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**‘We (woman) actually don’t think about it like that’;
A narrative analysis of tears in the fabric
of gendered experiences of aging following the loss of an
intimate partner.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Psychology

at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand.

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2014

ABSTRACT

Contemporary narratives about the ‘virtuosity’ of aging engage a dominant vision of independence and autonomy. Conducive to New Zealand’s neo-liberalist governing strategy, this vision generates moral trajectories around what constitutes ‘good citizenship’ in older age. This thesis considers women’s exclusion from such citizenship through their anticipated ‘dependent’ location in the social hierarchy. Following the literature on positive aging, the ongoing normalisation of the distinct and opposing binary of independence/dependence emerges through a gendered narrative that constrains women’s access to meaningful experiences of aging. Where the dominant cultural narrative of aging positions women as dependent and therefore deficient, the narrative is insufficient to appreciate the texture and complexity of women’s dependence experience. The text for analysis was generated through one to one interviews and two focus groups. This thesis represents a chorus of voices through women’s stories of losing an intimate partner to question gendered dependence narratives that render women’s experiences invisible in our disciplinary practices. The research asks how culturally produced narratives of dependency intersect with women’s experiences of gender and aging. This project specifically attends to the gendered cultural meaning of dependency on women’s experiences as they engage with reflexively transforming their loss.

The analysis shows that women’s intersecting experiences of gender, loss and aging involve a diverse and textured experience of dependence, and intimate relationships were located as necessary to social relationships. Counter-narratives emerged to bring into view that women’s ‘dependency’ experience, configured and textured through meanings of intimacy embedded in the moral trajectory of femininity, locate women as responsible for the care of others and the success of their social spaces. As the women told their stories through a process of reflection, they began to challenge the meaning of their gendered social location through stories of political capacity, challenging the dominant narrative that marks relational responsibility as dependence. What emerged through the chorus of voices was how the women resisted the cultural narratives as they critically reflected on changes in their relationships. There were five themes that organised the analysis; the struggle over the meaning of intimacy and its relationship with dependency, questioning the meaning of change and choice in women’s social location as a process, personal agency and resilience, reflection on gendered social location through stories of political capacity, resistance as an embodied process of transformation to critically question cultural narratives of women’s position as virtuous agers. The research tells how women’s resistance is a textured relationship between public and private spaces and subversive acts as they negotiate the gendered social meanings of dependency complicated by a gendered subject location and its consequent moral trajectories. As they transform such spaces, resistance emerges through a recognition of themselves as agents of change. Resistance to the cultural narrative of dependency was countered through challenging the assumptions of sexual difference and the virtue of coupling. Taking up a position as ‘having’ social power enabled the women to live in new ways across multiple other relationships. It is through the navigation of intimacy that women experience the rich and dynamic contest of the boundaries around support and dependence,

through which women experience relational negotiation. For this project, making visible this negotiation engages women's diverse and dynamic experiences with 'dependency' as involving social power, and reveling in processes of transformation. The texture that gendered 'dependency' narratives can lend older women's experience of reflexive transformation is the potential to challenge the constraints of gendered normality in a process through which women recognise their own experiences of dependence as enabling good citizenship.

Creating space for the voices of women to emerge while simultaneously writing a thesis to produce a counter-narrative of resilience to produce new understandings of virtuous aging carries ethical responsibility. Creating 'community' conversations in the practice of this research project lead to the opening up of 'discursive space' capable of being inclusive of the complexity of women's lives and experiences to provide a research experience for women that was transformative while retaining the integrity of the women's stories.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to first thank the women whose courage and sincerity were instrumental in shaping the foundations for this project. Your willingness to open your lives to this research has lent critical visibility to the experiences of women everywhere and has taken me on a truly profound personal journey. I will always remember your generosity and will continue to be inspired by your stories.

To my supervisor, Dr Leigh Coombes. You have gifted me the confidence to question my ignorance and inspired me to always confront deeper waters. Your knowledge, determination and understanding has helped me find volume in my own voice and compelled my search for a deeper purpose. For this I thank you with all of my heart.

Mum. From the moment I decided to jump on this slow moving train you have been by my side. Your quiet logic has kept me grounded and unbroken patience allowed me the space to find my way; I feel like we are closer than ever. Thank you, you are my rock and I love you.

I wish to lovingly dedicate this thesis to my Grandma. Your strength of character is a powerful reminder about the person whom I aspire to be. I am so glad we are on this journey together and I am so very proud to be your granddaughter.

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CHAPTER ONE – Introduction

Myself as Researcher

I am the proud daughter and granddaughter of two wonderful and inspiring women, whom over the last ten years or so have shared with me the moving and colourful stories of their loss of an intimate partner. Through spending time with them listening to their stories I have come to truly appreciate them both as more than a ‘mother’ and ‘grandmother’, but as very real people with very real experiences.

During our time spent together, or ‘bonding’ as my mother calls it, I have learnt and continue to learn a great deal. Feeling intrigued, excited and often confronted by their stories of change, I have become increasingly concerned with and offended by the discouraging and adverse ways that society talks about older women, their bodies, their lives and their experiences of loss.

Most poignant to me across the years in relational conversations with my wonderful foremothers are the rich and complex meanings of, and distinct variation in, their experiences. As they told of the textures of their experiences, my understanding of ‘normal’ aging experiences following the loss of an intimate partner was challenged. I began to question just how ‘helpful’ I (in the narrative production) had been to their lives since their loss. As their stories began to unfold in conversations between us, the assumptions I brought to my response began to transform as I began to make sense of the rich meaning that was being storied. As uncomfortable as it was, this continuous process of self-questioning and critique enabled me to consider how my own gendered social location within dominant Eurocentric markers of privilege and loss had influenced my responses based on the assumptions of dominant narratives of aging and loss.

My interest in these relationships between us was the beginning of my academic interest in psychology. As I engaged in the discipline, I accepted the ‘knowledge’ claims that categorised and normalised the ‘problem’ of women’s aging. I began to recognise a noticeable gap, a missing narrative, that did not account for the shared experiences of my mother, my grandmother, and me. I became interested in the dominant narrative that render women’s bodies as docile and how women’s embodied experience becomes a site of contestation, producing a counter-narrative to masculine assumptions of women’s dependence.

Contemporary Focus on Aging

Within contemporary capitalist ideology, the neo-liberal citizen is produced as free to choose and consume while taking personal responsibility for their self-care and efficiency. In this way, the neo-liberal subject is characterised through a Eurocentric gaze on a particular social body, reproducing a hegemonic western mode of subjectification to the social power relations of individualist culture (Morgan & Coombes, 2013).

Like much of the western world, New Zealand is experiencing the continual transformation of age structures. This change is currently characterised by a steep demographic trend set to continue across the coming years that signals a significant increase to the proportion of New Zealand's population located within an older age range (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). The regulation of the population through technologies of categorisation and measurement to produce norms is directly concerned with processes of birth, death, reproduction and the health of its citizens and is a pervasive method of social control. These technologies of knowledge and power control the movement, location and capacity of people and act on bodies (Morgan, 2005). As a result of this on-going expansion, there has been a surge in local and international research interest in social policy concerning ageing that aims to increase individual responsibility for self-care and reduce the economic cost to governments (Coombes & Morgan, 2015). Primary to this interest are questions that focus on growing older as a time of activity and independence. This theoretical shift challenges the traditional socio-political narrative of decline and dependency that has dominated the field, to reconceptualise it as a time of increased opportunity, enjoyment and social connectedness and this is intimately connected with the production of morally responsible citizens.

Critical health researchers Breheny and Stephens (2010) take issue with the assumed 'universal benefit' of conceptualising aging through positivity, and argue that this assumption further oppresses people living socially marginalised lives. Through research focussed on older people's ways of talking about 'positive aging' in their social relationships, Breheny and Stephens (2010) voice their concern over the impact of talking about aging as a time of positivity and how it effects older people's identity. They argue that the meaning of 'positive aging' complicates older peoples endeavour to position themselves in relationships where they morally align with being a 'virtuous ager', even when they are facing severe hardship. Through this tension, the narrative of aging that promotes activity and self-reliance re-enforces the disadvantage already experienced by some older people; the social anticipation that people can, do and should 'age positively' creates additional burdens for those already constrained by social and material circumstance, and excludes them from participation in good citizenship. Through their marginalisation, some groups become further distanced from accessing a healthy and positive experience of aging (Breheny & Stephens, 2010). This project builds on the argument of marginalisation by critically considering the experience of living as a gendered subject as it intersects with women's experience of aging; that our experience of gender complicates our experience of positioning ourselves as 'virtuous agers' in relationships later in life.

Dominant cultural narratives position women as responsible for the emotional labour of relationships. Through the master narrative of sexual difference, women bear the social responsibility for the emotional wellbeing of others and for the emotional stability of their relationships. While feminist researchers have contested this dominant narrative, women continue to be held responsible for the emotional work of nurturing their partners, children and extended family within heterosexual relationships (Sandfield & Percy, 2003). This social location generates a particular moral trajectory that contextualises the meaning of social relationships and impacts on women's experiences. This research is interested in the moral trajectory of positive aging as it intersects with the experience of older women

who have lost an intimate partner. It is proposed that such trajectories complicate women's personal transformation of loss and textures their agency in ongoing relationships.

In particular this project aims to attend to the trajectories that complicate the relationship between gendered experience and the moral trajectory of positive aging; this means also attending to the literature that questions the social and cultural meanings of gender produced through dominant narratives of sexual difference that marginalise women's experience.

Sexual Difference – A Feminist Critique

Through this research, I aim to texture the relationship between older women and their experiences of aging as diverse, complex and meaningful. The feminist notion of embodiment suggests that women's experience of aging can be understood as gendered (Twigg, 2004). This notion of embodiment differs from the bio-medical defined object-body in that it implicates the body as inscribed with meaning (Bartky, 1990). In this sense, women can be considered to live aging in and through their bodies and through processes enabled through certain historical, social and cultural possibilities (Butler, 1998). It is the ability to consider women's experience of aging as inclusive of their gendered possibilities that enables feminism to take critical interest in how society produces and structures women's bodies through gendered practices.

Feminist engagements with psychology have challenged the way the discipline has produced and reproduced oppressive social power relations by attending to the processes through which psychological knowledge is constituted (Coombes & Morgan, 2004). Feminism as a form of critique has disturbed traditional dominant assumptions that anticipate women will experience their aging bodies primarily through change to their reproductive function (Hyde, Nee, Howlett, Drennan, & Butler, 2010). Through an emphasis on gendered social power relations, feminist psychology has troubled the way reproductive discourse has marked older women's bodies, and challenged the objectification of women's bodies through their sexual (reproductive) difference to men (Dillaway, 2005a; Hyde et al., 2010).

Central to this critique has been a focus on the mind/body Cartesian split that locates women as quantitatively different from men. In this duality mind and body are not only different and distinct, but opposing; the mind privileged through its ability for rationality, and the body demarcated and devalued through its mechanical function (Morgan, 2005; Price & Shildrick, 1999). The mind/body binary is highly problematic to feminism because the mind has been profoundly coupled with masculinity and consequently aligned with logic, reason, technology and civilisation. Women, through their difference from men, and femininity through its difference from masculinity, become associated with the excessive, disordered and emotional body.

The narrative of sexual difference thus engages reproductive difference and locates women's difference in her biology, which becomes socially meaningful. The constraints of sexual difference reproduce social power relations of marginalisation, domination and subordination that are legitimated through naturalising the sexed body. The histories of women's bodies are intimately connected to the system of technologies of power that both constitute and discipline them (Sawicki, 1999). Dillaway

(2005b) argues that because men's bodies have historically dominated institutions such as psychology and medicine, women's normal reproductive processes have become pathologised and considered in need of surveillance. Where women's bodies are produced as reproductively deficient, the institutional gaze has defined, disciplined and disempowered older women. As women age, their bodies lack the norms of femininity (fertile, attractive) and are subjected to social and cultural practices of bodily deficiency and become asexual 'other'. In furthering this argument Dillaway (2005b) suggests that processes of normalisation and technologies of surveillance inscribe bodies with social and cultural meaning, and limit the possibilities for women's aging experiences. Located as other, aging women occupy the cultural space that breaches the boundaries of the hegemonic categorisation of sexual difference through technologies of normalisation.

Rendering women's aging bodies through deficiency enforces boundaries that discipline women's aging experiences. Such regulation of social and cultural meaning is a relentless process, and reproduces the narrative of women's dependence as the trajectory socially available for aging women. How then, is it possible for aging women to participate in good citizenship as positive agers?

Applying Butler's version of the power/resistance couplet, McKinlay (2010) argues that the experience of being positioned through discourse can be understood to set loose a "babble of discursive alternatives, a disorder of practices that flout prohibition" (p. 234). Thus aging women's bodies as 'other' can be positioned as critical to destabilising the gender binary that restricts access to speaking of life possibilities outside of institutions, where women's experience with masculinist discourse incites opposition. Drawing on Butlers notion of performativity, McKinlay (2010) argues that experiencing the continual reiteration of the practices that enact cultural norms moves beyond the dualism of structure and agency. Through performativity it is possible to consider that older women engage dominant narratives about aging bodies but how they take them up involves agency to oppose, resist and counter dominant positions and trouble the positioning from within the narrative itself.

Feminist Standpoint Epistemology as Cultural Critique

What we know and how we know depend on who we are, that is, on the knowers historical locus and his or her position in the social hierarchy. Appreciating this 'standpoint' is critical to feminism as a social movement concerned with how meaning is embodied, both constructed and transformed, through gendered social practices.

Feminism is a form of cultural critique and proponent of social change as it repeatedly resists patriarchal power relations. Advocating that "there is indeed no representation that is not produced from some position in society" (p. 127), Dorothy Smith (1997) argues that all attempts at knowledge are written from somewhere; feminist standpoint epistemology advances that knowledge is always socially situated. Situatedness is understood to be moderated and facilitated by the ways in which social values, experiences and practices are socially organised (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). Therefore, feminist standpoint epistemology is a critical approach to the relations between power and knowledge that open spaces to oppose, resist and counter dominant narratives.

Feminist standpoint theorists consider women's bodies as occupying a definitively subordinate and qualitatively different position from men in patriarchal culture (Hallstein, 1999; Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1987). Through this occupation, women's life experiences cannot be 'known' through existing epistemological approaches that alienate and distance women from their own standpoint (Riger, 1992). Thus, a feminist standpoint considers that the generation of knowledge must start with the lives of women; women's lives however are not considered to be either reducible or universal. As argued by Sandra Harding (2002, p. 58) "the claim by women that women's lives provide a better starting point for thought about gender systems is not the same as the claim that *their own* lives are the best such starting points". Feminist standpoint theorists suggest that the lives of women are a more adequate place from which to *generate* critical questions about social order (Harding, 2002), where women's standpoints can offer both different and more complex insights into gendered power relationships. As a form of critique, it is bifurcated knowledge of the power relationship and its effects of women that enable transformation (Hartsock, 1987).

