.2)

For Drizzle, her spirituality has enabled her to take back the control of her life from a controlling partner, and also to get back the power over her body, thoughts and feelings. She can retell her years of bulimia from positioning herself as empowered now, by the experience. In her telling of spirituality, she constructs a subject position of powerlessness in her past. However, she is enabled to tell herself as powerful and self-determined now, through the subject position offered by her narrative of her spirituality.

D. oh yeah its taken a long time to get to this stage where I do feel that I've got control of my own you know power of my body and thoughts and feelings and all that you know um definitely its been a roller coaster ride

K. so how did you where did you what what did you finally do to be able to be here today to be able to say that

D. um (.2) I walked out on [ex-boyfriend]

K. and what was that like someone else controlling what you were?

D. yeah he spent four years controlling trying to control me and saying um what I could and couldn't do at the same time as 'oh no you I support you 100%' but still I was half the person I am now because I felt that you know I was there to please him like had to be home by 5 o'clock before he was home and never really have time just to be myself you know it was always very much a us and him you know um sort of situation I don't know how anyway he was a manic depressive so and had a bit of a drinking problem you know dealing with that sort of didn't leave much time for myself um so that was quite hard but I've always been god (.) I don't know I think also a lot of who I am now does come out of the fact that I was bulimic from the age of 15 till I was 21 so I spent a lot of time with my head down the bog to put it bluntly and that um that effected me emotionally physically um the lot you know (Drizzle 9.4-8).

Like Drizzle, Jonesy also tells her spirituality through surviving a controlling partner. In this life trauma narrative, her spirituality telling offers her a subject position of powerlessness. Because spirituality is told as a connection, this loss of connection through the power and control of external sources such as a husband has a constraining effect on the women's ability to be empowered. For Jonesy this is told as a realisation that she didn't know who she was anymore:

J. yes I did but it wasn't shared I was at home it was you think you're a bit you think you're that and when I went back to school never gave a cent towards anything because I'd gone back to cos my place was the kitchen and he just shockingly jealous but he's happy now because he's married to this person who follows him around like a little puppy dog all the time and she's pleased to do it and I'm pleased he's got her is like he's got his soul mate or whatever just talks about him continuously you know his problems whereas I got sick of that and um so forth so on but since he left about five months after he left talking about spirituality business I thought I had it really sussed and then this would have been 6 years ago and I woke up one morning and I was absolutely not with it I didn't it sounds silly but I didn't know who I was I knew who I was in name I knew but I thought I honestly didn't know where I was going and I was hysterical hysterical for just so long and how I broke out of that was my niece came and I was being tough before that tough as you know and I and all of a sudden and I thought I've spent all these years focussing on one family one and there I was left after 47 and a half years left just left straddling without and it was something I'd looked forward to if you know what I mean (Jonesy 13.12)

Caesal also tells of a subject position offered to her by her spirituality that is one of taking control in her own life. She has been enabled to be herself and grow as a person, rather than being what others want her to be. Her spirituality enables her to move on from a position where others moulded her, and to be in a good place now in her life. She is also enabled to make decisions about her own life. Spirituality is told as being in touch with yourself through the life trauma/choice point narrative, which creates a subject position of personal power and the right to be yourself rather than be controlled or moulded by others:

C. oh no I didn't know what I wanted um and I had other people around me moulding me into this person that I actually didn't even want to be. And I was always worried about what people thought of me and every person I was with being my mother, my partner, my friends everyone of them wanted me to be something different and so I tried to please them all. And I tried to become what my partner wanted me to be, what my friends, my mum and in the end I was just all screwed up I was trying to be about 100 things at once. And none of them were helping me

K. and so eventually you felt like you were losing touch

C. touch yup of me

K. that's not a very healthy place to be

*C. oh no that's why I think gosh how scary and I think *gasp* and I think back at that and I just don't know where I would be I have no idea but I know it wouldn't be in a good place*

K. but how do you get strong

C. yeah I think the only way I did was just to look at me and say ok do you want to follow that path or do you want to move on and I'm just so thankful that I chose to with the help of [partner]. (Caesal 2.1-11)

K. but so while you're not making plans you still constantly grow in yourself

C. yup and more to the point where I think for me trying it's really hard to even put into words but um (.) thinking I think for me thinking about everything I do (.) thinking is this the right decision, am I doing it for me, am I pleasing others as well. Just trying to make that just the calmness (Caesal 2.14 – 3.1)

Telling spirituality as located within the person enables women to take up a position where their spirit cannot be touched by others and therefore is not open to being controlled or manipulated. This enables the women to claim their own spirituality as unique and special, which also allows them to resist any attempt to constrain them in what they can know. Here, Maria tells of spirituality enabling her to find a power identity that allows her to grow in confidence:

M. yeah definitely it was like um (.) I felt like an identity kind of a power thing I guess I um come from a background where I didn't have much self esteem I felt really vulnerable and it was something that was really internal and couldn't be touched by anyone was really sort of special and sacred and I um sort of grew from that and it helped me in a lot of ways as far as um um yeah identity and self esteem in a way and finding out. (Maria 1.6)

Below, Belinda reclaims her spirituality, which enables her to tell a subject position of power rather than the powerlessness she experienced when she tells herself as dependant upon her partner. This is told through the connection to nature that enables the women in their lives:

B. I actually don't know it happened just like that and it happened when I was about seven months pregnant with [son] I think [partner] went to Australia and he was supposed to go and send money home for us there was me and [daughter] and [son] and he was supposed to send money home and it didn't turn out like that he spent three months partying in Australia and I suddenly just got to the point where I thought well enough these are the boundaries this is what I'm going to do I'm alright I've got a house um I suddenly let I just thought um no no money and material things and that its not gonna you know you're not here don't send me money I'm still coping hey I can cope oh my god I can I can go to the beach and that's enough for me and I can and and that's enough for the kids they can come with me and that's cool (Belinda 4.10)

*B. yeah I was losing myself and I was really really lonely in my own relationship and I thought um you know I just can't spend the next (.) I cant wake up at forty and look in the mirror at this hag that's been nagging and crying and whinging for forty years you know I've got to um (.) I've got to yeah honour myself I've got to be true to myself and be honourable to what I actually need you know what I really need and I need to be free and that's a whole part of the spirituality thing as well I need to be free I used to walk at night just as the sun was going down favourite time of the day and it's a feeling and it's a *breath in* ohh so perfect couldn't be anywhere else this is so perfect this is you know when the trees are silhouetted and you get a lot of those big old pines and they're black and there's like this pink sky and its like ohh I'm I don't know its a feeling it's not a (.) I don't know it's hard to put into words its um I felt light and high really really high and like I'd sort of run and I would run and you could run into it and eat it and swallow it and just um (.) I needed to feel that again and I thought it's been three years now that I haven't felt that pure joy and my whole life has been consumed with pathetic bullshit like material things um guilt and um stress and all these things that and I've just lost it (.) I've lost that feeling that lightness and that feeling of um you know being able to jump and just jump and just keep on jumping and I lost it there for a while (Belinda 6.6)*

In reclaiming her connection to nature, Belinda is able to position herself within the greater construction of the natural world, and then to take power from this world that enables her to find her own sense of power. The life crisis discussed by Belinda is resolved through her ability to have a subject position of power within her telling of spirituality.