Hartsock's (1987) argument about the nature of the standpoint helps make sense of the diverse struggle older women are confronted with in accessing their experience beyond the dominant narrative of lack. In critiquing the gender binary we acknowledge the presence of a fundamental social segregation, where women, men and their activities are separated into two quite distinct and opposing positions; when men and women view each other they do as the inversion of themselves. Because gender is a social power relation of domination and subordination, the masculine vision of women is partial and distorted; it is the vision that has come to structure the material relations in which society participates.

Adopting an alternative standpoint makes space to consider the gendered power relationships under which we all live our lives and made available for critical questioning. By considering women's struggles as inclusive of multiple intersecting forms of political, material and social inequality generated from living within multiple marginal social locations, research can attend to women's struggles as textured by multiple power relationships intricately involved with each other (Krekula, 2007). As a form of alternative knowledge production, feminist standpoint offers a counter narrative that challenges legitimate hegemonic knowledge as a site through which the meaning of gender is constantly being negotiated, and the experience of oppression is made visible (Cole, 2009).

This project takes up a position of respectful feminist critique that tends to the complexities of being located within normalised disciplinary practices where conformity to dominant narratives of aging that enforce and discipline women's experiences, and simultaneously considers women's experiences of aging as inclusive of their gendered possibilities. This research aims to include the socially and culturally embodied experience of a group of women in their political sphere as they negotiate positive aging textured by the meaning of their experiences of loss of an intimate partner. To address these aims, the following chapter attends to the literature that traces a plotted history of contemporary notions of positive aging as a political strategy to reduce the burden of a burgeoning population textured through gender.

CHAPTER TWO – Aging and Gender

The Master Narrative of Decline

Stories about aging bodies traditionally involve deficit and regression. Expert medical discourse or ‘science’ legitimises the ‘search’ for such signs of decay and normalises medicine as a form of ‘symptom treatment’. Through this process, our aging lives become an entity for not only surveillance but medical intervention (Powell & Biggs, 2000). It is through this biomedical master narrative, and from early in our lives that we learn to anticipate with fear the ‘decay and decline’ plotted in such stories. Suggestive that youth represents the peak of our lives, this narrative of progression means that when we “(mis)recognize our aging face in the mirror” (Trethewey, 2001, p. 186), we are prevented from considering other explanations for such change as we progressively deteriorate through old age toward death. The domination of the narrative of decline permeates aging ideology and reduces both individual and collective experiences of aging to the neo-liberal conditions of individual responsibility, to stave off inevitable signs of decline; the consumption of technologies such as anti-aging skin-products, cosmetic surgery and popular texts are intimately connected with practices of the self-surveillance of women’s unruly bodies (Bartky, 2002; Braun, 2009).

Writing back to the decline narrative as a form of resistance, critical scholars have become increasingly responsive to the more constructive aspects of aging, attending to what happens when people age ‘well’. In this space, attention to the aspects of our lives that help maintain a healthy lifestyle came into view. Accentuating the role of activity in this achievement, and its consequent gains of autonomy and independence, a model of successful aging emerged. Building on medical discourse that suggested the ‘effects’ of aging were most often the effects of disease (Strawbridge, Wallhagen, & Cohen, 2002), this model centralised healthy function across the physical, cognitive and social aspects of people’s lives and, aimed at the retention of independence, connected healthy lifestyles with activity. This shift in ideology advocates for less government or state intervention in favour of the sovereignty of the individual and has spread into the textures of our disciplinary practices.

The positive ageing paradigm

Positive ageing is one such nuance within the rubric of emerging interest in healthy aging. Based on the assumption of the socially constituted nature of our lives, it critically attends the way that older people are narratively shaped through biological difference and consequently become “deprecated by the younger members of society” (Gergen & Gergen, 2001, p. 4). With an appreciation that the journey of re-storying aging as a time of positivity through transforming discourse it is different from its theoretical counterparts through attention to the social aspects of health and the theoretical space to consider the aging experience as socially textured and complex. Focussed on the potential for the development of a more comprehensive interpretation of ageing as a relational experience, positive aging attends to social and cultural connectedness. Thus older people’s experiences of feeling connected in their social

relationships, and their experiences of connecting with those others through discourse, are necessary to the project that seeks to resist 'agism' and re-focus toward ageing positivity. It is this discursive re-focus, that makes the theoretical paradigm of positive aging of particular interest to the sphere of New Zealand policies.

The New Zealand political landscape

In just over two decades, New Zealand's total population is estimated grow by almost another million people (Bascand, 2012). While our general population is expanding rapidly the transformative changes to the age structure in New Zealand, the transition from a younger to older population has been, and continues to be, gradual (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). Until now, the structure of age in New Zealand has not predominantly concerned those in the 65 years plus age group but with the 'baby boomers' making their way out of mid-life, the ageing population is set to expand. New Zealand's ageing population has doubled in the last 34 years, and is predicted to double again within the next 25 (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). With conservative estimates forecasting close to 1.2 million people considered 'older' living in New Zealand by the year 2036 (Bascand, 2012), those 'older' will likely make up close to 25% of New Zealand's overall population by the year 2061 (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). Like much of the world, we are in the midst of global economic rationalism that brings the demographic challenges our ageing population present to the forefront of neo-liberal concerns.

Over the last 30 years these shifts to age structures and the growth of the ageing population worldwide has generated political rhetoric that talks about the expansion of an aging population as an impending 'crisis' (Davey & Glasgow, 2006). Located within socio-political discourse about aging as a time of declining physical, social and economic health, this rhetoric portrays the expansion of aging populations worldwide as a fiscal burden on healthcare resources (Stephens & Flick, 2010). Positioned as essential to and responsible for financing and providing age related services, New Zealand's expanding aging population has emerged as a major concern to New Zealand policymakers.

The crisis rhetoric

Currently in New Zealand, beyond 95% of all people aged 65 years and over are the recipients of government provided Superannuation (Ministry of Social Development, 2012), a figure that in 2012/13 totalled a government expenditure of \$10.235 billion dollars. It is likely this expenditure will increase 25% by the year 2017 (Ministry of Social Development, 2013) and because of this, like many other countries, the New Zealand government has engaged with positive aging's 'virtues', activity and independence, to address the impending fiscal 'crisis' (Davey & Glasgow, 2006). Through a policy focus on positivity, independence in the lives of older people becomes viable as 'achievable' through not only social and physical activity but also people's adherence to health promotion advice and advanced financial planning (Pond, Stephens, & Alpass, 2010), and this narrative is normalised in social power relations.

The promotion of 'active bodies' encourages a localised personal level responsibility for managing health and wellbeing in later life while encouraging older people to continue to contribute to society, both socially and economically (Katz, 2000). This helps relocate the responsibility for older people's health and wellbeing away from care agencies and back onto the aging population and their families (Katz, 2000) and it is in this relocation of responsibility onto older people, in particular those who live marginal lives, that they become blameworthy for an inability to attain the universal status of 'positive ager'.

New Zealand's strategic political uptake of the positive ageing paradigm, the New Zealand Positive Aging Strategy (NZPAS) draws attention to the recognition of the integral role of older people in the wellbeing and integrity of family units and within our wider communities. In making a priority of older peoples financial security, independence, health, self-fulfilment, living environments and personal safety, the NZPAS aims to ensure income adequacy and security, affordable and appropriate housing situations, affordable, accessible and impartial healthcare and provide transport services across geographical locations that communities can access and afford, for older New Zealanders (Ministry of Social Development, 2001). In prioritising the security and safety of older people in all communities (both urban and rural), embracing cultural diversity and generating employment opportunities within those communities, the NZPAS aims to increase opportunity for personal growth and social participation and consequently promote positive attitudes within our communities and eliminate ageism (Ministry of Social Development, 2001). It is through these technologies of governmentality, where neo-liberalism extends individualism, that the hegemony of capitalism produces a mode of subjugation to the social power relations of individualist culture (Coombes & Morgan, 2015). Within this framework, technologies of categorisation regulate the population through institutional practices of normalisation and social control of the population; it is a social power relation that disciplines the movement, location and capacity of people and the behaviour of bodies (Bartky, 1990; Morgan, 2005).

It has recently been argued that through the relocation of individual responsibility for positive aging, the experience of social oppression is dismissed (Davey & Glasgow, 2006). Those living marginal lives, excluded from normalised criteria, become further dislocated from positive aging through the struggle to attain such a status (Breheny & Stephens, 2010). Therefore, when individual responsibility for independence is coupled with the unbridled optimism of positive aging discourse, a moral quandary emerges for older people; they are encouraged to present themselves in their social relationships as 'virtuous agers' even in times of struggle. A particular site of struggle is the tension between independence and dependence.

Independence and Dependence

The experience of material independence is plotted through themes of economic viability. The value of independence as virtuous material produces a moral location for the social meaning of virtuous ageing. Through its dominance, independence has a taken for granted quality that appears as a trouble free goal that is universally desired (Fine & Glendinning, 2005). Independence produces a moral position

for good citizenship, where virtuous agers meet the goals of the neo-liberal subject; self-reliant and autonomous.

Through the privileging of independence, dependency is located as a moral deficit. The social meaning of dependence has become entangled with crisis rhetoric to produce dependent agers as an economic and social burden. Fine and Glendinning (2005) have argued that the experience of dependency is intimately related to (the cost of) care and neither of them can or should be understood through 'fixed or rigid meanings'. Those agers who do not meet the necessary conditions for independence become blameworthy (Fine & Glendinning, 2005; D. Gibson, 1995).

The tension between independence and dependence has more recently been a focus for ageing scholars through the use of methods on inquiry that question the adequacy and the effects of current socio-political discourses in social relationships. Ranzijn (2010), for example, argues that active ageing policy reproduces socio-political exclusions for Aboriginal and other marginalised elders. In the disability field, Minkler and Fadem (2002) question the singularity of independence and argue that it is a highly fluid concept. Therefore, experiences of dependence and independence are intricately relevant, not only to one and other, but also to sociocultural context; they are in constant motion and experienced as dynamic across our lifetimes, as a negotiated struggle.

Breheny and Stephens (2009) argue positive aging discourse negotiates this struggle through the experience of reciprocity. They suggest that the experience of managing the conflicting assumptions of dependence and expectations of independence in social relationships complicates older peoples endeavours to promote themselves as aging 'positively' in their relationships. They argue the commitment to "a neo-liberal framework ... masks the unfairness and inequality of many elder lives... [which]... become about managing the description of inequality and disadvantage to demonstrate a positive attitude" (Breheny & Stephens, 2010, p. 47). The effects of inequality are necessary to understand how older women negotiate their moral location in gendered social power relations in the struggle for meaning.

Independence/dependence and gender

Although research has attended to the lives and experience of older people as complicated by positive aging discourse (Breheny & Stephens, 2009, 2010; Pond et al., 2010; Ranzijn, 2010) there has been little attention to how living as a gendered subject may texture the experience. The storying of women as dependent has dominated cultural narratives through a master narrative of sexual difference (Wood, 2001). Feminist psychological research has questioned the historical, social and cultural meanings of gender, and argued that women's experiences cannot be defined or understood within traditional categories of biological differences that position women through their sameness or difference from men (Harding, 1987, 1991; Sawicki, 1999). Sexual difference elaborates a theory of personhood that produces a hierarchically organised binary positioning women as the emotional opposite to men's reason through gendered relationships of domination and subordination (Morgan, 2005). This story reflects adherence to the regulation of women's experience through what Reynolds and Wetherell (2003) regard as a "powerful

and often tacit sets of regulations about appropriate forms of desire and intimate partnership” (p. 489). Willey (2014) argues that heterosexual coupling remains “a building block of contemporary culture”, with the term ‘compulsory monogamy’ often used by feminists to attend to the “deeply normalized status of coupling, especially for women” (p. 1). It is the unquestionable coupling obligation for women that Adlersberg and Thorne (1990) argue propels women into a position of dependence, where women’s intimate partnerships are the marker of self-worth and happiness (Wood, 2001). Through cultural narratives of sexual difference and reinforced through plotlines that insist intimate partnership as deeply involved with a women’s sense of physical and psychological wellbeing, single women are assumed ‘at risk’ of losing the economic, social and emotional security that coupledness is storied to bring. It reifies personal responsibility that takes the ‘gaze’ away from gendered social power relations and locates the problem of dependence in women’s deficit. The condition of risk is the oppressive positioning of women through relational dependency (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003).

Attention to the hegemony of gendered social power relationships and the effects of the socio-political context of the experience of dependency in the lives of marginalised groups has been neglected in psychological research on positive ageing. The following section attends to the emergence of research that locates women as gendered subjects within the hierarchy of gendered social power relations.

The Storying of Older ‘Single’ Women

*‘Your days are difficult because you are an older widow,
not because we all have difficult days.’
(Pat Chambers, 2002, p. 37)*

Research interventions and practices of psychology that tacitly align with a hegemony that seeks to control the bodies of women through stories of dependency, are reproduced at the site where older women who have experienced the death of an intimate partner are also located; they are at ‘risk’ of dependence. Therefore, psychological research and practice can be understood as contributing to maintaining gendered power imbalances through its perseverance with research agendas that focus on the ‘problems of widowhood’. Located in this way, psychology as a discipline has isolated older women who have experienced the loss of an intimate partner through our participation in knowledge production that constitutes them as problematic and thus as requiring intervention.

History – grief and bereavement

Emerging from a history of pathologising loss of an intimate partner as an experience dominated by severe emotional, psychological and physical grief reactions, was bereavement theory. It centralised grief reactions as an internal psychology of self that could be resolved through dissolving emotional attachment to the loss by successfully moving through the emotional ‘stages’ of grief as necessary to productively form new relationships and ultimately ‘move on’.

Such stage theories were orientated toward ‘recovering’ from the loss experience through a narrative of progression through emotional states in sequence (Bennett & Soulsby, 2012). Through this early research and its assumption of a universal experience, it became commonly understood that due to women’s extended longevity and lower probability to remarry after the loss of an intimate other the pathology associated with widowhood was a women’s issue. The insidious nature of this pathological crisis framework is exemplified in the proliferation of loss and bereavement research that has generated a disproportionate amount of research involving women widows as pathological (Chambers, 2002) to confirm the storyline of women as dependent and marginalise their experiences in positive aging. While ‘the problem of women’ was resisted through the early critical efforts of Helena Lopata (1973) as a gendered social power relationship, the significant volume of research literature continues to focus heavily on the social and material difficulties women face after their loss. This re-enforced early medical bereavement narratives of crisis and engaged a dominant public narrative themed through the social and material ‘problems’ of widowhood for older women (Chambers, 2002). This research reproduces representations of women who have lost an intimate partner as financially insecure, socially marginalised and pathologised through their embodiment of psychological, emotional and physical difficulties that constitute their dependency on family and institutional care, and is embedded in the master narrative of sexual difference. The plotlines in this narrative are engaged to locate women as dependent on economic and social relationships outside of intimate partnership.