The life trauma experienced by these women relates to their spirituality as something that allows them to be in touch with themselves. This telling allows them to take up a subject position of strength and self-empowerment, which is enabling for them in their spirituality narratives. For Agnes, she is enabled by her spirituality to be in touch with parts of herself that had been injured through a life of abusive experiences:

A. *yeah well there was so much distraction because I'd just left home and I had a very intense um controlled upbringing like I got adopted at nine and um (.) got fostered out and then they decided to adopt me but my mother (.) I never had a hug (2) from the time I left South Africa (2) till I found sex. So then I went through a confused stage where sex and love are the same thing and especially when you've got a horny young teenage guy offering sex as I love you and that was so what I wanted to hear was I love you it didn't matter that it came with this commodity it was I love you know so that was sad and that was bloody sad but I suppose you can't change it because it happened and it had to happen because that's the way you went you know so*

K. *kind of you're the sum total of that*

A. *yes so I think um to go from all that and I think that's one of the reasons why when I was married and I was pregnant it was alright because somebody did love me I was creating a life of someone and I think one of the reasons if I'm really honest that I had children was so that I could have somebody who was mine (.) it wasn't just about having another generation it was about something for me someone for me and someone who would need me cos that was huge you know and I think having achieved that that was when I blossomed and the really gentle spiritual side of me was actually able to come out that was one of the first times (Agnes 11.1-3)*

Through the life trauma narrative, Agnes is able to tell her story of neglect and abusive love relationships. In this story she can then reclaim aspects of herself that had been hidden or untellable through abuse. She goes on later to reclaim love in her own telling of self, back from the gender role of dependence upon a man for love, and for completeness as a person:

K. *is there something wrong with you if you don't have I mean in that state of mind is there something wrong with the woman if there is no man in her life?*

A. *oh I felt so at the time I felt that I'm unlovable and no body wants me so therefore I'm less than (.)*

K. *and are you incomplete?*

A. *totally because that's how you see yourself. But it didn't take me many years to realise that it was ok and in fact it was fucken better than ok because suddenly I didn't have some fucken moron spending all our money on drugs and alcohol I didn't have this moron causing me emotional grief all the time I mean one of his favourites was (.) things would be going really well you know your babies would be happy he had a job or whatever and things everything would be just right everybody's healthy. You go to bed and you make love you know and you're just starting off to sleep thinking my little corner of the world is ok and I'm happy with it and then he'd say something like 'what are you going to do in the next week?' 'What for', I'd say 'oh I'm leaving you' and you'd just fucken shatter there'd be this knife in here up to the*

hilt you know and you'd be like my god where did this come from. And I mean then I thought it must have been because that's what I deserved you know I had been told when I was seven and I was beaten that (.) it was because I'm so unlovable and not till you're 35 and this bursts out of you in a counselling session do you realise that for (.) this amount of your life 28 years of your life you've carried that shit and believed it on some intrinsic level and that's fucken disgusting you know and those are the things that I that piss me off about my abuse and you know even my adopted mother I can remember her saying to me at 16 'oh for Christ sake [Agnes] take your hair out of those plaits' and I said 'but why', she said 'cos you've got a horse face and they look fucken terrible', I mean what does that do for your self-esteem (Agnes 14.1-3)

The subject position offered to these women in their tellings of their spirituality is that self-identity is not available without dependence on a male partner, and therefore the women are controlled by their partners. They are constrained by a subject position that has them as not the knower, positioning the controlling partner as the knower and decision maker. Their spirituality narratives enable them to position themselves as self-determined rather than controlled by other people. This is told through stories of being lost and then of finding the journey again:

F. like I was never, I never worried that I was different, there was always just something there and only like cos [partner] and I, my partner we've were together since I was 14 and we broke up when we were going on 23 so only since we broke up did I suddenly realise that I hadn't even been (.) searching for anything that meant anything to me. I'd spent eight and a half years of my life being part of a couple and I'd resigned myself to the fact that I was going to be (.) with [partner] for for ever so I didn't have to make any effort to find out what hobbies I liked, um what made me feel good, what music I liked um how if I was stressed what I like to do um (.) what I believed in what was going to make me happy so I guess I've only kind of looked back and thought hey I was feeling lost and I wasn't missing that kind of journey back then and only started to do it in the past year and it's been wicked (Fathom 6.3)

The life trauma/choice point narrative telling allows the women to position themselves in a subject position of self-empowerment. Because of the constraining position offered to them by patriarchal institutions, they reclaim their right to have power that stems from the self as shown in this extract from Artemis:

A. I mean well I think that first of all you have to well I got to a stage where I understood about patriarchy I mean that's the interesting thing about growing up is that for the longest time you just go that's the way it is and you don't question it when I started to question then the the patriarchal was those constraints I just couldn't I got so angry and I got so powerless when I got so angry and I mean I can remember um when I left my first husband and I was not very old I was about 20 um and I went home my parents and the minister came around to our house and without

any compassion without any anything ordered me to return to the home of my husband and I think I mean if I look at all those kind of relationships and things they all taught me some really powerful things about women's silence women's submission and the kind of the expected order of things and um (2) so I think that the way I got round that was for the longest time I was my own because there are psychics in my family and because I had always had another spiritual life which in my family wasn't totally stamped out because there were people who had the sight the Scottish thing the Celtic thing and who could do strange healings and used herbs and things then I think for quite a long time my response to my powerlessness around the patriarchy was in fact to dialogue with my spirits because that was and they were my strength they were my huge strength and so that when things got really hard and I you know and I started to I could always go and inside myself for want of a better way but I now understand it doesn't mean see it didn't feel like that but I could always tap into guides and spirits and angels for want of a better word um yeah and I could absolutely experience being loved being given knowledge and being given strength absolutely now most of those spirits were female which is very interesting so ah and compassionate and loving and powerful and all of those things and they weren't all female but most of them were (.) and I think they went on with that for the longest time but you see I came through like by the time I was in my early twenties or mid twenties anyway I was wanting to go overseas um you see there's thing that I think patriarchy turns a lot of women into rebels into absolute warrior women even though I will only say that now and didn't have that perspective then and of course then along came feminism which gave a name to the fight to the battle and so in a way (2) that was my empowerment and the spirit that I brought out (Artemis 3.6)

Artemis tells her spirituality as a reclaiming of her own knowing from the patriarchy, which was initiated by a life trauma/choice point of divorce combined with the pastoral power of the church telling her what to do. This telling offers her the subject position of knower of her spirituality, and knower of her life decisions. She rejects traditional gender roles such as being compassionate and loving and claims the role of warrior, which enables her to tell of the fight against the oppression of the patriarchy, and to claim empowerment. She tells of resisting the submissive role that was offered to her by the patriarchy, by telling stories of her Celtic heritage that enabled her to be in touch with feminine energy, with things that are outside of the accepted knowing of the patriarchal spirituality. The reclaiming of the feminine is an important part of the narrative as this allows the women to speak from a position of strength and power through the right of being present and being female, and through this connection to the natural world around them.

In identifying the life trauma/choice point narrative, I have discussed here how my participants positioned themselves within their narratives, and how they rejected some positions offered to them. The life trauma/choice point narrative offered a

position of strong, able women who can grow and change through life trauma or choice points. They reclaimed the hard times in their lives and were enabled by a subject position of self-empowerment and strength. This allowed them to retell their controlling relationships as growth experiences from which they have gained insight and strength, and also have been enabled to be more in touch with themselves. This telling enabled the women to position themselves as acceptable as they are, which allowed them to reclaim their self-esteem and the painful experiences of their life. They told themselves as women, a position not of traditional gender roles, but of self-power. For women to have power they needed to reject the subject position of submission which is offered in patriarchal institutions such as churches, and then claim power for themselves, their own sense of knowing which is related to the natural world around them which they are part of, as opposed to the patriarchal telling of separation. This theme continues in the next and final narrative, identified as the fighting for life narrative, that I will discuss in the following chapter.