Beyond ‘problems’ – diversity and discovery

In psychology’s emerging story about older women and intimate partner loss rendering the problem of women/dependence visible has opened up the possibility for theoretical and methodological diversity in transforming the meaning of dependence. This turning point has seen a small but significant turn to qualitative methods over the last two decades that historically, socially and culturally locates meaning through the voices of women by researchers disinterested in the continued problematisation of older women’s loss experiences. The chorus of voices re-enforces a theoretical appreciation of the experience for women as a complex history embedded in gendered social power relations. For example, through attending the voices of women in research, the experience of change as it is enacted can now be appreciated as a social identity transition involving a re-construction or reformulation of ‘self’ (Cheek, 2010; Lopata, 1973, 1986), an experience of fore-closure and rebirth (Van den Hoonaard, 1997) and as a new life phase evolving (Feldman, Byles, & Beaumont, 2000). Attention to voice has made visible change after loss as a ‘recovery’ or ‘re-discovery’ of pre-marital identity (Adlersberg & Thorne, 1990), a “complete transition of [a] taken-for-granted reality” (Lee & Bakk, 2001, p. 52) that may be an experience of continuity, a merging between old and new identities (Bennett, 2010). Merging is a process that may be fragmented, “dramatic” or “imperceptible” (Bennett, 2010, p. 211), present as disorientation, re-examination (Lee & Bakk, 2001), augmentation, or hyphenation (Bennett, 2010). Rapid and/or sudden, change may be experienced as gradual or on-going, a partial or complete journey pertaining identifiable moments of change that are constantly being negotiated (Chambers, 2002). What has emerged

is an experience of movement that is neither uniform nor progressive. The experience of loss is not sequential, and “certainly not [experienced] through stages of adaption in the traditional bereavement sense” (Bennett, 2010, p. 214)

The change experience as critical reflection

Danforth and Glass (2001) explain women’s experience of loss as a process of reflection on their social and cultural positions, as ‘who they are’ in their everyday lives transitions. Understood as a process of movement and reflection, this process provides opportunities to challenge past experiences and make sense of how gender contextualises the everyday experiences of memories and loss (Gattuso, 2003). Reflection can be appreciated as a critical experience of change through which grief can be expressed and where assumptions about life, relationships and the world can be grappled with. Critical reflection is understood as an opportunity for women to learn about themselves. For example, women may discover “unacknowledged talents” and develop and explore “new facets” of themselves (Cheek, 2010, p. 358), experience the re-discovery of their *own* desires and aspirations, and re-examine their beliefs (Adlersberg & Thorne, 1990)

The diversity of stories that have emerged through a focus on the multiple, fluid and complex nature of the narratives women use to story their experiences after loss, privilege the voices of women. Listening for variety and fluctuation when hearing the life stories of older widows, Pat Chambers (2002) reveals that women experience discovery and reflection as the fluid interrelationship of managing and not managing their everyday lives as they are constantly rebounding between confidence and un-surety. Her interpretation of women’s experiences recognises the jagged variation in this space as rugged, skewed and navigated. As women negotiate their experience, critical reflection is appreciated as transformative. It opens new opportunities for meaning making and resilience

Through this diversity and ruggedness the experience of discovery and critical reflection can be appreciated as transformative (Danforth & Glass, 2001; Feldman et al., 2000; Gattuso, 2003; Lopata, 1986). In the work of Danforth and Glass (2001) resilience is understood through plotlines of survival, coping and self-worth generated from narrative interview with 6 widowed women where reflection on their gendered position generated a “significant turning point in creating a new lens through which to view the self and world” (2001, p. 522). Resilience to the cultural narrative of dependence is made meaningful through narratives of change that are experienced as ‘making them stronger’ (Feldman et al., 2000).

The social nature of critical reflection

There is little doubt that women experience change after intimate partner loss amidst “thick networks of family and friends” (Cheek, 2010, p. 357) and that critical reflection, and ultimately resilience, are engaged and realised through positive social experiences (Cheek, 2010; Lee & Bakk, 2001). For the most part, psychology has storied women’s social relationships as a ‘variable’ in social

processes of aging. The measurement of social interaction has reproduced the narrative of social and material dependence (Utz, Carr, Nesse, & Wortman, 2002). Recently critical scholars, again attending women's lives and experiences through privileging voice and diversity, have come to appreciate that women's social relationships after loss are actually very complicated and while often positive, they may also be experienced as confronting and highly challenging (Chambers, 2002). The significance of making visible women's complex experience with social relationships following loss of an intimate partner is that those relationships act like a horizon against which women experience critical reflection. Attention to social relationship has made visible the unpredictability of relationships following loss (Bent & Magilvy, 2006), where the "shifting [of] interpersonal proximity" (Cheek, 2010, p. 354), and culturally mediated unrealistic expectations of women's dependency have often lead to challenges to established close personal relationships (Cheek, 2010), or they have ceased (Lee & Bakk, 2001; Van den Hoonaard, 1997). The significance of these challenges, including the lack of recognition of same-sex relationships by friends and family and institutional structures such as church communities, can lead to increases in responses of grief beyond bereavement (Bent & Magilvy, 2006).

Critical reflection and gender as resistance

Through her work with the narratives of older widows, Chambers (2002) noted how the women in her study located themselves in their narratives by drawing on their relationships with brothers, fathers and partners. As women engaged in the process of continuously forming a new identity that was also a product of their past, many women experienced seeing themselves as having been "caught in the tide of expected behaviour" (Adlersberg & Thorne, 1990, p. 6). Becoming conscious of the effects of gendered normalisation and its effects, women reflect on themselves through a new lens.

Making visible social relationships as complicating women's experience of critical reflection may help psychology further appreciate the way such complexity can texture women's experience of recognising themselves through resilience. Reflecting on the effect of gendered social power relations can bring meaning to women's experience of being positioned as dependent; relationships are the location where women encounter and negotiate sexist and ageist narratives about their dependency.

Research Aims

'...one woman has experienced it all and yet tells us that she can't complain about life.'

(Feldman et al., 2000, p. 166)

The aims of this research are concerned with the meaning of positive ageing and the social power relations that produces independence as necessary to good citizenship. This project seeks to tend women's marginal social location within the dominant narrative of 'virtuous aging' (Breheny & Stephens, 2010), asking the question: How does gendered dependency work to texture older women's experiences of the virtue of positive ageing after the death of an intimate other?

As discussed, the specificity of women's social worlds as gendered has been excluded from New Zealand's policy and the experience of gender as embodied and appropriated by gendered norms and expectations is important to this project. While the NZPAS considers the impact of talk about ageing in the lives of older people, it does not tend the impact of gendered subjectivity. It is the failure of the NZPAS agenda to address the gendered cultural stories that locate older women as dependent that compromises women's participation in the endeavour to 'age virtuously' that informs the aims of this study.

The experience of being assumed as dependent in, and on, their social relationships suggests older women who have experienced such loss as having to struggle harder to achieve virtuous moral positioning in those relationships. This project attends to the possibility that this struggle compromises older women's health and wellbeing experiences, complicating their personal experience of loss.

In this project, I appreciate older women's struggles over their moral positioning in and through their stories about the experience of resisting the dependency narrative within relationships after loss. In this way, I understand women's struggle with their assigned moral position, responsible for the emotional stability of relationships. It is posited that when these trajectories become entangled with women's experiences of resisting dependency assumptions, this experience can be considered to significantly texture and complicate women's personal transformation in light of their loss.

The uncritical uptake of aging as a time of universal positivity and the meeting of requirements for good citizenship attained through independence is of concern to this project. Through the inclusion of women's voices as they story their lives, this project aims to strengthen debates that destabilise the binary nature of dependence and independence through the consideration of gender as texturing women's everyday experience of aging. By engaging the experience of reciprocity and interconnectedness as a gendered experience for women, this project seeks to produce a counter-narrative to the dependence/independence binary that marginalises older single women. This project, therefore, seeks to challenge positive aging discourse by rendering visible the impact of the narrative of sexual difference as highly problematic in women's experience of aging.

In working to achieve these aims, women's counter stories of resisting, the significance of gendered moral trajectories in women's experiences of reciprocity and interconnectedness in their relationships with family and friends are brought into view through appreciating that the experience of critical reflection after loss is dynamic, fluid and on-going and experienced as relational.

CHAPTER THREE – Methodology

Sandra Harding (1990) argues that all claims about ‘knowing’ are situated within the social location of the ‘knower’. The way in which we come to ‘know’ about our social situations and the situations of others is caught up in the activity of our social location. Because this location is prescribed by social power dynamics, such locations are able to structure and set limits to the understanding we make about our material lives. These on-going relations of power and knowledge circumscribe our participation in social relationships (Hartsock, 1987).

Understanding the hegemony of knowledge is important to this project because women’s spaces have predominantly involved care for others. Dominant narratives assume women’s biological difference from men, and women’s propensity for care is normalised as natural (Smith, 1997). The knowledge produced within psychology has a history of excluding women’s gendered specificity, and diversities (Riger, 1992). This research speaks back to the gendered hierarchy of psychological research by bringing volume to women’s narratives, as they are located in stories of loss and aging. Feminist standpoint tenets also call me to confront the oppressive gendered discourse in which I am also embedded and question hegemonic cultural narratives as a contribution to their destabilisation.

A feminist standpoint enables creative possibilities for new knowledge to emerge. Lorraine Code’s notion of rhetorical space is taken up by Morgan (1999, p. 186) to articulate the “fictive but not fanciful or fixed locations” where particular voices are authorised in the regulation of what can be said or asked, and “what will be regarded and sensible and intelligible”. This space represents an opening for relations of choral support, where women have an expectation of being heard, respected, and taken seriously. This standpoint is brought to the conduct of this research, to legitimate knowledge making through the experiences of women as we engage in conversation about aging. In this way, connections between the institutional narratives of aging and our lives, how we negotiate the legitimacy of expertise and our own subjectivities in and through our own shared stories is the focus. This is a perpetual process of listening, hearing, reading and writing, and unfolding. It is the connections in the process of generating stories that can be understood as opening the space to hear the diversity of voices among the utterances, embracing the often contradictory and multiplicity of women’s subjectivities (Harding, 2002).

When women’s contradictory lives, voices, and un-uniform experiences interact together collectively as a group, there is opportunity to generate a constantly transforming meaning in that space. Hearing women “speak together, in personal voices and mutual narratives” (Gadow, 1994, p. 306) where gender as meaningful to the shared social location enables space to negotiate understandings of gendered social power relations (Wilkinson, 1998).

In embracing women’s lives as diverse, feminist standpoint epistemology has the capacity to generate knowledge relevant to, and often involving, many other politically disadvantaged social locations in women’s lives (Harding, 2002). Living at intersecting multiple marginal social locations, women’s lives are considered by contemporary feminists to be capable of producing knowledge about gender as an experience mutually embedded within a myriad of other axes of social differences (Burman,

2005). Because of this, women's lives as diverse is regarded as crucial to the generation of critical questions relating not only to gender relationships but regarding a wider array of social power imbalances (Harding, 2002).

Opening spaces for older women who have experienced the death of an intimate partner as living their lives at intersecting marginal locations is central to the aims of this research. Produced through patriarchal social processes, the master narratives of sexual difference, marriage and age have intersected to generate cultural discourse about older women who have experienced such loss as deficient and dependent. This discourse is contextualised within, imparted from, and regulated by, the actions and perspectives of 'man' and locates women as a site where problems can be recognised, described and explained through their otherness. As a discipline that is concerned with human subjectivity, language and social relationships, the discourse of 'man' and the masculinist privilege that legitimates psychological knowledge production (Coombes & Morgan, 2004) is questioned through disrupting women's otherness. Women located in psychological knowledge as other is produced and reproduced through phallocentrism; women are always positioned in relation to men – the same as men, different from men or as man's complement (Grosz, 1990).

Standpoint epistemology can work as a strategy for feminists to conceptualise the 'difference' between the lives of women as textured rather than absolute. Seeing 'difference' between the lives of women in this way maintains the academic value in treating women's lives as diverse and unique but keeps intact women's oppression as an actual and material reality. Thus, difference experienced in the relational space between myself and the women who produced their stories in the conversational relationship between and among us can be interpreted as a space capable of revealing and destabilising the power and privilege in which they are embedded. This understanding of difference is valuable to this project because it informs my own critical reflexivity. In opening up the space between my life and the lives of other women, the social politics that mark this space are made available for my own critical interrogation. It is intended that this questioning will make visible how gendered social power relations have guided my knowing about psychology and my connectedness within the chorus of voices that has emerged through this inquiry.

Taking up a position in feminist standpoint epistemology necessitates that as a researcher I take up a reflexive position to recognise and interrogate my situatedness; approaching what I already 'know' as informed, ascribed and regulated by my social location. This approach will see that I continuously and critically reflect on what I 'know' and how such 'knowing' shapes my positioning, and in turn how this effects my interpretation of what women share through the telling of their stories. In this way feminist standpoint narrative research lends itself to intersectionality; the relationship between our positions in the social hierarchy and knowledge are understood through multiplicity and movement, locating us in different ways.

A Turn to Narrative

Narrative research emerged from the theoretical and practical amalgamation of several academic traditions. It is the inter-disciplinary collective 'turn' to narrative in the later part of the 20th century that now locates it as broadly used across many disciplines through its diverse ability to account for not only the structure and context of stories but the cultural context in which those stories are told (Squire, 2005). Narrative inquiry's focus on cultural context makes it responsive to tending relationships of social power. What we 'know' about psychology can be thought of as a building of stories, rather than facts or 'truths', produced across time and emerging from within the reflexive thought processes of those interested in psychology.

The storied history of psychology means that all psychology is narrative (Sarbin, 1986). As we go about living our daily lives, we continually endeavour to make meaningful, our actions, our activities and the events we encounter, and this experience is storied. To make meaning we attempt to organise, order and make cohesive our experiences through an engagement with the narrative structure of the them (Sarbin, 1986). During this engagement, everyday activity is orientated with an understanding of time and space and the consequent narratives work to help maintain a sense of order and cohesion in, and connectedness to, such activity and action (Crossley, 2000). Because of this narrative structure, stories can be often considered as "more expansive and fully developed than other more explicit forms of argument" (McClish & Bacon, 2002, p. 34).

Narrative inquiry embraces peoples stories as the fundamental unit in accounting for the human condition (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) and thus women's narrative accounts of their diverse and unique experiences are pivotal to feminist interest in the politics of storytelling. Viewing such stories as a resource for the critical analysis of cultural narratives, feminist psychology has added volume to a chorus of voices to understand how such narratives shape and regulate women's performance as sexed, classed and raced subjects. Together, we bring meaning to how women are enabled and constrained through their social location associated with the activity of their gender (Coombes & Morgan, 2004).

As an organising principle, narrative structure is understood to guide worldly understanding and the making of moral decisions within it (Sarbin, 1989). For example, Bruner (1991) argues that through listening to peoples stories, the boundaries generated by cultural discourse that define the type of subjects who are socially acceptable are made visible. He distinguishes that because cultural stories are a fundamental principle in the organisation of these boundaries, their meanings are those we use to find cohesion and make meaning about our own experiences and social interactions (Bruner, 1991). Paying specific attention to social interactions enables researcher's to critically examine how the activity of social location textures that interaction (Breheny & Stephens, 2011).

The stories we engage at any given time can be understood as purposeful sharing of experiences within a community of response, where they are heard and shared through dialogue and made meaningful as they are being told. Through the process of telling and listening, we position ourselves morally and ethically within other storylines. Our positions are dynamic and active, but our moral interpretation of both the other and of ourselves is always embedded within a 'knowing' generated in light of dominant

assumptions (Davies & Harré, 1990). In this way, the telling of stories harbours the potential for the narrative outcome to be understood as produced through a political/moral narrative trajectory, and researcher reflexivity requires that such trajectories are made explicit.

Narrative Inquiry

As a more involved and rich form of communication, the stories people tell present for research the space requires to explicate experience (McClish & Bacon, 2002) and it is through such explication that narrative inquiry is capable of increasing the volume of marginal voices (Riessman, 1993; Squire, 2005). As a methodological framework, narrative inquiry offers this project a medium through which to generate volume to women's 'voice'. Through listening to stories, especially those of socially oppressed groups, meaning about previously unpatented social political experiences is brought into play (Riessman, 1993; Squire, 2005). The intersecting marginal social locations of older women who have lost an intimate partner have meant that their specificity as gendered subjects has been excluded in psychology knowledge production. When feminist psychology takes up the politics of storytelling, it tends the question of how stories confront and challenge relationships of social power (Coombes & Morgan, 2004). The narrative structure of our lives disrupts psychological assumptions of the neutrality of gendered subjectivities and its compliance with western knowledge systems that has fictionalised the experiences of those who are socio-politically constrained (Squire, 2008).

Narrative and Meaning Making

In making meaning for our experiences we look to stories about our social locations for guidance and assume these master narratives represent the 'normative experience'. When we engage the discourse of location we use it to help comprehend personal experiences and the experiences heard about through the stories of others (Bamberg, 2004). Through repetition and routine, storylines become internalised, and the more we are subjected to them the more we engage with them and they become crafted into our 'normality'. Through repetition, these dominant storylines work to provide the positions available to us as subjects and the regulation of those positions limit what kind of gendered subjects can be produced (Butler, 1988). In our relationships, we engage these normative storylines to make meaning about our experiences and the experiences of others with whom we interact. Storytelling is powerful in helping make experiences coherent and meaningful, however it is not wholly determining, and past, lived experiences also dynamically contribute to our interpretations.

Through the process of shifting and moving in relation to other experiences and as a response to the context of the present telling (Riessman, 1993), past experiences often emerge to counter and contradict dominant narratives. In pursuing meaning about contradictory experiences, master narratives become critically questioned and resisted. Because western knowledge systems are co-ordinated around polarity and sets of specific binary oppositions (Burman, 2005), the experience of resisting master narratives has predominantly been tended through opposition. For example, Grenier and Hanley (2007),

in their narrative research with older women, found resistance to master narratives was not a private experience, but an entanglement of public, collective, subversive, emotional and embodied textual experiences, all at the same time. Rather than a simple binary of domination and subordination, resistance stories are fluid and contextual and it is the destabilisation of binaries that make space for fresh political and interpretive communities to emerge (Burman, 2005; Grenier & Hanley, 2007). The struggle of resistance opens spaces for producing counter narratives (Bamberg, 2004) where personal and political narratives of women are neither separate from, nor opposite to, master narratives. This project is invested in the narrative struggle to make visible the texturing of women's experiences and their counter narratives.

Narrative Methodology – Narratives of Experience

Narrative inquiry does not provide researchers direct access to an individual's experience. Riessman (1993) argues that the distinct and selective processes of experience cannot be merely represented, but rather our experiences transpire throughout the phenomenon of experiencing. Understanding representation as a process, it emerges that what is noticed will depend on other experiences and interactions that are meaningful to that experience. In the telling of the experiences, stories give these selective and particular representations of phenomena an outward expression (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008). Because representations are always dynamic in that they drastically differ over time, and across other locations embedded within socio-political contexts, that single moment will be re-produced very differently throughout any consequent re-telling's. When we come to tell that experience, we begin a process of talking and listening; there is an inevitable gap between the telling and the experience itself (Riessman, 1993).

Corrine Squire's (2008) narrative framework offers this project a conceptually based technology for the interpretation of experience through the analysis of women's stories. In using this framework, the analysis of women's stories generates an interpretation of their experiences through defining the temporal qualities of narrative that enable this meaning making process. Concentrating on temporality for this project involved paying careful attention to all the talk shared in women's personal narratives (Squire, 2008). While this project considers events such as the passing of an intimate partner as significant to their narrative experience, the event alone is not the totality of that experience. As a technology of interpretation, tending women's experiences involved attending to all the talk generated in our narratives; this talk was appreciated as themed rather than structured (Squire, 2008).

Interpreting themes within narrative experience and paying particular attention to their progression and sequencing in and across stories, aligns with what this project considers 'narrative' to be. This understanding assumes the existence of a relationship between the individual and cultural; because personal stories are connected to cultural level narratives, tending themes within those stories are capable of displaying peoples experiences of them (Squire, 2008). This capability is significant to the interpretation of women's experiences in this project because it aligns with an interest in women's deployment of, and resistance to, gendered cultural narratives about dependency within their social relationships and location in the social hierarchy.

The narrative representation produced in this thesis is organised by attending to the temporal qualities and progression and sequencing of events to make sense of how personal narratives are connected to cultural narratives so that I can attend to recognisable moment of social transformation (Squire, 2008). Attention to context and temporality enables the researcher to attend to morality as a narrative process.

How women position themselves within the gendered moral order is significant to the meaning of the experience they have of 'who they are' (Squire, 2008). Narratives take meaning from particular contexts while being understood within different ones. It is through processes of transformation that the narrative context enables movement toward change: in this way, narratives appeal to their own future. In this project, I understand transformation as continuity that is reproduced in different ways across different moments where narratives do not merely transmit, but create meaning.

Counter Narratives

This project takes interest in women's experiences of connectedness through attending to the personal and political narrative struggles of resistance to dominant narratives that align older women with dependency. The aim is to make visible the textures of meaning and social transformation that produce counter narratives.

It is important to acknowledge that the conversations generated for interpretation in this project emerged from my curiosity about change and difference in women's lives after the passing of an intimate other. It was not until the later 'hearing' stage of this project however, that this curiosity began to develop into a socio-political interest. Methodologically, I embarked on an evolving approach to hearing women's stories that began with a set of questions to engage women in generating their own stories; to enable women to 'make choices' about what was important to them. While I was interested in narrative inquiry because it engages women-as-agents in the everyday 'doing' of resisting master narratives, I was not fully aware that my own curiosity was constrained through the desire to identify master narratives and the capacity to counter them. On reflection, this 'blindness' has turned out to be of value in learning about the experience of producing counter narratives through conversations that enable social transformation as the narratives unfolded. What became important to the research process is the complex ways that women's location in the social hierarchy as dependent complicates their social relationships with others and how the moral trajectory of women's dependence was resisted through counter narratives of their experience of connectedness.

Method – Explicating Experiences through Conversation

Suter (2000) argues that narratives can be elicited in research through the generation of conversations across a mix of individual (researcher/narrator) and group (research/many narrators) settings. Each of these methods of data generation produce different types of conversations, and diverse storylines. This project was designed to bring into view the connections between dominant narratives of

aging and our gendered subjectivities through a process of sharing stories. I did not want to exclude the stories that are told between two people, or those that are brought together in social group interactions. Both individual and group participation were important to the design of this project.

Ethical Protocol

This research was considered low risk according to MUHEC criteria. Based on the principle that sharing stories in conversation among ourselves and with others is natural and familiar to us as part of our everyday lives, embracing conversation and social interaction as a method for generating ‘data’ in research has many ethical gains. One of the benefits is the principle of connectedness (both the research and the researcher/participants) between and among those with whom we are storying, enabling familiar relationships to become part of the chorus of voices. Therefore, recruitment for participation drew on a process of snowball sampling because of its potential to secure a sense of personal agency (Wilkinson, 1998) and to promote ownership of participation decisions and contributions among the participants as they became familiar with the research process (Noy, 2008). The six women who dedicated their time and shared their stories for the purpose of this study became aware of this project through a ‘friend of a friend’ approach using social networks.

To achieve familiarity, the researcher engaged the help of a personal social connection who had experienced the loss of an intimate other later in their life. The first relationship made connections among other relationships, through conversations about the project and by sharing the information sheet (Appendix A) that invited them to contact the researcher. The criteria for women’s participation was a 2 year post death time frame which was established to reflect sensitivity for the loss of an intimate partner and the potential for harm that may be associated with understandings of grief following bereavement.

Following contact from potential participants, we began a conversation about the project that enabled the women to gain confidence to share their narratives and addressed any questions they had about their participation. We talked about individual interviews and meeting as a group to have conversations, together. The women were invited to participate in one-to-one and/or focus groups.

Participants

Six of the seven women that initiated contact went on to share their stories with me. Three women selected to participate in face-to-face interviews and in a focus group. A further three women elected to only participate in a focus group.

The individual interviews were conducted at a time and location that was most convenient for the participants. Two women chose their own home and one chose the designated interview space. The focus groups, which came after the interviews, were offered on two separate weekends and the women selected the date they preferred. The focus group sessions were held at a central location that was convenient to all the women, morning tea and refreshments were provided and travel costs reimbursed.

For both interviews and focus groups, the researcher discussed the information sheets and participant rights before gaining written consent (Appendices B and C). We discussed confidentiality, and this was readdressed at the end of the focus groups so that disclosure of group details and the content of the stories were understood to be a group responsibility.

Interviews

Individual interviews were digitally voice recorded, and group interviews were digitally video recorded, producing a total of five recorded conversations. At the end of each interview and focus group, all the women were presented with a thank you card and after a week, each participant was phoned or sent an email to provide the opportunity for them to ask any further questions. The conversations that transpired through our coming together were not structured. Beginning with the context for the research meant that in conversation all narrators were both involved and present; conversations remained emergent and iterative, and were embraced as co-constructed. Across these conversations and through my ongoing experience of critical reflection, I began to encounter moments of interest; things heard and things felt that became valuable and important for me. In tending these moments through a reflexive practice, multiple understandings of gender and social power evolved.

Transcribing conversations

The interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim, and all identifying information was either removed or changed to protect identities. All transcripts were returned to participants and they were invited to review the transcripts in writing or by describing changes to me in person. The transcripts were either mailed back to me, or collected by me. All the women signed transcript release forms (Appendix D). The conversations around transcript return provided an opportunity to answer any additional questions and to talk about the women's experience of participating in this project.

The conversations generated were transcribed from audio to text as a process of representation (Riessman, 1993). As a researcher, this process was experienced as a transformation; a change from being a listening participant within the storied telling of experience during conversation, to becoming a hearer and a reader of those experiences. This transformation involved a struggle with decisions about how to display the text and how to include pauses, silences, gestures (as if these have fixed meaning); how to retain context and honour women's emotion; and how to maintain a sense of the women's connection to their stories and our emotional connection together, that I could hear in the audio recording. This phase felt like I was letting go of our experience as shared conversations and beginning to shape my own research story about this experience.

During the transcription process, our co-created stories began to form my own account of women's diverse stories as a collective. Vital to my experience of this was an interrogation of my own thoughts and feelings about not only the stories that had we had created together, but of my own social location and of the impact that my social location had on my experience in that co-creation. During

transcription, I could hear how the emerging power dynamics of my presence was critically shaping the trajectory of our conversations. Recognition of this was critical to my reflexive practice and helped me more fully comprehend the impact that my own thoughts, perspectives and presence had on what was shared and how.

Across the back-to-back transcription of the audio-recordings, I could also hear my swiftly emerging political interest. Because I am deeply concerned with the socio-political marginalisation of women, the narratives we created together were made meaningful to me through that interest; my personal re-telling of our narrative encounters through this research had a shifted purpose.

Becoming a reader

Concerned about my relationship with women's voices disconnecting through the process of transcription, my method of working with the transcripts incorporated the experience of listening to the experience of reading those transcripts. The value of this strategy is that a reader asks not only the question of who is telling the story but also asks, 'who is listening to it?' Obligating the reader to pay significant attention to the 'voices' of those telling the story, the reader becomes compelled to attend to the ways in which they identify with, and are different from, the various voices.

In keeping with the emphasis of standpoint theory that promotes reflexive practice in which one's own social location is critiqued, connecting with women's voices was pivotal in attending to the power relationships by ensuring a reading of transcripts that embraced the differences between our lives. The voice-centered listening approach (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1996) provided me with a strategy that helped preserve the relational nature of the stories generated. Aligning with the strong ethical principle embedded in this project concerning attending women's 'voice' and maintaining its integrity, this guide compelled me to critically examine my own moral positioning within those conversations; my position as a listener/reader and interpreter. It is this realisation of my position and the critical examination of difference to and identification with, the stories of others, that works to retain the integrity of women's voice in those stories. Such reflexive practice is key, not only the recognition and promotion of women's stories as valuable and meaningful, but in the integrity of any re-telling about them (K. Gibson & Morgan, 2013a, 2013b). In approaching the transcripts as relational, it was important to tend the relationships, plots and characters in women's stories; in particular the way in which such characteristics were built around specific and significant life events.

Interpretive analysis

Narratives of experience move beyond an event. For example, when women experience the death of an intimate other, such an experience is neither isolated to that moment, nor does that experience occur in isolation. Many other life experiences may also be happening that texture the meaning women make about such experiences, and impact the meaning women subsequently make during the continual re-representation of that event through its retelling. While, through the personal narratives of the women in

this project, the event of the passing of an intimate other became known as very significant to women's meaning making experiences, i.e. "Almost as soon as I left the room, almost as if he knew I'd gone, and he just slipped away" (Caroline); "... and he killed himself so I've had a whole heap of anger" (Jude); "...the shock" (Joan), to more fully appreciate the richness and diversity of women's experiences this project used an interpretive technique that included all the texturing talk generated in women's personal narratives.

During the analysis of women's stories in this project the interpretation of their experience of feeling connected was generated by careful listening. This listening involved interpreting women's complex and often contradictory moral positioning of self and others, within and across their stories. Central to this positioning is women's artful use of cultural storylines that regulate for them what it 'should mean' to feel connected in their relationships. In this way, women utilised particular storylines as a normative point of reference, the moral trajectory of what it means to be connected in relationships, to construct their experiences as the same, similar or different. It was my interpretation of women's experiences as a complex and entangled mix of similarity and divergence to 'the norm' through women's use of these cultural storylines that fore fronted the capacity of women's stories to be heard as resisting normative expectations of connectedness. Women's stories as morality tales were achieved by listening for feelings as this enabled a way of interpreting the meaningfulness of their experiences of connectedness in their close personal relationships.