Chapter Seven

Fighting for Life Narrative

The fourth narrative, presented here, I identified as the fighting for life narrative. In this narrative, women tell themselves as fighting traditional gender roles such as mothering, and also fighting for women's rights such as equal employment opportunities. They also claim a position of power for women through the physical process of birthing in which men do not participate. The fighting for life narrative also tells of keeping themselves safe from being destroyed by the process of patriarchal language and relationships in which men are positioned as powerful. This involves reclaiming of women's voice to speak such things as emotions. As discussed in the previous chapters, the participants in this research used narrative form to tell their spirituality, and simultaneously accepted and rejected the subject positions which were offered to them and which they themselves tell. As in the life trauma/choice point narrative, the women were able to reject a subject position of submission offered to them in patriarchal constructions, to then construct a subject position of knowing for themselves and forming connections to the natural world around them.

In telling their spirituality, the women participating in this research told of fighting the traditional gender roles offered to them in patriarchal constructions, in places such as family, church and general society. This telling allows them to reject the constraining effects of such gender roles, and to reclaim other subject positions that are more enabling. In the following extract, Sianan tells of the constraining subject position of doing as she is told, which is bound up in the gender role of being a 'good girl'. Through this narrative of fighting for life, she claims the right to do what she wants regardless of gender, and tells her spirituality with a subject position of a strong, self-determined woman:

K. so so for your growing up your sort of family environment, like I know a little bit um has there been any difference for you being a female or being a male like you've got a brother um has it made any difference?

S. I thought it did when I was younger. I always felt that I was in my brother's shadow like I always felt that I was never good enough because he was this top

sportsman and he was so good and stuff but actually I've got older and actually he wasn't that great like not saying its because he was a guy or whatever but I always thought because that he was the older brother and he was better and like a lot of the family like talk to him more than they do me not the fact that but just because he could I don't know like he could do something for them or stuff you know what I mean. Like I always had big arguments and things with mum and stuff like you love [brother] more than me and stuff like that but I don't know if that was me being young but I always felt like that and now I don't. I feel that he's great his way and I am in a different way and it shouldn't be put down to whether or not you know whether or not he's a boy or it's just we did different thing and we're different people. And like all this stuff about being a good little girl and I never was and actually reading back on his school reports and things like that he was never that good but everyone put a cover on it.

K. so the good little girl and the good little boy is there more room for little boys to be not such good little boys but still be ok and but little girls are only what are good little girls? Like demure are they sort of

S. yeah sort of. Like do what they're told. And boys are more like congratulated on doing what they want you know what I mean. And the fact that I never stood that made me not a good little girl and he was always a good little boy because of the fact that he said I don't want to do that I'm going to do this and I know its not a big thing but mum was a lot harder on me as a teenager like younger cos I went through my rebellion stage when I was about twelve or thirteen and that's quite young. It was just sort of (2) I think boys are given a lot more (.) freedom as such

K. to be themselves?

S. yeah to be themselves rather than girls. (Sianan 10.6 to 11.2)

For Sianan to claim the right to be herself, she has to fight the gender role of being a good girl that has an investment of demureness. The fighting for life narrative enables Sianan to reclaim her own resistance to this gender role, and to retell herself as a person rather than a girl who has not been successful at the gender role offered her. In this retelling she is then enabled as a strong woman who does what she wants, rather than a good girl who must conform to what she is told to do. In this next extract from Maria, she positions her mother as taking up the traditional gender role of authority. Maria rejects this role as authority and control that are told as masculine roles. To do this she places her spirituality in nature and therefore outside of the constraints of religion and control:

M. yeah and it also in a way I guess the male thing represented a kind of power authority control form that um (.) it was just the masculine thing my mother was a um power authority control thing so she was essentially masculine in those ways and um

that was another thing that I was resisting and it was almost because of my mother I was resisting the authority control thing and everywhere else besides my mother it was a male dominated area including religion school everywhere else um so I found more solace in things which were more spiritual and weren't religious into more nature things (Maria 7.3)

In the next extract, Belinda tells her fighting of the traditional gender role of a mother who should be able to cope with everything. Her inability to do this is told as a failure as a mother and she fights this gender role, also fighting her own inability to meet the expectations of the role. She goes on in the second extract to reclaim her mothering experience by rejecting the subject position of the perfect mother. In telling her spirituality, Belinda constructs a subject position of mother that is constrained by the traditional gender role of coping, and of being perfect. She then rejects this position and her spirituality enables her to tell another subject position of a woman who loves her children, and reclaims the inclusion of the pain and difficulty of being a mother:

B. I think fighting things so much with [daughter] is it was just me and I had to cope with everything and (.) and I thought well it wasn't meant to be like this this wasn't the plan this wasn't the picture and I didn't surrender to the way it was instead I said no its got to be this plan it's got to be this way and it's not and I've failed and I've you know I've got to get it this way and I was so hell bent on having this this the way it was supposed to be (Belinda 3.5)

B. this is the other thing I think we need to owe women a justice and we love our kids and they're beautiful and they're gorgeous and we wouldn't trade them for the world but giving birth is hell it is hellish the first year is awful you are stripped of every human right that you could ever imagine you spend a lot of the year with huge engorged breasts and where does this damned picture come from that no it's going to be this perfect gorgeous lovely little baby it's shit (Belinda 14.8)

Fathom rejects the traditional gender roles of women through a telling of spirituality that positions the male as the head of religion. In this telling, she is enabled to reclaim her telling of spirituality that does not depend upon subject positions of domination.

K. which leave women where?

F. well, to take their place where it was dictated but yeah I think that I mean you've hit the nail on the head there it's probably where my most of my doubts come from

allowing just knowing that that's where it came from it didn't come from a spiritual base as such but was designed with the male as a head in mind (Fathom 2.2-3)

She goes on to further reject the way women are portrayed in patriarchal society and to question the role which women have been given. In this telling, Fathom reclaims women's rights and is able to reject the constraining effects of the subject position of women as subservient in patriarchal tellings:

F. um I don't know if I'm going to answer your question here but the train of thought that that led me on was that um I guess that's where a lot of my doubt comes from because early on I had always been kind of pro-women's rights and stuff like that having kind of taken myself along that path to women's studies at university and stuff and I think that's kind of my bent against it was the way that women are portrayed and to realise that the base of the religion is not the faith but the fact that it was designed for a patriarchal society, but um (Fathom 2.1)

In the following piece of Artemis' transcript she takes up a subject position of resistance to traditional gender roles through tellings of being a warrior women and struggling to take on unknown roles of mother and nurturer. She tells of fighting to bring women into visibility and getting women's voices heard and this relates to her inability to know how to be as a mother. When she defined herself through finding herself, she was in an exciting world, she was a corporate, single woman and she was a warrior woman. She had not defined herself as mother or as nurturer. These all serve to orientate her as a woman who lived through the 1970s and experienced the political turmoil of that decade as a woman and as a feminist. It also demonstrates how one period of her life and her experiences have effected who she is today and she clearly states they are the place she speaks from. This relates to her telling of spirituality because in her abstract she tells how her spirituality is everything, the way she lives her life. It's how she interacts with people and with nature such as the air she breathes. It's her physical body, her heart and it's her mental self. To make sense of spirituality she needed to tell of a time in her life where all of these parts of her did not make sense and she tells of experiencing a devastating feeling and describes a 'minor nervous breakdown':