Squire's (2008) experiential narrative approach enabled me to interpret the narratives beyond a unitary story of individual loss toward a consideration of women's personal narratives as a meaningful amalgamation of all the stories, spoken together; a chorus of voices that reveals women's active, multiple, shifting and agentic experiences within dynamic gendered social contexts. Contextualising my selection of storylines was an interest in what 'other' experiences older single women were having beyond those culturally prescribed by master narratives that involved social, physical and financial dependence. As a reflexive researcher, I continually re-engaged and reflected on the transcripts generated from our conversations. From here, I began to interpret this 'difference' as a resistance to such narratives at which point I began to consider women's experiences as socio-political, as constrained by gendered power relationships and their marginal social location.

Organising data

To form a relationship with women's voice through the transcripts I engaged a multiple reading method that used highlighters, journals and a whiteboard. Because I considered women's total contributions across the individual and group conversations as coming together to make up each of their personal narratives, I allocated each of the six narrators each a separate journal.

I printed out four copies of each of the five transcripts and named them by narrator and reading, i.e. Jane-Reading One etc. I then allocated one coloured highlighter pen to each of the four readings (e.g. blue pen - reading one, green pen - reading two) and systematically, transcript by transcript, read each of the five transcripts four times. During each reading, I carefully marked the transcripts with the allocated

colour and made detailed notes in the corresponding women's journals under the headings individual/group and reading one/reading two, and so on. As I progressed through the readings and re-readings and completed journal detailing of the transcripts, I also made more general notes with a marker on a large whiteboard in the form of a 'mind map'.

When I had finished the four readings of each transcript, I reviewed the journal notes and the whiteboard notes. From here, I began to develop the themes (rather than structures) and storylines that I experienced as significant through engaging with (listening to) the transcripts that reflected the relationship with women's voices, and therefore their stories. Critical to this relationship was the amplification of women's different voices within those stories, a vital component of the first reading of the transcripts. Orientated by context and drama, my first reading of the transcripts was focused women's stories as told through central metaphors, reoccurring images, themes and language, resonance with emotion, stylistic inconstancies, what was not in those stories and what was revised, and women's positioning within those stories. Crucial to this reading stage was that it extended my reflexive practice. This was a time of significant critical consideration of my position of privilege in the interpretations made and on the outcomes of my interpretations. While a reflexive practice was very important to the ethics of this project as a whole, during the 'working with the transcripts phase' it saw me spend time with the feelings, emotions and thoughts that forming a relationship with women's voices and their stories generated for me. Connecting with women's voices was an emotionally intense experience, that at times meant there were many tears shed and through which I formed a true appreciation of my ethical responsibility to honour women's contributions.

The second reading of the transcripts involved attending the way in which the women spoke of themselves, their 'I' in their stories and their 'I' as speaker of their story (K. Gibson & Morgan, 2013a; Taylor et al., 1996) This is where I came into a relationship with the women as speakers. The process of 'coming into this relationship' meant I was moved to appreciate the women and their voices on their own terms and began to recognise my emotional and intellectual connection with them. This reading encouraged me to move beyond considering the transcripts as text and to welcome them as belonging to the women that emerged from their heart, mind, body and soul. In recognition of this, my personal feelings and thoughts came to connect with those of the women and I began to learn about them, their diverse experiences of a world they had in common and about their relational webs.

The first two readings involved my active development as a responsive listener, opening myself up to women's voices and creating a passage for their stories and thus a possibility for 'knowing'. This enabled my recognition and appreciation of the relationship between what I was reading with my own personal life context and history.

Through this passage and possibility women's voices entered my 'knowing' and became framed within my feminist concerns; thus as a responsive listener, my concern with gendered socio-politics means that I am also a resisting listener. Because of this, the final two readings involved social politics as a process of listening and responding to women's relational voices that speak about two conflicting aspects of relationships. These voices, such as those of loving and being loved, and those about equality and fairness, enabled an appreciation about women's complex experience with morality in those

relationships. Responding to these voices enabled me to recognise in women's stories the oppressive social conventions of gender that entangle to create for women the struggle between oppression and empowerment.

During subsequent stages of interpretation, the continual progression and sequencing of themes across and within women's stories allowed for the consideration of women's stories to be re-presentations of experiences of transformation (Squire, 2008). Reading experiences of space and time within the narratives enabled me to attend to recognisable moments that transform or are transforming. For example, because I interpreted about the meaning of uncomfortable relational experiences brought about by assumptions of women's dependence through an interpretation sensitive to time and space, I was also able to 'recognise that moment' where discomfort was appreciated by the women as an experience for learning, resistance and growth. In this way, I was able to look for the meaning of transformation as continuity that is reproduced in different ways, across different momenta and diverse audiences. Tending experiences of transformation was critical to the interpretation in as much as it enabled the consideration of women's stories as re-presenting their experiences of change and transformation, but also considered that transformation is also a textured experience.

The inclusion of context and temporality during the analysis of stories of experience enabled me to interpret them as tales of morality and therefore able to make significant and meaningful the experience these women have of 'who they are' (Squire, 2008). The opportunity to interpret women's experience as personal morality tales emerged very significant to this project because it enables an interest in the impression that gendered moral trajectories have on women's meaning making about 'who they feel they are' after the passing of an intimate other.

This project takes an interest in women's experiences of intimacy through the interpretation of women's reproduction of, and resistance to stories about, gendered cultural narratives that align older single women with dependency. I also read for the meaningful experience of resistance. I interpret the experience of resisting through the women stories, as complex. This complexity is textured by not only resisting dependency as it is understood in public and private spheres (Fine & Glendinning, 2005), but in ways that engage emotional, conscious, embodied, subversive and direct resistance (Grenier & Hanley, 2007). Resistance is considered to be a profoundly personal experience and the 'act' of resisting is contextualised by the journey of a woman's life as socio-politically oppressed. Rather than as a 'problem' with women, dependency here is interpreted as a necessary and crucial part of social connectedness.

CHAPTER FOUR – Analysis

The analysis of narrative experience is presented through themes where individual and cultural relationships that locate women in the social hierarchy are made meaningful as resistance to gendered narratives about dependency. The first theme emerged as a storyline of diverse and changing relationships where intimacy was made meaningful through emotional connectedness. The experience of intimacy was interpreted as reciprocal and dynamic, and partnership intimacy was understood as discrete. The second theme emerged through the event of the loss of partnership as the marker of change in the storyline of intimacy. Interpreting transition as a relational process, life space and reflection are understood as fluid and transformative. Change after loss was storied through experiences of decision-making and management which are interpreted through relations of resilience and interference. Interpreting change through personal agency, enabled the fourth theme to emerge. Through relations of care where the experience of emotional connection was made meaningful to women through their complex positioning as a gendered subject, and interpreted through complication, morality is understood as a constraint of the cultural narrative of women and dependency. Interpreted through gendered storylines of finance and threat, the diversity and textured meaning of dependence emerged as resistance to the cultural narrative

In considering gender as performativity (Butler, 1988) in the activity of gender orientated by their location in the gender binary, women engage in the action of caring. Women's social relationships provide context for this action. Social relationships are fundamental in human life and in listening to women's stories of their feelings about, and experiences in their relationships with those close to them, emotional connection quickly emerged as significant to my interpretation about them.

Social Relationships and Intimacy

It is well documented that social relationships change as we age, and this change has been understood as a diminishing motivation to engage in meaningless social contact (Carstensen, 1992). The quality of social connectedness is important to the health and wellbeing of older people specifically through the positive provision of social support, which when not experienced can lead to feelings of isolation and/or alienation (Bromell & Hyland, 2007).

With a shift to cultural narratives of positive aging, the emotional rewards of social contact are prioritised across the aging experience. This cultural narrative calls for individual responsibility to persevere with and invest in close personal relationships that, although they may reduce with age, can bolster support and therefore increase health outcomes. New Zealand's Ministry of Social Development considers social relationships with family and friends as providing positive affirmation and appraisal and as acting as a stress buffer (Ministry of Social Development, 2010).

In paying attention to close personal relationships, such as those involving family (Nikora, Hodgetts, Carlson, Tongi, & Li, 2010) or those who act as family to us (Breheny & Stephens, 2011),

recent research contributions to our knowledge production in the field of aging have begun engaging a more complex consideration of the cultural and moral fabric woven into those relationships.

With an interest in the specificity of gendered experiences within the cultural and moral fabric of aging, the first storyline to emerge from my conversations with women concerned the highly complex nature of women's social experiences. Through the 'to and fro' in the talk amongst us, experiences of diverse and changing relationships emerged as a significant storyline. In working with the transcripts of those conversations as a listener/reader, my attention was drawn to the multiple voices that women use to make meaningful their experiences within and across their relationships. It was through tending these voices that I interpreted women's quality experience of their social relationships; the significance of feeling emotionally connected to others.

Reciprocated intimacy

Through the women's stories of time spent with family and friends after the loss of their respective partners, the significance of quality relationships can be interpreted through the reciprocated emotional connection. In critical reflection of the positive aging discourse, the experience of reciprocity in close personal relationships has recently been conceptualised through its social functionality. Suggesting that older people use emotional and practical giving and receiving as a discursive tool to avoid the moral obligation of dependency in their relationships, Breheny and Stephens (2009) conceptualise reciprocity as a complex situation of social repayment. As such, reciprocity is necessary to the management of identity in relation to others (Breheny & Stephens, 2009) as the boundaries between independence and support are contested. Women's positioning in the social hierarchy however, is implicated in relationships of dependency and their experience of social repayment. Through my interpretation, women's emotional experience of giving and receiving is understood as a reflection of their social and moral location - responsible for the care of others and of their relationships.

Jane's personal narrative realises the significance of close personal relationships in the lives of older women after the passing of an intimate other i.e. "Family is what's worked for me". Through connecting with Jane's voice the significance of reciprocated intimacy in those relationships was exemplified i.e. "... but my mum and two of my brothers turned up as soon as I rang them, and my mum came and bought her jammies just incase". In my interpretation, the poignancy of this particular exert lies in its illustration that subtle and unspoken gestures offered by those we care about are received as meaningful through the sincerity of their appearance; the meaning of such gestures is embedded within the connectedness and reciprocity of intimacy between each other – the just in case. The significance of context in the experience of reciprocated intimacy was heard in Caroline's story about taking an adventure holiday with her daughter, son-in-law and a friend after the passing of her husband. Her narrative illustrates the physical and emotional connection of time spent together. For example, "sort of like bonding in a way" was important to the experience of reciprocated intimacy because of its shared nature; "so my daughter walked with me at the back of the pack, and my son-in-law and another friend that came walked at their own pace at the front, and when they finished their leg they would come back

and swap with my daughter so someone would be walking with me”. The shared character of building intimacy in social relationships enables opportunities for reciprocated feelings of care to be achieved and communicated. Together these excerpts illustrate that women’s experience of intimacy is deeply embedded in the context of relationships that are not necessarily devoid of dependency in their reciprocity. This makes for a strong argument that any ‘knowledge’ about the significance of quality relationships in the health and wellbeing experiences of older women must be inclusive of women’s experience of intimacy by being inclusive of the meaning(s) of reciprocity in women’s lives.

Dynamic relationships

As suggested in the work of Bushman and Holt-Lunstad (2009), quality close personal relationships often include varying degrees of change, difficulty and problematic moments. Women’s relationships and the experience of intimacy in them can be thus considered as a dynamic synthesis of negative and positive aspects. Through including context, this project exposes the experience of intimacy as dynamic, troubling binary assumptions that anticipate that close personal relationships are universally experienced as positive. The assumption that relationships are always beneficial informs women’s experience of social relationships as textured through diverse engagement with intimacy and loss (Bushman & Holt-Lunstad, 2009; Wilson, 2010) as they age.

Understanding women’s narratives through relational context and accounting for temporality (Squire, 2008) enabled an interpretation of women’s experience of intimacy across and within their relationships as diverse and dynamic. For example, “a kiss on the cheek from a friend” is “not the same” as “a great big bear hug from my boys” (Jude) although both are illustrative of intimacy, and “we were always around but we weren’t sort of close, she has become really close to me over the last two or three years” (Jane) illustrates shifting and dynamic relationships over time. Through the visibility of diverse experiences of intimacy, I consider it to necessarily involve change. Change to the experience of intimacy in relationships can involve shifts in how ‘care’ is understood as others respond to your loss. For example, close relationships are others “need(ing) to make sure I’m alright” (Jude), where friends may disconnect gradually, “[Name] was my second husband and I hardly see any of his friends... [they] just sort of dwindled away” (Jane) or shift suddenly from intimacy to exclusion, “suddenly your married friends, you’re a problem to them ... a problem at the dinner table” (Jude). Intimacy can be a re-generation of earlier relationships, “[so] for me that’s made me reinvent myself, if you like, in my friendships ... I’ve had to re-visit my [location] friendships because I actually closed them off when I moved to town ... I didn’t see them properly for two or three years you know because we were so involved with our own relationship ... so it’s about picking up those again, opening those doors” (Jane). The meaning of loss is informed by the response of others and regenerated relationships that take on new meaning, i.e. “Well you see that’s another thing that I think comes as a result of being on your own is your ... women friendships, become incredibly important and sustaining and fun” (Jude).

Reflecting the experience of relationships as a synthesis of inclusion and exclusion, in a process of change, intimacy in close personal relationships are interpreted to texture of the meaning of their loss.

Jude's personal narrative makes visible the significance of relational intimacy i.e. "it makes me think someone loves me". The experience of intimacy is also told as a complicating story of loss, contested on the boundaries between support and (in)dependence i.e. "I've seen my mother go through it in trying to come to terms with where I am in my life ... she's trying to get why he was so bad, why he would do something like take his own life and then make sure that I'm alright, instead of letting me get on with it".

By attending to intimacy as complex, the complicating story is made visible as women's active negotiation of intimacy within their relationships because those relationships are emotionally significant: "I mean for me I have son's so what I need to show them is that I don't need them hanging around me, that they need to go and live their life and I will be alright ... so you need to kind of show them that you are resilient and you can cope, the fact that there are times when you get incredibly lonely and um, nervous at night and all those things, it's not their problem, and certainly not at my kids age!" (Jude).

Intimate partnership

Through the stories of the women in this project, intimate partnership emerged as a distinct type of intimacy centered on a relationship history that was built over time. Listening for time and sequence in their stories (Squire, 2008) enabled an interpretation about intimacy in partnership as an experience of togetherness, "We were twenty seven years" (Jude). In a group conversation, Jude, Joan and Ngarita storied relational intimacy as produced through time spent building a shared history of meaning making, "You miss the companionship of somebody to share with, we were there, we were twenty-seven years and you miss the, um, the history, being able to talk about the history with each other" (Jude); "As you say the companionship and the 'do you remember when we did so and so?' or 'when the children were little? ... we grew up in the same area and the 'how things have changed' in that area" (Joan).

Intimate partnerships, while distinct from other intimate relationships, were textured with multiple cultural narratives of women's participation in marriage and family life. Intimate partners were 'meant to be', i.e. "the holy spirit guided me ... I know it brought the right person to me" (Ngarita); "I know he was my soul mate" (Jane), and were connected to motherhood "ohhh and when [name] saw him for the first time I was still on the trolley and he said "He'll do me Mrs", and he meant it" (Ngarita); identities "For me I had this identity before I was married ... I then was married and a mother and working and all those kinds of things" (Jude) and the connectedness of a life partner "My [name]" (Anne), "no-one would be like he was for me" (Ngarita), "he was the other half of me" (Joan).

In its distinct nature, women's experience with the togetherness in intimate partnership is interpreted as dynamic i.e. "I thought ours was (a partnership)! Until I found out he had had affairs since the day we were married! The entire of the marriage ... I had no idea, absolutely no idea!" (Jude). Across the span of women's lives the shifting meanings of intimacy experienced in their intimate partnership through multiple movements in time and place provide opportunities for changes; and the event of the passing on an intimate other marked a specific (shared) event as a significant part of this process of change.

Change

Through my interpretation of the women's stories told throughout the research process, the passing of an intimate partner is appreciated as one of the most confronting and challenging transformations women will experience. Through their stories, women's unique moral experiences of intimacy with their late husbands were interpreted as valuable because it was the relationship of intimacy that changed when their husbands passed.

During a conversation between Jude, Ngarita and Joan about change, Jude's contributions emerged to make visible the entanglement between the emotional meaning and practical meaning of intimate partnerships for women, the presence of their intimate partner. i.e. "we were there" ... "I think of another partner and you'd have someone to talk to at the end of the day".

This entanglement is interpreted as illustrating the dynamic nature of intimate partnership for women where having a functional partner and having an intimate companion caring for them were both significant for that partnership. While the functional aspects of intimate partnership are important i.e. "you can go places and do things you can't do otherwise" (Ngarita) or "having someone there to watch the bags" (Jane), and "you find those (friends) who act as your partner in terms of someone to download to or problem solve with or those kinds of thing" (Jude), so too was having that intimate companionship i.e. "But I miss him, I miss the companionship" (Jude) and that that person holding the bags is "someone you trust" (Jane).

The visibility of the relationship between function and emotion is of particular interest to my interpretation because it destabilises dominant assumptions that assume the functionality offered by intimate relationships is of high priority for women i.e. "you don't have to be in a partnership to be a contributor" (Jude).

The personal experience of change

'Being cast adrift'

(Caroline)

Pivotal to the women's stories and to an interpretation about all their experiences was the event of losing their late husband; it was a deeply felt personal experience. The experience of grief and the bereavement that follows such an event is most often considered within the psychology literature to involve a finite process of time with functional coping strategies. From this perspective women's experiences of bereavement, are most frequently conceptualised as structured from the event of loss and periods of time where step by step stages grief and bereavement are experienced (see Rothaupt & Becker, 2007). Contemporary understanding of these stages align with dominant ideologies that consider women's normative progression through this (finite) time as a lineal process of emotional recovery (Bennett & Bennett, 2001).

The consideration that narratives are stories of experience (Squire, 2008) builds on an event perspective that considers stories as about events, to consider stories as experiences in which event are involved. Through this latter perspective, the event of loss becomes contextualised in women's lives and thus can inform an interpretation about change that locates the event in the on-going narratives of women's lives (Squire, 2008) that texture the meaning of the event. It provides an opportunity to move beyond the discrete event/recovery interpretation of loss of an intimate partner – and brings meaning to the notion of 'being cast adrift'.

Life-space

Through the diversity of women's stories in this project i.e. "you bring other stuff into the mix that makes the difference" (Jude), the experiences of grief and bereavement were interpreted to involve a loose and dynamic set of very personal experiences that happened in a broader life space. Transition was not an all-encompassing staged progression of anticipated responses occurring over a set period of time. When I listened to the diversity between and within women's personal narratives, grief and bereavement were interpreted as a space where variously unpredictable and fluctuating moments of physical, functional, psychological and emotional experience occurred; the space was textured through its relation to other experiences.

As space, grief and bereavement as a process of transformation can help dislodge the dominant medical event/recovery binary that anticipates women's experiences of loss as all-encompassing, linear, progressive, recovery orientated and time regulated (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2007). The diversity in and between women's experiences illustrate the dynamic nature of this space. For example, through group conversation Caroline's experience of this time is interpreted to involve a motionlessness where "you become like a robot almost ... just on automation" where "you're forced to go on" and so just "go through the motions of daily life". Interpreted from Jude's narrative this is a space where gradual realisations i.e. "it takes a while you gotta just get yourself back out" engage change i.e. "kind of get back into a functioning mode". The sequencing of Jude's contribution to this conversation "you just go down and cope" through to "you gradually just work out ... well I've still gotta make a cup of tea" illustrates for my interpretation, the experience of movement in the motionless space. Jane's narrative resonates with this to illustrate the experience of movement as gradual and sometimes linear "I've had to change, so what's happened is I've stayed with things I'm comfortable with before I take another little step which takes me a little bit further along the road", while Ngarita's narrative makes visible this experience as profound "you come back and you've just got to cope".

Women's personal narratives in this project make visible this notion of space as a process of dynamic and forever shifting experiences, the diversity of which enables an understanding of the experience of loss as an experience of change and transformation.

Transforming loss as a reflexive process

Joan's experience about movement in this space as learning i.e. "I just learnt to be independent, um a person in my own right so to speak" guides my interpretation to appreciate this space as a place where women transform loss. Times of difficulty and change often bring with them the critical questioning of our most fundamental assumptions about our lives, the world we live in and who we are. This fusing of life experiences and critical contemplation is a space where flexibility in oneself is experienced and the on-going capacity for adaptability and change is encountered (Marshall & Rahman, 2014). As a continual learning experience awareness and change of perspective is generated, consequently transforming the meaning of life (Danforth & Glass, 2001) and creating opportunity to experience agency (Marshall & Rahman, 2014). Opening spaces for reflection as a site of transformation has the potential to examine the relationships between women's experience of loss and their intersecting gendered social location. Women's cognisance of change i.e. "I've been very aware all along of my changes ... but when I reflect, and reflection you know gives you hindsight gives (you) 20/20 vision; you look back and see it a bit differently" (Jane), illustrates transformation as a reflective practice.

Reflecting on change as part of the on-going journey rather than part of the 'recovery' i.e. "you just never get used to it ... you just learn to cope with it in your own way" (Anne) enables transformation to be considered as definitively dynamic, the past textures the present. For example, it can involve dealing with regrets, i.e. "my regrets are around my children and that I allowed them to see a dysfunctional relationship for as long as I did" (Jude), questioning of self, i.e. "yes, I've kind of had to re-group and think 'I'm not a bad person' and 'I'm not somebody you would want to deceive'" (Jude), learning "I think we can teach our kids actually quite a lot about coping and resilience" (Jude), reflection i.e. "I think it's a process you go through as to what you take out of you reflection" (Jude) and questioning of choice "because it, it's not something you choose and I think that's the biggest think" (Jane).

The questioning of choice is particularly significant when considering transformation as a reflexive practice. Because how women come to know about self and world involve them as a subject of gender, women's critical questioning in light of loss involves the critical examination of their gendered social location. Thus in transforming loss, women come to critically question their intersecting gendered marginal social location and deliberate on the morality that that location enables. It is this critical consideration of one's own standpoint that makes women's vision particularly valuable to psychological research.

Considering the experience of transformation as a reflective as well as reflexive practice demonstrates for my interpretation women's capacity to reflect, make choices and to impose those choices on the world. Women do this in spite the complexities generated by their marginal social location. By hearing about women's experience of self as a capable agent for change i.e. "you choose a different route" (Jude) located within socially located relationships that imply gendered moral trajectories, such trajectories can be understood to complicate access to that experience of agency through gendered discourse that regulates what it means for women to 'be' a woman.

The visibility of women's agency is crucial to feminist research because it highlights that women have choice as we navigate the 'moral capacity to care' (Gilligan, 1994) brought on by our gendered location, but that navigation is constrained by cultural narratives that limit access to our own realities. Highlighting women's agency in 'doing gender' means that gender can be considered a fluid concept, and therefore challenges dominant narratives that constrain the meaning of women's agency. Women's stories and women's lives are thus crucial to destabilising such gendered normative ideals of the meaning of the loss of an intimate partner.

Personal Agency (Resilience and Interference)

Learning about women's experience of engaging agency in decision-making after their loss is pivotal to learning about reflexivity in the transformation of loss. Agency is a psychological concept that is highly contested in feminist psychology. Central to this debate is the relationship between self and culture and to what extent self as an active agent for change is bound within normative cultural expectations. Gill and Donaghue (2013) suggest that because of a pre-occupation with the self/culture relationship in post-feminist discourse, the complex nature of women's experience of intimacy has been overshadowed. Aligning with this perspective, this project appreciates gendered experience of intimacy as highly significant in tending women's (un)interrupted access to their personal agency.

Through women's experience of change after loss, I interpreted women as positioning themselves in their relationships through a narrative of resilience. Through stories about decision making, I heard that even when the experience of decision making was difficult or had changed, women positioned themselves as capable. Through women's stories, intimacy was interpreted to be pivotal to their experiences. For many of the women, making decisions had previously involved sharing with their late intimate partner, and this changed when their partners passed on. This change was interpreted to involve the experience of support.

The experience of support in intimate partnership, for example having "someone that's on your side even if they disagree, you know they should be able to say 'Well I don't think you were right there, but you know, that's your decision'" (Caroline) is interpreted to be about the value of shared intimacy "someone you trust" (Jane). Intimate partnership provides togetherness in the decision making process i.e. "It really was a partnership" (Joan) and it is the relationship that is interpreted as the change when women experience the passing of an intimate partner i.e. "I feel I had to become more independent" (Joan); "... you don't have a sounding board" (Jude).

It is interpreted that being more alone in this process can equate to increased pressure i.e. "when it's dependent on your, you know, when it's about your children ... that's the thing I struggled with ... making decisions around what's right for them" (Jude); "where everything revolves around you, right from putting the rubbish bins out because you are head of the household" (Anne) and can evolve through self-questioning i.e. "you make a lot of decisions and sometimes you think 'Oh I don't know if I've made the right one'" (Caroline). I interpreted that this can mean change to the experience of shared

responsibility available during intimate partnership i.e. “For me it’s the responsibility, you actually have to live with your decision, you know, because you made it” (Jane).

Losing this togetherness experience is interpreted to involve change to the provision of support from others. The experience where support networks shift i.e. “you can ask your family” (Caroline); “consulted on the children” (Joan); “friends show themselves” (Jude), is where women become centralised in their decision making experience i.e. “you can get all the advice under the sun but ultimately it comes back to you” (Anne).

The shifting provision of support in decision-making is interpreted to texture women’s experience of accessing their personal agency. For example, after the death of an intimate partner, what women need from their support networks changes i.e. “having being quite contained ... to (then) go out and talk to other people and ask them ... I found it really hard to open up to other people things that would have been decided at home” (Jude). During conversation Anne and Jane describe this as everybody having “little contributions” to the making of decisions. These contributions are interpreted to complicate, through well-meaning interference or “fuddling” (Anne), women’s access to the experience of agency in making and owning their decisions, because “they’re not actually in your shoes” (Caroline).

In managing this interference, it is interpreted that women engage a narrative of resilience that endows a sense of responsibility to re-position themselves in their relationships as decision makers i.e. “it’s just taking the responsibility” (Caroline); “you don’t have the option really” (Anne); “you’re forced to go on and make decisions for yourself” (Caroline); “we just learnt to stand on our own two feet” (Joan). It is the visibility of this narrative of resilience that is pivotal to making an interpretation about women’s experience of personal agency as present i.e. “I wanted to do something and once again I enjoyed making my decisions for what I did ... if I had had somebody there it would have been a bit of negotiation I’m sure!” (Jane).

Making visible the experience of resilience as something women have, rather than approaching it as something that is ‘become’ (Bonanno, Nesse, & Wortman, 2004) through transformation or the successful adjustment to life following the loss of a spouse, it can be interpreted as a resource that women employ across their transformative experience. As a resource, resilience is interpreted to be part of women’s skillful management of their loss as an experience of intimate support, and an expression of agency in the reflexive journey of transforming.

Morality

‘The man was the boss ... and that’s still (being) in our civilized society ... it’s hard to get away from all that, it is really.’
(Ngarita)

Building on an the interpretation about transformation of loss as textured, dynamic and interrupted, and as involving women as agents for reflexive transformation, my analysis turns to more

fully consider the impression that gendered morality i.e. “you often put your children’s needs before you own” (Anne) makes on women’s experience of reflexively transforming loss.

Breheny and Stephens (2010) argue, that as a result of positive aging discourse, older peoples identity and social meaning making about what it ‘means’ to be older are constructed from independent and active accounts of aging that “construct old age as an individual project of wellness, social connection and participation built upon social imperatives of healthy choices, self-reliance and contribution to community” (p. 41). These accounts work to generate moral trajectories, such as the ‘morally virtuous ager’ that older people use in their identity construction. Much like positive aging discourse that generates social morality about what types of ‘agers’ are socially appropriate, the master narrative of loss of an intimate partner for women produces a moral trajectory that locates older single women as socially appropriate; relationally dependent.

By examining gender in the experience of attaining a ‘virtuous’ aging identity, this section uncovers how women’s moral capacity to care, generated by the master narrative of sexual difference, compromises older single women’s health and wellbeing experiences through complicating the transformation of loss.

Woman as a subject of gender

As a subject of gendered social location, women are allocated the role of care and nurture for others and relational spaces (Gilligan, 1994; Harding, 1990; Hartsock, 1987; Smith, 1997). This gendered location encourages moral trajectories for women that align them as responsible for the care and wellbeing of others and for the success of their relationship i.e. “[women] take more onboard, we want to contribute a lot more I think” (Jude). Through the stories of the women in this project these relations of care are suggested to texture women’s experiences of intimate relationships through necessitating that women morally navigate their multiple positioning in those relationships i.e. “[women] on the one hand, they are their own person ... but they also give so much to their families and partners ... we are torn lots of different ways” (Jude).

As women navigate their positioning in gendered moral development (Gilligan, 1994) we are embedded in an experiential process of meaning making. When we do these activities we do so with cultural context; we use culture not only in the act of telling and hearing stories, the ‘who’ we tell and ‘why’ but also in the ‘what’, the context we tell about (Squire, 2008). Women’s stories, as stories as they are experienced and transmitted within a gendered cultural context, are also an action of political capacity. In consideration of understanding the moral capacity for care (Gilligan, 1994) women’s stories as tales of gendered morality of political capacity (Squire, 2005, 2008) challenges the meaning of the social force that positions relational responsibility as dependence.

The tacit experience of a gendered morality

Through the stories of the women engaged in this project, the experience navigating a gendered moral trajectory is revealed as often indistinct from women's everyday lives i.e. "... but we actually don't think about it like that, that you are torn, that you're giving all the time" (Jude). When the women told stories as a process of reflecting on their experiences (Riessman, 1993) this tacit nature of a gendered morality was made visible i.e. "It was a good marriage but it was also a partnership, and we didn't do anything without my husband saying, 'Would we do so and so, or so and so' ... Um, mind you I invariably said, 'What do you think's the best?'" (Joan).