A. oh and I think that also I think both in your generation and in mine because we were probably the first generation that started having their children late. I had [daughter] when I was thirty is that there's only um that in fact it's setting up

pressures when you have your child because you've done the exciting corporate single woman warrior woman. Is that um when I had [daughter] and I had worked for many years and had loved what I was doing and I chose to have [daughter] she was absolutely a precious gift but um I actually um had a minor nervous breakdown. I had a, I went very strange because I, there was in my defining myself through finding myself I hadn't given myself the role of mother and nurturer I hadn't understood it so I hadn't thought about it cos that wasn't the fight. The fight was you know first of all to get women's voices heard you know and to get and bring women into visibility and um so when I had [daughter] I didn't know how to be and it was devastating. I was absolutely devastated and um you know I don't know whether it was a good thing or a bad thing it just was an is thing that because I had gone very strange. I mean my husband and I and the doctor decided that going back to work would be a good thing and it was and it was um and that worked quite well with my husband was chief nurturer for about three years and I mean he couldn't integrate that role and he just left us so there I was full-time working with a four year old who I adored and no possibility of finding the mother role or you know that role. I mean I wont say that I didn't try to nurture her I certainly did and I think that's been an aspect of me all along but that finding the place where I could be (.) the mother and the (.) homemaker is something I'm coming to now you know in my cronehood and that's, and I'm wondering about that you see I think its an interesting thing. I think that the mothering what we do in our society is we we go mothering with housewifery and I actually don't think for me that that is the correct cycle it doesn't make sense that in fact the mothering needs a grandmother to be doing the housewifery you know (Artemis 5.8)

As well as fighting the subject positions offered in traditional gender roles, the participants in this research also tell of fighting for women's rights. As women, they are fighting for their own rights and also for the rights of other women. In their tellings of spirituality, they tell narratives of fighting which allow them to take up subject positions that are enabling for women, containing concepts of power and self-determination. In resisting the gender role of submission to men, the tellers can then claim rights such as equal employment opportunities. This reclaiming of women's rights also includes a rejection of traditional patriarchal institutions that offer constraining subject positions of subjugation for women, and allows them to reclaim their own spirituality and position of power in their spirituality.

In the following extract, Drizzle tells of the constraining position offered to women when men have all the power, and then claims a breaking of this constraint. This claim allows her to reclaim a voice for women to be listened to, telling a different subject position of speaking, present women. In the second extract, she talks about

her work environment, reclaiming a subject position of job ability and power as she tells herself as fighting for women's right to equal employment opportunities:

D. yeah definitely you know that's something I really am looking forward to I'm definitely not ready for it yet but eventually you know I think it's pretty special. I think um I think women have definitely had it hard though especially when it does comes to the whole sort of I mean men and boys seem to have the power and the women you know through religion work you know absolutely every day like I think and I love the fact now that we are just coming you know we are breaking it all and now what was I watching I don't know if it was on the television last night it had a big thing about the big feminist um riots that they had in America years ago and I saw these women and they had their banners and they were going look listen to us you know and the fact that they had to do that in the first place you know like the suffragettes to get the voting system (Drizzle 2.2)

D. I find it I don't know that's quite a good question actually because as a woman who is trying to develop some sort of career in a mans world I was speaking to you the other day about that sales rep who came in you know and because I was blond and had big tits I got the job is what he thinks and you know I have that every day you know um you know men come in the shop and they instantly think they have a power over you because they're a man and you're a woman and it's there you know they try and intimidate you into things and I always find it's better to stand up and say 'hey you know no this is it' you know or um just in the work business you know in the work place it's so frustrating as a woman because men come in and they do think that they can over-power you always having to I find it frustrating that I'm always having to prove myself as a woman that I can do the job just as well as they can whereas if I was a man there would be 'no problem hey mate how you doing have a coffee sit down' whereas as a woman it's like you know 'hey who are you' you know but so (Drizzle 3.7)

The fight is inspired in this telling and reclaiming her spirituality enables her to fight harder for women's rights:

D. yeah and it would have bothered me for ages would have probably effected probably what I'd done in 6 months time cos I would still be dealing with it whereas now it's like oh you I'm not going to let you you know it makes me just want to fight harder like it's not really a fight (Drizzle 11.7)

Maria also tells of fighting for women's rights as a reclaiming of her own spirituality from the patriarchy. The subject position offered by the patriarchy is constraining for women who are subjugated by men. In resisting this subject position, Maria is able to claim the right to unrestricted spiritual knowledge and power. Maria tells of her grandmother who accepted a position within religion. Through this telling Maria

is able to resist the constraint of positions available to her grandmother within this religion:

M. yup I think totally in terms of spirituality that fits into like what we were talking about before that because religion is a man made thing and spirituality like religion is supposedly um (.) dealing with human spirituality but it doesn't at all it just like were saying it limits it it turns it into some sort of other completely other form and um (.) with Christianity and a lot of the other religions I can't think of them that I know of (.) um (.) because you conform to this religion. Women have always been positioned as second and second place in that structure of the religions or how it's been formed or how the most holy religious people are always men there's no aspiring women for women to so their spirituality, I think, is definitely more restricted in men when they go to religion because they haven't got this female um entities or female energies to relate to or aspire to so I think in that sense like you're saying it would do more damage to women or (.) even like I mean it was interesting spending time with my grandmother and grandfather and he was you know definitely more strict to the way the religious writings are and you've got to stick to them and she was a lot more flexible and (.) I could see a lot of good things in her but it did make me wonder how she (.) um dealt with those womanly things or you know she's had 6 children and where there was room in her religion to deal with those things or to include them in her self and in her spirituality and in her whole life and in her relationship with god or how it all fit in (Maria 8.7)

Like Maria, Jonesy tells of the fight for women's rights. To progress the women's movement, she tells of separating from patriarchal institutions and forming women's groups. In this separation she is able to tell a subject position of women reclaiming their place from the patriarchy, and therefore being present and active in their own spirituality. She resists the constraining subject position offered by the patriarchy:

J. well that, that is ah, and at that particular time you couldn't get anywhere at all and that is why I separated myself. well, we had women's groups and they actually did far more progression and it's been the same with Catholic Church. It's been the nuns and it's been the (.) they have actually broken through and take that religion out on the streets behind those walls and ah it, it um, because the closed orders were very frequent up till the 60's. Of course they had a job um getting out but it was the men who laid down all those regulations and in the middle century they did that and it um, ah and because women at that time were just tools - they were there to be used and ah they were aware of that because that was their lot in life (Jonesy 8.1)

As well as fighting for women's rights, the fighting for life narrative involves some claims of power and enables them to tell themselves in positions of power. This power is claimed through stories in which men are powerless, such as birthing. Their spirituality tellings allow the women to position themselves as strong women who are capable in situations where men are helpless. This allows them to reclaim

their spirituality from patriarchal tellings of powerlessness for women, and to position themselves differently to the gender roles offered to them, as discussed earlier.

In this next extract, Drizzle reclaims a position of power through a story of menstruation and then of birthing. In this narrative the man is positioned as powerless to help, and also to know. Women are told as knowers and also as the holders of the power. This allows Drizzle to tell her spirituality with narratives containing enabling subject positions for women, and to reclaim power for the biological processes which women experience in order to give birth:

D. I don't know I think um its still people get embarrassed don't they I mean a lot of men don't understand about periods and I think it's because they don't understand as well you know um and some of us are lucky I suppose some blokes will go 'oh are you all right' and listen and give you a hot water bottle and understand that you are feeling a bit touchy at the moment and all that sort of stuff so I mean it's just the type of men they don't they have absolutely no idea of what's going on I suppose it's the same for a bloke when his wife or partner is giving birth to his baby you know and then he's absolutely powerless nothing he can do and the woman's there you know right from the start of the pregnancy to the actual giving birth all the man can do is give his emotional help and all the rest of it but he's powerless to what's actually going on inside as the woman we can do things to help the baby (Drizzle 6.10)

Similarly, Caesal tells of the birthing process to tell how men are powerless and women are in fact powerful. In this story she is able to tell herself as in control of her body, and in control of bringing another life into the world, taking up a position of power through which she is enabled as a woman. She also reclaims the ability to have emotions which is told through this position of power as a positive thing that women can also do:

*C. yeah I mean even as you're saying that like thinking of when I had [daughter] I mean the power that I had and even like ok I mean [daughter's father] came together and made a baby even thinking of when I went into labour and even that whole growing when she was inside of me, that was, I had so much power. I wish I was more focussed in my mind to enjoy it more because I was so young and so screwed up but I just think even at that moment when I was giving birth it was amazing totally amazing. I chose not to have pain killers because I wanted to feel everything because I felt it was just amazing and I look at him just standing there freaking out going *makes loud panic noises* whereas me experiencing it and my mum there, being my support person I just think that poor man there who's (.) look at the power I've got and it wasn't power as in yeah, it was more (.) wow I am a woman. Look*

what I've done. I have brought a human being into this life and that that to me no guy, no god can experience that. That was just amazing. And even it sounds really funny but even our homes and how we organise and how we take on so much. I mean I go to work and I work hard and I please people all day. I come home and I, even if it's cleaning I do, we do so much as women. We take on so much and at the end of the day if we feel like crying we can, and it's not a bad thing (Caesal 4.10)

For Belinda, the fight to reclaim power for herself is told through reclaiming her mothering. Instead of fighting her man to support her, she tells herself as strong and able to cope, therefore taking up a position of power in her relationship and in her mothering. She is no longer constrained by a position of needing reassurance from her partner that she is doing a good job, and therefore able to tell herself as strong. She also resists the masculine role, claiming the right to be a strong woman, but also to want the support offered by a strong man. Here, Belinda claims power for herself but also shows how she is enabled through the support of others, rather than being powerful in isolation:

B. why isn't it given by men I think you have to know how it feels to be robbed of that personal sense of spirituality to know how important it is to give back to each other I think a single a you know we all know and we all sit there we just know it's so tiring and we boost each other up we say oh [friend] you're doing such a wicked job with these kids you know look at them they're so great and it's only because we know how damned hard it is and yeah we just think oh you're doing such a you're so strong and wicked and he would never tell her that because maybe he doesn't know that she needs to hear it maybe he thinks that she's so strong that she can just cope maybe he thinks up I don't know

K. do you think men think that women are strong?

B. well I know that [partner] has verbalised this to me in the last you know month or so he said if I didn't trust you so much and I didn't know you were so wicked and strong he said I would get my shit together a long time ago so he said I know that you will always cope with these kids he said I know I trust that you will um you know everything will be alright

K. that's a pretty pathetic comment though from his point of view

B. it is pathetic what it is is a cop out if you've got a strong woman you can take less of a role but I said to him I'm sick of being a strong woman but no I said I'm tired of that masculine role (Belinda 9.1-5)

Belinda also tells the fighting for life narrative through a willingness to experience the hard times in her life, and to give up the fight at times. In this telling, the fight is

against the loss experienced by her as a woman and she positions herself as supported and helped which enables her to let go of the fight and to experience the growth offered in life through change:

B. I'm no longer afraid of that dark spiritual place because I know, and have faith, that it will always be followed by the light. Every journey is always followed by the light. Every journey is also provided to teach us something and allow us to continue growing and rather than fight this all the time and fear the unknown I am now able to let my helpers, help me. (Belinda – additional)

In the next extract, Belinda identifies her fight for life in her loss of control over her life. She reclaims this loss of control, and is enabled through this telling of her spirituality to reclaim her loss and to position herself within the natural world that is told as supporting her and therefore allows her to retell her fight as a process of spiritual karma or balance:

B. I think my spirituality is directly linked to my body and my body's connection to the earth mother. I think, partially, my temporary loss of touch with my spiritual identity had something to do with my loss of control over my own body, due to the process of childbirth, breastfeeding etc... However, in saying that, karmically my son in the same form as my daughter has been provided as a gift to balance that up again. (Belinda – additional)

Another part of the fighting for life narrative is self-defensive. Women told this through stories of keeping safe and not being destroyed, not losing the connection. The self is told as an internal part of the women, at risk from being harmed, and therefore kept hidden. This part of the self is that which is told through spirituality, and is positioned as the spirit, or the unique part of the individual. In this telling, the women position themselves as the keeper of their own spirit, which is kept safe from the harm and destruction of patriarchal telling of spirit. They resist the constraining subject position of masculine dominant spirituality and, in resisting, are enabled to tell themselves as special, unique and capable of knowing their own spirituality.

In the following telling, Belinda uses the metaphor of the natural world to tell her spirituality as interconnected with all things. This telling enables her to claim a cyclical nature to spirituality and therefore the right to sometimes lose her own grasp on it. In positioning herself this way, she is able to tell the fighting for life narrative

as a natural part of the cyclical nature of spirituality, as something which naturally occurs and therefore is not unique to her own experience:

B. very much um in tune with the Earth for sure that's um I don't see spirituality as a spiritual being one being I see it as a whole interconnecting series of things I don't see one um I very much rebel this theory of god at the top and this hierarchical sort of system I think that um (.) spirituality is about cycles about um (.) our place in the whole system of things really and it does get lost you know through life and through things that happen and you do find periods where you just slip out of that sync and um (Belinda 1.4)

For Belinda, the fighting for life narrative is about reclaiming her own struggle with recent experiences that have disempowered her. Her fight has been to reclaim her own sense of self, and she tells this through positioning herself as someone who was fighting for things that were material and external. The fight is realised when she is able to position herself within the cycles of nature and to let go of the external expectations. In surrendering her desire to perfect her domestic environment, she is enabled to stop fighting this expectation of herself and of traditional gender roles. In her telling of her spirituality, the fight has been for her own life and sense of self, which she is able to reclaim in letting go of her own need to control things, and position herself as part of a natural, cyclical world:

B. and you know what they probably want it to be able to find the freedom to be able to do it themselves so they probably feel the same they're probably going here here but we don't have the courage to actually do that and you know yeah just let go of all the things it's alright if you don't do the washing for one day or something it's ok no one's going to judge you if your house isn't immaculate and all those things (.) you know just relax and surrender to it I think is definitely what it is just surrender to it if you fight it you're not going to get on that wheel of um I went to a clairvoyant the last time a couple of years ago and she said this to me they're trying to help you they're out there the other whatever you want to call it are trying to help you but you're not allowing yourself to get on the wheel and so they can't get behind you you're resisting all the time and that's so true you resist and nothings going to help you because every time you know if you just resist a little bit they're not going to be able to help you and you resist a bit more and then it's like oh wow and everything and it happened over night for me when I was about seven months pregnant with [son] I suddenly thought right I just can't fight anymore. I'm sick of fighting damn it I'm going to relax and I'm going to get on with it you know I'm sick of fighting you [partner] you can do whatever you want I'm sick of it (Belinda 15.16)

In losing her sense of self, Belinda was in a position of needing to fight and resist. Likewise, Jonesy tells herself as resisting the control of her partner. In her telling of

fighting for life, she claims her own spirituality as a small part of her that she would not let go of:

J. Yes but what happened was I realised later looking back that he was wanting me to live his life quite definitely and I didn't want to do that I went a certain way I did everything I had to in the home and I did everything but I just would not allow that last thing to go and I always what I call be humbled I suppose I don't know what you would call it one way and another (Jonesy 15.13)

Jonesy is able to position herself as someone resistant to the destructive power of another person by not letting go of her small sense of spirituality. She rejects the responsibility for another person, and is able through this telling to position herself as a strong woman who is able to keep her sense of 'self' safe, and to do what she needs to do in life:

J. I think you've got to be very very strong when you know that you're being destroyed that your that you've got to be very strong and you cannot feel sorry for the other person, you can feel concern but you mustn't allow yourself to feel so sorry that it's your responsibility because our generation did, we were made to feel it was our responsibility I mean you get somebody who full on commits suicide or I'll do this well let them go and do it you know it's it's I mean that sounds easy now but if you don't you are creating more of a problem I mean I've created more problems by having done what I thought was the right thing to do and so but then I can only say that now because I have been aware of those problems whereas had I gone and done what I really felt and there may have been other problems in that I would be saying now why did I go (Jonesy 16.6)

In the following telling of the fighting for life narrative, Agnes is able to position her fight as keeping herself safe. By fighting for her life, she is enabled to reclaim an abusive situation in her life and to survive the experience. Because she positions her 'self' as in internal piece which is kept safe, she can therefore resist the abuse that she is experiencing, and thus fight for her life. However this subject position constrains her from being open and from experiencing her feelings and therefore blocks her from other parts of her spirituality that are told as interconnected in other tellings. For Agnes, the fight for her life is also constraining of her ability to experience the openness required for her spirituality:

A. So that was a really big turning point for me again um (.) I'd gone through this thing with my ex husband where um don't cut me that crap anymore and so (.) and so you learn to block it off that what I'm feeling and I'm thinking doesn't count so it was

quite an emotionally abusive situation and I think that took away from my ability to feel things and sense things cos your so busy holding what's you safe. That you can't open up too much (Agnes 4.1)

Agnes compares the experience of being battered and keeping parts of herself safe, an internal part that is untouchable by the abuser – to the process of giving birth which is physically painful and requires women to seek that internal place away from pain. In this telling she creates a subject position where women are united by their biology to fight physically for life, and also united spiritually to fight for life. This telling of the fight constructs a subject position, which is taken up and thus enables them to survive their biology and also enables them to survive the subjugating power of patriarchal society:

A. I think you create your own internally I think you have to to survive (.) you might never ever share it with somebody else or maybe even acknowledge it to yourself because it think for some women to actually come out with it (.) is a betrayal and therefore they're going to be hurt by it you know. I mean you take the battered women somewhere she's got this little spiritual core and I mean I think you would find that if you speak with any battered woman that there's a piece of them that's untouched

K. it's hard to find un-battered women on one level or another

A. yeah yeah but every one of them has got something (.) even if it's just the tiniest spark and I think for me that's feminine spirituality because that that's the backbone of us because we have to fight to give life you know we fight our own bodies in some aspects you know we get um a bigger amount of fluid we have a faster heart rate all sorts of different things happening

K. everything is squished

A. yeah you know organs have to fight for position your skin has to fight to stretch you know its all the emotional adjustment just everything you know and then there's childbirth again (.) I mean that's a totally different thing I mean and I think that women basically think about childbirth on a very spiritual level otherwise we wouldn't be able to deal with it (Agnes 16.4-8)

Similarly for Jonesy, she is able to resist the controlling and destructive relationship with her husband that is enabled by the rules of the Catholic Church. By keeping a part of her safe and not letting it be destroyed, she is able to fight for her life and her right as a woman to make her own decisions:

J. I did but I had conflict with my conscience because I was married to someone who was born a catholic and the remarks were things like 'I know all I want to know about women' or all I need to know, you know that that you couldn't discuss it and it wasn't but and I would say but, you don't know about me but he would always say things like what you need is this and I know what you're thinking and I wanted to scream so I would just go and do other things that would satisfy me such as joining the little theatre or always getting myself a decent book to read at the end of the day whether he liked the light on or now, you know what I mean it wasn't being deliberately it was never deliberately, I just quietly said I am not going to let my inner core be touched I had this funny feeling that there was some and it was something I was not going to have and I suppose in a way it was like saying I'm not going to be destroyed (3) ah but I did I did have um for instance he was always really really delighted when I was pregnant and he loved his babies (3) but then once they started to grow older get, older he would then lose interest in them and then it would be the next one but whether it was a comfort thing and to have these babies or not I don't know but once they started to have a mind of their own and a personality he he couldn't cope with that and I'm not blaming him it was a generational thing and a thing that he was very much brought up you see so women had to fight against or else they joined their own women's group (Jonesy 8.8)

Another way that these women fight for their lives is in fighting for a voice. This fight is a reclaiming of a female voice in which emotion is positioned as important, rather than being silenced. In this telling, the women are able to reclaim their voice and their way of speaking in the world, and to position themselves as active speakers who are entitled to speak. This relates to the reclaiming of hysterical speech described by Haaken (1998) which questions the privileging of reason over emotion, and reclaims "hysterical storytelling" (p. 249) as a way of speaking emotion which enables new stories to be told.

Sianan reclaims her right to speak by constructing a subject position where she is enabled to speak validly through emotion that enables her to feel better and move on from the emotional outlet. She rejects the subject position that constrains women from speaking their emotions, and resists the gender role. In this telling, Sianan is able to tell herself as a valid speaker and also to tell a subject position of strength for women when speaking from emotions, resisting the constraint of patriarchal language which marginalises emotion talk:

S. the way it's put out there towards women. I think it's a negative thing because they don't show that men do it and I think they do. Like not all men and it's a lot of women don't get temperamental or whatever and I don't think it's like as much of an issue. If you want to be fucked off be fucked off or whatever.

K. so don't put it down to gender

S. yeah don't put it down to a reason. If you just like sometimes I get emotional and I just want to cry and stuff and I have no idea what I'm upset about but I'll just cry I'll let myself cry otherwise I'll hold it in and then feel feel like upset and I won't know why. If I have a cry then I feel heaps better and I can do whatever.

K. and move on

S. yeah other than being mean to everyone around me for the fact that I'm in a bad mood. I do get in bad moods and I do show it because I'm not a hold in personal person and people who know me know this.

K. has it been problematic in your life being a woman and having emotions? Has it been problematic because you're a woman?

S. oh for sure for a lot of a lot of people say oh you bloody woman like my father and mothers partner and stuff like they make you feel like you know you shouldn't be like that (Sianan 9.2-8)

Likewise for Drizzle, emotion talk is reclaimed as a valid speaking voice for women. This telling of the fighting for life narrative enables the women to take up a subject position of voice, rather than the silence imposed on them when emotions are not allowed to be spoken. Drizzle also claims the right to speak from her heart, positioning herself as a capable speaker who is not willing to be constrained in her voice:

K. and have we got ways of expressing how we think then if we're dealing with it like that I mean where is that communication breaking down?

D. I think we do I think cos (.) well personally as a woman I'm quite an outspoken one so if I've got a thought or a feeling I'll tell them I'll tell whoever it is you know and whether or not they choose to understand or want to understand it or just brush it off which I think men do