The involvement of a gendered morality i.e. "one only wanted to go where he wanted to go" (Caroline) in the experience of intimate partner loss is interpreted as a transformation positioning i.e. "he didn't come to church, so as soon as he died I came to church because that was what I really wanted to do" (Caroline) after the passing of an intimate partner.

Care and illness

Through the stories of the women engaged in this project, the loss of an intimate other was interpreted to signify profound change to the experience of intimacy, whereby that intimacy becomes part of the moral experience of reflexively transforming that loss i.e. "it sounds silly really but I think if I loved him enough he'll stay, he won't get taken from me" (Caroline). Through Caroline's narrative, women's moral capacity to care for intimate partners simply became known to me through 'we'. The 'we' of intimate partnership for women lends a responsibility not only for the care of partners, but also for their healthy recovery.

The master medical narrative understands health as physical and generates bio-medical storylines that normalise the gendered activity of care as a physical task orientated toward recovery i.e. "...we were both in denial because there was always some other treatment. ... with [name] it was 'we're going to do this next ...'". Through women's moral capacity to care women may take on responsibility for that recovery i.e. "but despite the fact that when people are first diagnosed with these illnesses you are given every eventuality, every side effect, you get to the stage where you think 'Oh my goodness, how is he ever going to survive this?'" (Caroline).

This visibility of the illness/recovery storyline in Caroline's narrative allows a critical appreciation of how women's social location for the care of others positions them as morally responsible for having the capacity to aid such recovery i.e. "if I keep up his medication and keep on with going to the doctor's and following the rules and regulations ...". This responsibility is interpreted to texture women's experience of intimacy through regulating that others needs must always come first, i.e. "... and you just know that you have done the best you can and that goes for, as you say, having respect for one and other and not arguing the toss all the time and it's going with the flow, a bit of peace".

In putting others needs first, in maximising the capacity for care, women can "look back and you think, 'well I really did everything I could'" (Caroline). Illustrated as 'helping' in Caroline's narrative, the

experience of maximising care is interpreted as highly critical to the experience of transforming loss i.e. “because you have got to live with yourself afterwards”.

This example of the responsibility for others that women experience makes visible how gendered morality implicates the experience of self-questioning within the boundaries of a gendered cultural narrative. Women are allocated responsibility for care that generates a moral trajectory that anticipates women must do their best at caring. In this location, doing so is a responsibility for the emotional work in their intimate relationship (the moral deliberation of pleasing and guilt) i.e. “should I have done more? Could I have done more? ... I don’t really think there is much more I could have done”. Thus through their moral capacity to care, and the anticipation that they should do their best at caring, women take on the moral responsibility of life and death.

Caring as sharing

Women’s moral capacity to care and reflexive process as meaning making is interpreted to also allow the taking up of sharing and teaching about relationships as part of their transformation of loss. This is illustrated through Jude’s personal narrative i.e. “The other thing I’ve tried to teach [my children] as well... but the one thing I have missed not having a partner is that physical contact”. Because of women’s social location as responsible for others it becomes morally significant to women to ensure that others, like children, understand about intimacy, i.e. “and you know as long as they know that their father’s behaviour was no reflection on how much he loved them”; “[as long as] they don’t repeat the same pattern in their relationships ...” and comprehend the importance of feeling intimacy in their relationships, i.e. “it’s reassuring that I’ve taught them that a hug can do an awful lot of things”. The reassurance experienced through teaching is interpreted to be a significant component of women’s transformation of loss. This reassurance is interpreted to involve women’s active agency for change in their own lives and in the lives of their loved ones; that through teaching others, others can learn from their experiences.

The commitment women may experience to the stability of family relationships is illustrated through Jane’s narrative about her experience of “learning” to “work(ing) with [name]’s family that he wasn’t really close to” after his passing. For my interpretation, women’s moral capacity to care together with the experience of relationship intimacy and commitment to relationships within the family, including those that might be challenging, textures women’s experience of transforming their loss. The cultural narrative that (re)presents a moral tension between pleasure and guilt in the capacity to care through the public monitoring of women’s relational efforts positions women through their obligation to make relationships work.

Through Jane’s narrative it is interpreted that women’s moral capacity to care works to texture women’s experience of agency in negotiating their family relationships and that such texture can compromise women’s access to the experience of agency.

Anonymity

Recently, through the stories of women who had experienced the loss of an intimate other, Danforth and Glass (2001) concluded that in light of transforming loss, “the experience of loneliness ... required a new perspective on the meaning of aloneness” (p. 525). In considering women’s stories as tales of a gendered morality, I consider the experience of ‘alone’ as a distancing by women from the moral trajectories cast upon them by the master narrative of gendered care; the responsibility for the care of others. Caroline and Jane’s narratives both accentuate the significance for women of being emotionally and physically in their own company. From their stories, I came to more fully appreciate the effects that the complexities of the moral capacity to care have on women’s lived experiences of transforming loss.

In conversation with Caroline about spending time in a new social situation, I interpret being ‘anonymous’ as an emotional and psychological space where women may find alone time in a social setting i.e. “... and you don’t see them a lot ... but that was fine with me” (Caroline). The appealing nature of anonymity “and I think it might have been another attraction in a way, [that] people didn’t know me” (Caroline) is of particular significance to my interpretation because it illustrates how psychologically and emotionally occupying the moral capacity to care can be for women. For women having no connection with those around them in a social setting is something similar to a ‘freedom’, a disengagement from caring.

Jane’s narrative builds on this interpretation about a space for ‘freedom’ by making visible the significance of private physical space i.e. “I remember that I would go home and close the door and just break down”. Privacy is interpreted to be significant because for women being in private may be the only time that they and their behavior are not socially scrutinised through dominant cultural norms.

Building on an interpretation that considers anonymity as means of ‘managing’ the expectations of gendered morality i.e. “I used to all of sudden just say “don’t care” and I would get in the car”, is Anne’s narrative about sharing time ‘with’ her late husband i.e. “... so I would just go down and sit down at [the church] and then, you know, have a cigarette with [name] and then I’d turn around and go home and get stuck in and work till midnight”. Emerging foremost from her narrative is that of significance being alone for women is being in a space where they can spend time in the presence of the intimacy they had shared with their late intimate others. Anne’s experience gives sustenance to contemporary conceptual models of grief and bereavement that understand ongoing connectedness as a ‘normal’ and completely healthy part of life after loss and challenge dominant cultural storylines that continue to position women’s intact experience of connectedness to those who have passed as pathological and detrimental; a problem with their dependence.

For my interpretation, women’s experience of taking time to spend psychologically and emotionally connecting with late intimate others i.e. “have(ing) a cigarette” is very significant to women’s journey of transforming their loss. Not only is it a ‘reprieve’ from the demands of morality but it locates psychological alone space where women may process their loss. From this interpretation, anonymity and privacy are considered to be potentially restorative experiences for women.

Resistance

'[I]t was another brick on the building ... what had gone before affected me in my thinking... and I think the bad things affect you and go into making you a stronger person.'
(Joan)

As a feminist scholar I am interested in the way that women's activity of their gendered social location, such as the negotiation in and navigation of complex and morally gendered social relationships, comes to texture their experience of resisting.

Through the diverse and complex stories told during this project, I have interpreted women's experiences of navigating their relationships as involving gendered moral trajectories that provide a moral compass for women. The visibility of this compass as significant in women's relationships enables me to further interpret women's experience of resisting a gendered social location in those relationships.

The gendered social location of older single women involves women as dependent on, and dependent in, intimate relationships. This social location of dependency is unique because it reflects an intersection of oppressive master narratives. Located in this dominant narrative of relational dependence, older women who have experienced the loss of an intimate other experience the assumption by others that they are socially isolated and thus dependent (D. Gibson, 1996). Because 'womanhood' is grounded in connectedness and as women age their social networks change, the notion of social dependency becomes contested through the transformation of loss.

Hearing about the way others assume women's dependence is critical in tending women's gendered experience of social relationships. Positive aging discourse promotes the attainment of independence as reflecting what it means to be a positive ager. It can be understood that older women use this to construct their identity and strive to create themselves as active and independent so others will consider them as morally 'virtuous' agers (Breheny & Stephens, 2009). Already assumed dependent by others in their social relationships, older single women are confronted with an additional challenge that further distances them from positioning themselves in this way. Through older single women's stories about confronting assumed dependence in their social relationships the experience of challenging such assumptions can be interpreted as resisting the master narrative of sexual difference that positions them in this way.

Resisting

Resistance is important to learning about women's experiences of oppression. Traditionally conceptualised though dominant ideals concerning conscious and intentional political action involving overt opposition and public protest (Grenier & Hanley, 2007), resisting has more recently been argued as textured; this consideration positions resisting as an everyday experience for women i.e. Riessman (2000); Squire (2005). In their narratively orientated work concerning the use of 'little old lady' discourse

as a tool of assessment and eligibility within public health and social services, Grenier and Hanley (2007) argue that for older women the experience of exercising resistance is complex; that it is “private as well as public, personal as well as collective, direct and subversive and embodied, as well as conscious and emotional” (p. 225).

For this current project, taking up women’s experience of resistance as complex broadens ‘access’ to women’s experiences of oppression. Through considering women’s stories as capable of revealing the unique way that cultural master narratives about gender, age and the ‘single’ status intersect to constrain women’s performativity of gender, women’s achievement of positioning themselves as ‘virtuous agers’ in their relationships can be critically questioned.

Through women’s stories of resisting, the experience of constraint is again interpreted through interference. Assumptions about reduced matters of financial agency are generated by an entanglement of oppressive cultural narratives that plot being a woman, being older and being single as an adverse social course. Madhok, Phillips, and Wilson (2013) argue that the dominant gendered narrative that renders women’s bodies as passive and therefore best suited for the domestication of care, positions women as economically dependent on men, and therefore dependent on heterosexual coupling for financial stability. Part of this reliance is the assumption that as responsible for care, women’s position in the gender hierarchy excludes them as agents able to make legitimate economic decisions.

These storylines are taken up during social interaction and come to contextualise the interpretation and meaning others make about older single women’s experiences. Commonplace in social conversations about older single women are storylines about economic instability in which women’s personal agency in managing financial situations is questioned, reproducing them as dependent.

Financial dependence

The narrative uptake of the financial storyline is important to an interpretation about how women experience resistance, because it makes visible the impact that oppressive power dynamics have on older single women’s relationships, i.e. “Old friends of mine, particularly male friends, telling me how I should be managing my money, and telling me how I should be doing this” (Jude) and on their experience of resisting in those relationships. In Jude’s narrative it is interpreted that male friends take up gendered dependency storylines in relationships to position themselves as dominant within the gender hierarchy; a dominance that is used to justify their interference in women’s lives i.e. “male friends ...feel[ing] like they can interfere”. For my interpretation, this experience of gendered oppression pre-empts women’s internal experience of resisting, where women often think, “None of your business!”, rather than speak it. Jude’s narrative reflects patriarchal storylines that specify it inappropriate for women to resist overtly or speak critically towards men, especially on financial matters. The visibility of ‘thinking’ strengthens an interpretation of women’s experience of personal agency as definitively present but constrained by moral trajectories that limit and shape women’s capacity to respond in social relationships and to resist the assumptions made by those within them.

The assumptions that limit what can be said, alongside the positioning of women as passive and responsible for the emotional wellbeing of relationships produces a moral conflict for women when challenging the social normativity inside their relationships. Therefore, a woman's private 'doing' of resistance, "where I used to be much more open about what I shared with people ... now I'm much more secretive about what I am doing!" (Jude) becomes very important to feminist psychology. Doing resistance privately or in secret as a consequence of interference, is critical to this research because it begins to reveal the ways such moral trajectories impact older single women's wellbeing. This is where being in relationships for women means having to consciously and continually negotiate and navigate "what is shared" (Jude) in those relationships.

The complexity that inference contributes to older women's experience of positioning themselves as a 'virtuous ager' in their relationships can be further interpreted through the debate concerning the intention of that interference i.e. "I suspect it [advice] was well meaning ... I'm sure it's well meaning ... well it was not taken as such!" (Jude). In my interpretation, a deliberation of the gendered social hierarchy of the virtuous ager makes visible women's resistance to assumptions of dependency that compromise women's access meeting the criteria for virtuous citizenship.

Caroline's narrative about being taken advantage of by friends who assumed her financially incapable at a time when she was "in a state of shock" further illustrates the consequence of others interference. Caroline's experience of constrained resistance, i.e. "you're not going to argue" makes visible the material reality for women when others take up oppressive dependence storylines i.e. "He died and these people were overseas and they came back to collect their clocks and they said, "Well of course he's not around to give us any sort of after service" ... so they gave me half of what he had agreed". The assumption of lack of financial agency had material and emotional effects, i.e. "I had to get a complete stranger to take all of this stuff away, and I got next to nothing for it". Through Caroline's narrative the consequences are interpreted to impact women's confidence in seeking help i.e. "so I had to get a complete stranger". This is of particular concern because "the big issue when you are on your own is getting someone to come and do stuff for you ... because you have to trust them".

Threat

During our conversations, the women participating in this project told stories about their experiences of other women feeling threatened by their single status and assuming that they were romantically interested in their husbands. There is strong sense of binary that underscores women's marital status that, storied through the master narrative of sexual difference and dependency discourse, ensures that coupledness is a situation of privilege for women (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). In negotiating the experience of exclusion from this privilege, women encounter stories about "the power of the single woman to take other women's men" (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003, p. 499).

In conversation with the women in this project, the uptake of 'threat' storylines by others in friendships come to further my interpretation about women's experience of resistance as complex. Caroline's narrative is interpreted to illustrate this complexity through an amalgamation of resisting as a

private, public and subversive experience. Caroline's personal narrative engages 'normative' storylines about older women as dependent and seeking re-partnership questioning her intent, i.e. "What does SHE want?", like I was going to ask him to go around and mow the lawns or something" and in the same story illustrates the experience of encountering such assumptions in relationships can be quite unexpected, i.e. "[it] totally took me aback ... [it was] just bizarre you know". For my interpretation, this establishes that women's actual experiences are often different from such assumptions, "I don't ever know what made her think that I had designs on her husband, nothing could be further from the truth!". Having established an interpretive relationship with Caroline's voice enabled me to interpret this narrative as a subversive experience of resistance; a conscious effort to make 'difference' visible for this research. It was through our conversations, where the women felt they were speaking to 'ears prepared to listen' (Taylor et al., 1996), that subversive storylines of resistance that texture women's experience of agency unfolded; the moral suppression of agency was relaxed.