K. so it's quite easy to dismiss the (.) what you're saying because it's an emotional thing

D. yeah maybe mainly because it's coming mainly more from the heart than the head you know um so yeah (Drizzle 5.5-8)

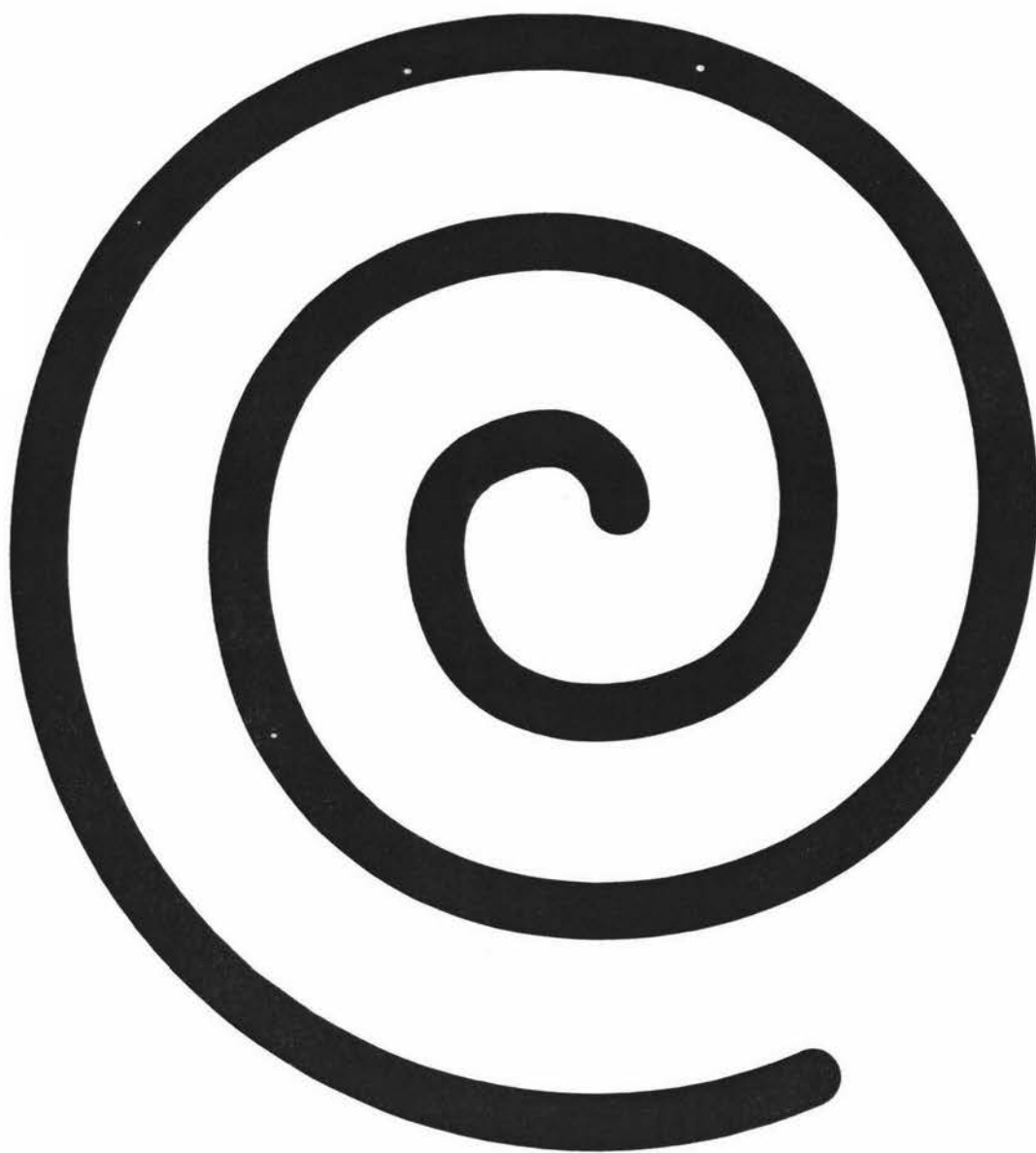
In the following telling of the fighting for life narrative, Caesal positions women as strong by reclaiming her right to speak from an emotional place. This speaking voice enables her to tell herself as she really is and not cover this up or hide from her

emotions. She privileges this voice over the masculine voice of avoiding emotions. In this reclaiming of women's voice, Caesal is enabled to be strong and to position women as strong and free:

K. in terms of I was talking before about patriarchal spirituality or man based where the hierarchy is masculine um, has that effected your life in any way that awareness

C. um I always say why a man like why and I think I mean some of the women that I have met especially have been so strong and I think women can be so much stronger than men um I think because we're not scared to cry we're not scared to show our emotions we're not scared to do things where men have been put up on this pedestal if you think and are too scared to let go and just say this is who I really really am and I have met so many men like that. They get pushed in I mean look at New Plymouth we're rugby orientated so (.) growing up you play rugby you will be accepted I mean it's it's. Women are freer and I always think well gosh if we're like that why is it this man who is overpowering us and I guess, I mean I don't get angry, I mean I don't, I mean if that's how it is well (.) I just think it's stupid. I just think how pathetic that men should be known as the stronger ones when I just don't think they are. If anything we should maybe more equal or I think women (.) they go with their heart more where men get put up there and they don't say how they're feeling even though they talk about some issue and this is how it is sometimes I think do you really believe that because they're just supposed to. (Caesal 3.8-9)

In their tellings of the fighting for life narrative, the women are able to reclaim speaking positions that are empowering for them and for other women. They tell of fighting traditional gender roles and fighting for women's right to speak as strong, self-empowered individuals. They reclaim their power as women through positioning themselves as the givers of life and able to cope with this physical and mental trauma. The women tell the fighting for life narrative also through stories of keeping themselves safe from being destroyed, and through reclaiming a female voice where it is possible to speak from their emotions. The fighting for life narrative enables the women to create speaking positions of strength for women and to validate their right to speak.



Character comes from following our highest sense of right,
from trusting ideals without being sure they'll work.

One challenge of our adventure on earth is to rise above dead
systems - wars, religions, nations,
destructions
- to refuse to be a part of them, and express instead the
highest selves we know how to be

(Bach, 1988, p. 95)

Chapter Eight

Discussion: Moving beyond binaries

In this thesis I have attempted to tell women's narratives and the subject positions they construct through these narratives of their spirituality. These tellings have been excluded from the field of psychology, and women have been positioned in the edges of knowledge production, leaving absences and silences. I was interested in reclaiming female voice from the practice of objectifying participants in psychological research. I was also interested in moving away from constraining women's voices through theories of cohesive, stable personalities and norms which subjugate women, into the consideration of the complex power relationships which influence all aspects of social life. My own speaking position has been enabled by a narrative tapestry, which includes psychology, poststructuralism and feminism. In reading and writing from this position I am informed and supported in my concern about women's presence in psychology, and in the absence of research involving spirituality.

I have attempted to identify the narratives that women tell of their spirituality and consider the effects of these narratives. In doing this I have contributed my analysis of these women's tellings and the subject positions that they told and which they took up themselves. I have done this by identifying these subject positions and considering the effects of these on enabling and constraining women. The narratives told were multiple, and I chose to identify four narratives that were presented in Chapters four to eight. These narrative constructions were informed by my reading of the interview transcripts. Through these narrative tellings, I have presented co-productions of women's tellings that include the right to claim and reclaim subject positions of empowerment, of connectedness with the cycles of nature and of growth as women and individuals.

Through these narratives I have presented tellings of the constraining effects of patriarchal institutions, and of relationships with men, and of the complexities of the constraint of traditional gender stereotypes such as mother and nurturer, or women

as passive to men's active nature. I have also discussed some of the problems of binary oppositions that appear in patriarchal language and presented a realisation of other knowings, which include multiplicity and interconnectedness. I have presented subject positions of strong, independent women who were capable and had the right to speak for themselves, with their own voice, and to know for themselves. I have analysed through narrative form, to convey a claim of connectedness to nature and a repositioning of women in the natural cycle of life which gave them a sense of empower. I have presented tellings of positions of power and retellings of life traumas and choice points from this position, which enabled reclaiming painful experiences as enabling and learning experiences. In these tellings I have also identified a claim for the rights of all women, and a claim of empowerment that is neither controlling nor destructive. My readings of these co-constructions has contributed voices from the edges. It is possible through this voice to investigate some of the effects on women within institutions and structures of power, and within their cultural resources.

There are limitations and constraints on this thesis, and they are multiple. My reading and writing practice is constrained as I have imposed meaning on other women's tellings, and also on our co-production of these tellings. This thesis therefore presents a further construction of these productions, which is my own telling and weaving of the strands and threads which were gifted to me by the women who willingly shared their time and stories with me. My re-construction of their narratives was also informed by my readings. I discussed some of my concerns for the analysis of these tellings in Chapter 3. I have attempted to honour the stories these women shared with me by leaving them as complete as I am able within the space constraints of this study, and by investigating the narratives they have told. However, so many of the women's stories have been left out of this work due to both my reading, and also to the limitations of this project. Many of their stories were of another weave, and I have been unable to include them all here. Also, the individual story may have been lost in my analysis and I feel this both adds to the work but also creates other silences. I do however believe narrative analysis enabled me to consider the meaning making processes these women used in these tellings,

and allowed a way to discuss and consider the effects of their tellings of spirituality. This is a partial contribution and while I hope to present voices, they are still from the edges and I send them out, hoping others will hear, and will also start or continue to speak.

To continue this spiral of tellings, I would like to re-turn to my participants. Together we have created this piece of work, but without their willingness to share, their willingness to dig deep within and give voice to their thoughts and feelings, none of this could be. At the end of each interview I asked each woman for some final words they would like to say to young women out there...these are their replies:

Inner strength. Believe in yourselves. For women out there to know that they've can do it and they don't need a male figure. Sure have one working hand in hand with you but you don't need one to make it. We've been given an ability in this form to do it alone. (Agnes)

Try to be true to your self. (Jonesy)

It does get easier. (Drizzle)

Stand in your own truth which is about standing in the spirit. (Artemis)

Be true to yourself because I remember even at that age I knew when I was doing something that didn't feel good to me. Go with your instincts and be true to yourself. Don't feel pressured. Well, feel pressure and recognise it as pressure but be true to yourself. (Fathom)

Every journey is provided to teach us something and allow us to continue growing. Learn not to fight this and fear the unknown but let your helpers help you. (Belinda)

Just be true to yourself. Just live. Don't be too focussed on one thing. Have a direction but just know what you want and spend time on what makes you feel good. (Caesal)

If you wanted to explore some spirituality or even just in general I think it would be valuable to um start looking at the older, I don't even like to call them religions, but

older peoples' belief systems pre-Christian or like Native American or pagan things which have got a lot more fruit in them for people to develop a more whole kind of sense of spirituality. Or to go to nature or like even with those older pre-Christian non-Christian non-Buddhist non-masculine religions, you know the standard ones there are where there are female deities to aspire to. Recognise that they are out there but they've been suppressed. (Maria)

To be in touch with yourself spiritually give yourself the full potential to be in your self. You are most spiritual when you are thinking the way you want to be thinking, not what someone is telling you how to think. And that's actually getting into your self like what everything means to you as a person. (Sianan)

Appendix A

Goddess Spirituality – Pollack (1997, p. 136-137)

A religion based on the reality of life, not power

People critical of the modern Goddess movement sometimes ask, if the Goddess is so all powerful why did women lose their place? How did men seize control everywhere and suppress women, keeping them ignorant and enslaved? Those who believe in the Goddess may also find these issues troubling. Some develop mythical ideas that the Goddess deserted her children, or punished us for some lack of proper worship, or some broken taboo. Others fall back on the assumption of progress, saying that the Goddess allowed men to take over as a necessary stage in human development.

To some extent, these questions themselves arise from a patriarchal model of deity. We picture God(dess) as Almighty, controlling and directing everything that happens with deliberation, purpose, and unstoppable power. This is God made in the image of man (or rather, man's fantasies of omnipotence), particularly the master-slave "dominator" model of the world as Riane Eisler calls it. In such a religion, God stands apart from the world and stage-manages it, commanding us above all else to fear Him ("Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," the Bible tells us).

The religion of the Goddess is not an "abiding relationship" with an all-powerful controlling being who exists apart from the world. Instead, we might term it a relationship with the world as it really is, with its cycles, its abundant life and ever-present death, its joy and pain. The abiding relationship emerges out of the body of the world and our own bodies. The Goddess is not in charge of history. The Goddess is history, with all its pain and horror as well as its beauties and discoveries.

The evidence from the Neolithic period teaches us that the Goddess does not require a split between nature, science, and the sacred. The beauty of such places as Stonehenge, Newgrange, or Chaco Canyon lies in their evocation of the sacred through channelling light into stone- giving form to the shifting body of the natural world. When we recognise creation as female we do not need to posit a God who creates out of thoughts alone, and who therefore determines everything that happens. We do not need to look for religion in something "higher" than the world right in front of us.

A religion based on the world as it is liberates men as well as women.

Appendix B Information Sheet

[Massey University letterhead]

Women's narratives of their spirituality and how these narratives tell us

Thank you for your interest in my research. I am Kirsti Cheals and this is my master's thesis, which I am completing through Massey University, Palmerston North. However I am conducting my research in the New Plymouth, Taranaki area as this is my current base. My supervisor for this piece of research is Dr Mandy Morgan, who is based at the Massey University campus in Palmerston North.

This study is about finding the stories that women in New Zealand tell of their spirituality. I am interested in how we speak about our spirituality, and also about the subject positions created by these narratives. I am interested in your story, and how this story has affected your life. You will be invited to participate in a one-hour conversation-style interview at a location of your choice. This interview is intended to allow you the opportunity to tell me about your spirituality and what this means to you. I am also interested in the ways that patriarchal models of spirituality have affected you as a woman.

Once I have transcribed your interview, the tape will be erased, and your identity disguised through a coding system. This data will then be analysed by myself under supervision. My analysis of yours and nine other women's narratives will then become the basis for my master's thesis. At all times the data will be stored securely, and your identity protected by coding. You will be referred to by pseudonym in the thesis, and you are welcome to provide me with a pseudonym. At the completion of the project the data will be securely stored by the supervisor. At all stages up to the completion you are invited to make changes to your transcript, and to withdraw from the project. You are also welcome to decline to participate in this research at any time.

You are welcome to contact me at any stage regarding this project. I welcome your feedback. To contact Kirsti please phone her on [omitted], or email her on [omitted]

Alternatively you may wish to contact my supervisor Mandy. Her phone number is (06) 350 5799, extn 2063, or email her on c.a.morgan@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix C Consent Form

[Massey University letterhead]

Women's narratives of their spirituality and how these narratives tell us

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission.

(The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project).

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix D

Conversation-style Interview Prompts

What does spirituality mean to you?

- as a woman?

Have you ever searched for, and have you found, a way of expressing your spirituality that feels right for you personally?

- why did you search?
- What do you understand as different to other ways of understanding?

How have patriarchal models of spirituality affected the way you think about yourself

- available ways of expressing yourself spiritually
- ways of understanding your body and your place in life/on the planet

Do you think women have their own spirituality. Would it be recognized as separate to male spirituality?

How do you think women are positioned in terms of spirituality?

What is knowing

- intuition
- feelings

Appendix E

Transcribing Key

Extract identification:	(<i>Name, transcript page number. paragraph number</i>) e.g. (<i>Drizzle, 1.1</i>)
Additional extracts:	This is where the participant has added more to their transcript after reading. e.g. (<i>Drizzle, additional</i>)
Brief pause:	(.)
Longer pause:	(1) signifies 1 second
Action:	*action* e.g. *laughs*
Omitted text:	Names and other revealing information has been omitted from the transcript and replaced with square brackets which indicate whom or what the reference was about without revealing specific information. e.g. [daughter] where the speaker has used their daughters' name.

Appendix F Letter Back

Thank you for participating with me in this journey of exploring spirituality. You have individually given of your own stories and that means so much to me as a researcher, but especially as a person. I honour you.

Here is the transcript of our conversation together about your spirituality. Thank you for this gift, which I now give back. Please read it and adjust any bits that may not feel right to you, and please add things that now come to you... all of this is the journey of narrative, stories of making sense of our selves.

If there are changes, could you please telephone me when you are finished on [omitted].

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