This interpretation of Caroline's narrative as a story about the subversive experience of resisting in a research setting is intertwined with an interpretation of it as story about the private and public experience of resisting moral trajectories that anticipate women's passivity in managing relationships. The excerpt "... and then he phoned me up on his mobile and he said, "Oh I couldn't talk my wife was here" and I said, "So what's the problem?!" is pivotal to an interpretation of the notion of resisting as public and involving women's active sense of personal agency in light of assumptions of dependence. Together with the excerpt, "So now it's always 'just go in the yellow pages and pick out the name of a handyman'..." it becomes possible that agency can be understood as private resistance to dominant narratives of dependency and threat, and the complexities of the public/private action of resistance comes into view.

Resonating with Caroline's story, Jude's narrative is a story of resistance involving the navigation of relationships in light of the 'threat' storyline. Through Jude's narrative and hearing about the feeling of being "staggered" by threat assumptions built on my interpretation of Caroline's experience of being "taken aback". To hear that, "suddenly your married friends, you're a problem to them!" generated for my interpretation a consideration of what it can mean for women to be considered a 'problem' in the social relationships that they have spent time building intimacy in. Jude's story strengthens an interpretation that appreciates the textured nature of 'how' women resist. In listening to Jude's narrative about experiencing the dissolution of relationships consequent to friends "they think that you are going to go after their husbands" I was able to consider with more depth the overt, public subversive experience of resisting moral trajectories for women; the experience of telling stories with the intent to publically challenge established beliefs. This point is illustrated in Jude's story i.e. "I believe it's quite common. I mean I've spoken to a number of women and I believe it's quite common".

The volume of Jude's narrative subversive experience of resisting is heard to speak directly to a resistance of moral trajectories that anticipate passivity in relationships, i.e. "you know I can go out and find a whole new circle of friends, which I've done!" While this volume is very significant for an interpretation that appreciates women's personal agency in action, it is also important for a knowing about the act of resisting as a catalyst for transformation; a point from which women make significant

change in their relationships. Through tending the temporality of Jude's personal narrative, the difference generated between Jude's story about new relational experiences, i.e. "nobody's looking for anybody, they're just a bunch of friends" in contrast to those experienced prior, i.e. "suddenly your married friends, you're a problem to them ... they think that you are going to go after their husbands" enables an interpretation of resisting as bolstering women's sense of themselves as agents for change.

The diverse stories of the women in this project illustrate that resisting is experienced as a textured relationship between private, public, subversive and internal 'acts' and that women's agency in negotiation of how they resist the social meaning of dependency in their relationships is complicated by a gendered subject location and its consequent moral trajectories.

Complying, resisting and countering the dependency narrative

Accounting for the experience of resisting as interactive and complicated enables the counter narratives produced during that experience to also be considered as complex. Through embracing this texturing as a process, the experience of countering can be accessed beyond a subversive and overt appearance and be considered as occurring as a more everyday capacity (Bamberg, 2004). Thus, the experience of producing counter narratives through resistance can be considered as an interactive accomplishment; counters are produced through struggling between resisting and complying with master narratives. Through this process, I understand the production of counter narratives as involving a relationship between self and world.

Through women's stories of the complex experience of resisting dominant assumptions of dependency in their relationships, I interpreted them also to counter these assumptions. The sexual difference narrative promotes the universal 'virtues' of heterosexual coupling for women and anticipates that older women are dependent on such partnership. Through this vision, being without a husband or inmate partner is understood as a negative and undesirable situation; a threat.

Through women's stories of struggling with this dominant version of dependency, I heard about a different version; one where women experienced this situatedness as negative and undesirable but also experienced the experience of being alone as actively pursued and empowering as they transformed the experience of loss. Aligning with cultural narratives about adversity, the women told about the less welcome experiences of being without their husbands after their loss i.e. "going home to an empty house ... and avoiding been at home too much on my own" (Caroline), of "look[ing] out and everybody's busy with somebody" (Anne) and "walking into a room and visiting people and everybody's still got their partners... it was really quite frightening" (Joan); "when you're used to having someone" (Ngarita); "the hardest thing is to get things done" (Caroline).

However, in considering women's personal narratives as temporal (Squire, 2008) women's experiences of adversity can be understood as entangled with experiences of empowerment. Temporality is necessary to consider i.e. "before my husband died I was very afraid of being able to cope and all that sort of thing ... and now I'm afraid of what's going to happen to me after I retire! [Laughter]" (Caroline) for how it transforms women's lives after the loss of an intimate other in an on-going movement that

destabilises the binary of dependence and independence in the gendered social hierarchy i.e. “I do thing perhaps [name] wouldn’t have done ... I enjoyed making the decision of what I did ... but there are pluses and there are minuses” (Jane).

Through the notion of ‘interactive accomplishment’ the production of women’s counter experiences are interpreted to involve the experience of living unwelcome experiences from which women become positioned as agents for change. Among the most pivotal ‘counter’ emerging of interest to my interpretation was told through the storyline of re-partnership. Through women’s stories about having choice with regard to intimate re-partnership after the death of their respective husbands, such choices became known to me as contextualised by women’s life experiences concerning sentiment and embedded in their history of intimate partnership. For example, “I had quite the opposite; my husband was just such a bastard! ... it was only after he died that I realised how impossible he was and how difficult my life had been ... and I wouldn’t live with anyone else because I am too terrified to! ... I’m not the least bit interested in a relationship because I couldn’t trust a man now, in any way” (Jude); “quite frankly I’m not looking! ... he would be hard to replace” (Joan); “if I can’t have him I don’t want anyone else to live with ... I couldn’t bare them!” (Ngarita); “... when you believe in a marriage” (Anne).

Together, women’s experiences as complicit with dominant cultural assumptions of being without an intimate partner as a unwelcome and often difficult experience, and their resistance to this through the experience of agency in re-partnership choices, produces counter narratives that embrace ‘being on one’s own’ for women as an experience orientated around women’s own personal choice and the context of their lives. Through this counter-narrative women’s experience of living ‘without a husband’ relationship is interpreted as involving learning to live in a new way that more fully involves one’s self and that self in across multiple other relationships.

The way in which living more fully involves self is exemplified through Jane’s narrative. The ‘interactive achievement’ between “how society thinks you should act” and being “my own person” produces a counter-position of “getting used to being on my own” as a “journey”. Through interpreting women’s recognition of normative cultural assumptions i.e. “And I’ve got a friend and she’s always busy” I can consider that for women, the experience of being “very content with my own company” is produced through a struggle with those assumptions i.e. “you know and I think ‘Oh yeah, that’s cool, that’s her, that’s fine’ ... but I don’t need to be like that! ... it’s about giving myself permission to sit in the hammock and read a book and feeling it’s actually okay to do that”. Through the on-going struggle, “the big change”, between having “always had somebody else to think about” and being on one’s own i.e. “there is nobody but me” it is interpreted that women experience both positions at various moments and they reflect on this recognition as empowerment.

The experience of empowerment is also illustrated through my interpretation of the social efforts women experience after their loss. In the telling of their experiences of relationships that “sort of dwindled away” (Jane) that were complicit with the master narrative of older single women’s assumed dependency, the women’s actual experience was of feeling “content” (Jane/Anne) in their own company. I interpret such changes in relationships as empowering women i.e. “So for me that’s made me reinvent myself, if you like, in my friendships” (Jane). An experience where relationships with others can be built

or re-generated i.e. “I’ve had to re-visit my [location] friendships because I actually closed them off when I [moved] to [town]... I didn’t see them properly for two or three years you know because we were so involved with our own relationship. So it’s about picking up those again, opening those doors” (Jane), and intimacy in friendships is conceived i.e. “Well you see that’s another thing that I think comes as a result of being on your own is your friendships with your, women friendships, become incredibly important and sustaining and fun” (Jude).

Summary of Findings

The aim of this research was to interrogate the meaning of positive ageing and the social power relations that produce independence as necessary to good citizenship. Through an examination of the specificity of women’s marginal location within the dominant narrative of ‘virtuous aging’, the analysis addressed how the gendering of dependency works to texture older women’s experiences of the virtue of positive ageing after the death of an intimate other.

Older women’s narratives reveal that the loss of an intimate partner can be experienced as a marker of change in women’s lives. As such, the experience of loss and losing can be appreciated as generating a dynamic life space where counter life meanings can be accessed, revealed, encountered and generated. It is in such space where relationships between people and the gendered social hierarchy are produced and reproduced. Women’s experience within this life space necessarily involves their social relationships; these social relationships are made meaningful to women as they come to reflexively transform their experience of loss.

What emerged through the chorus of voices was a cultural narrative that located women as dependent in the social hierarchy; however, the meaning of dependence was contested. The first theme that emerged was made meaningful through the storyline of emotional connectedness in intimate relationships with family and friends. Where Breheny and Stephens (2009) argue that reciprocity is a complex negotiation of social repayment that functions to avoid the moral obligation of dependency, this research suggests that women’s emotional connection textures their social and moral location as responsible for the care of others and their relationships. The shared character of building intimacy in social relationships enables opportunities for reciprocated feelings of care to be achieved and communicated.

Understanding women’s narratives through relational context, and accounting for temporality (Squire, 2008), enabled an interpretation of women’s experience of intimacy across and within their relationships as diverse and dynamic. What emerged through the chorus of voices was how the women resisted the cultural narratives as they critically reflected on changes in their relationships. As women’s lives changed, they began to question their position as responsible for the emotional stability of their relationships. It is the struggle over the meaning of intimacy and its relationship with dependency that significantly textures and complicates women’s personal transformation in light of their loss. The second theme, change after loss, is a marker in the transformation of relationships and intimacy. What was made visible is the entanglement of emotional and practical meanings of care and companionship intimacy in

partnership, where the assumptions of the functionality of intimate partnerships that position women as dependent on their relationships were contested. Within this reflective space, change after loss was storied through experiences of negotiating the boundaries of dependence and independence through a process of questioning 'choice' in women's social location, and deliberating on the morality that that location enabled. As women reflected on change as a journey rather than as recovery from an event, they transform the meaning of the loss as a dynamic process where the past textures the present.

The third theme explored the notion of engaging agency as women reflexively transform their loss, and what emerged was storied through a narrative of resilience that enables women to enact decision-making and manage interference. As women renegotiated their social relationships, cultural narratives of women's dependence complicated their experience of personal agency. What became visible was a story of resilience; as the women worked to reposition themselves in their relationships as decision-makers, resilience became an expression of agency in the reflexive journey of transforming their loss.

Building on the narrative of loss as textured, dynamic and interrupted, and as involving women as agents for reflexive transformation, theme four returns to the 'morality of positive aging discourse' that dominates our cultural narratives. Where Breheny and Stephens (2010) draw attention to what 'types' of agers are socially appropriate, the master narrative of loss of an intimate partner for women produces a moral trajectory that locates older single women as relationally dependent.

By examining gender in the experience of attaining a 'virtuous' aging identity, this section uncovered how women's moral capacity to care, generated by the master narrative of sexual difference, compromises older single women's health and wellbeing experiences through complicating the transformation of loss. Subject to the normativity of gendered location, women take up positions within the narrative as responsible for the care of others and relational spaces. As the women told their stories through a process of reflection, they began to challenge the meaning of their gendered social location through stories of political capacity, challenging the dominant narrative that marks relational responsibility as dependence.

Through older single women's stories about confronting assumed dependence in their social relationships, the experience of challenging such assumptions can be interpreted as resisting the master narrative of sexual difference that positions them as dependent. In theme five, resistance is understood as an embodied process of transformation that broadens access to women's experiences of oppression where women's stories are considered capable of revealing the ways that cultural narratives intersect to constrain women's performances of gender. In this way, women's positioning as virtuous agers can be critically questioned. The women in this study were explicit about their resistance to dominant patriarchal storylines that assumed their inability to achieve financial independence; the cultural narrative limited their capacity to respond to interference, at least publically. Resistance therefore, was often achieved in 'private' spaces where women were actively conscious of the continuous need to negotiate gendered social power relations in their relationships. What also emerged was a cultural repositioning of women through their single status, and its effect on ongoing social relationships. The loss of an intimate partner was complicated through cultural narratives of sexual difference and dependency that privilege coupledness, and assume single women will seek to re-partner, positioning women as a threat.

Understanding their location as a problem, the women began to resist the gendered moral trajectory of relational experiences and form new intimate friendships. Women's resistance is a textured relationship between public and private spaces and subversive acts as they negotiate the gendered social meanings of dependency complicated by a gendered subject location and its consequent moral trajectories. As they transform such spaces, resistance emerges through a recognition of themselves as agents of change.

The complexity of negotiating compliance and resistance enables counter narratives to be produced. In this way, the process of producing counter narratives is understood as an interactive accomplishment. Resistance to the cultural narrative of dependency was countered through challenging the assumptions of sexual difference and the virtue of coupling. Taking up a position as 'having' social power enabled the women to live in new ways across multiple other relationships.

It is through the navigation of intimacy that women experience the rich and dynamic contest of the boundaries around support and dependence, through which women experience relational negotiation. For this project, making visible this negotiation engages women's diverse and dynamic experiences with 'dependency' as involving social power, and revelling in processes of transformation.

The texture that gendered 'dependency' narratives can lend older women's experience of reflexive transformation is the potential to challenge the constraints of gendered normality in a process through which women recognise their own experiences of dependence as enabling good citizenship.

CHAPTER FIVE - Final Reflection

To take a traditional approach to draw this project to an end would be to write against the political standpoint framing the research process – to open space for relations of choral support that legitimates knowledge making through the experiences of women as we engage in conversations about aging. When women's contradictory positions in cultural narratives and their voices are brought together, their relational experiences interact to generate a constantly transforming meaning in that space. Where gender is meaningful to the shared social location, conversations enable space to negotiate understandings of gendered social power relations. Creating space for the voices of women to emerge while simultaneously writing a thesis to produce a counter-narrative of resilience to produce new understandings of virtuous aging carries ethical responsibility. To write a traditional ending would be to foreclose on the potential opening of spaces for ongoing conversations.

In this way, the analysis that I have produced is an interpretation of women's experience of the normative moral trajectory of positive aging, and located within the literature that questions the social and cultural meanings of gender produced through dominant narratives of sexual difference that marginalise women's experience.

As a chorus of voices, including the researcher's own critical engagement, the narrative produced here writes back (a form of resistance) to the location of dependency as a moral deficit and considers how older women engage dominant narratives about aging. At the same time it considers how women oppose, resist and counter dominant positions and trouble their positioning from within the narrative itself. Counter to a narrative of intimate partnership constituting women's economic, social and emotional wellbeing, in this space attention to gendered social power relationships that transform the meaning of aging and loss come into view.

Appreciating older women's struggles from within their gendered social location necessarily involved negotiating the dependency narrative within relationships after loss and I came to understand that women's struggles with the cultural meaning of dependence textured their personal transformation. As the conversations between us took shape, and engaging the experience of reciprocity and interconnectedness as a gendered experience of storytelling, a counter-narrative to the dependence/independence binary that marginalises older single women was produced as the women storied the significance of gendered moral trajectories within their relationships with family and friends. This process of critical reflection brought into view the experience of loss as dynamic, and experienced as relational.

Women's cultural location as dependent in gendered social power relationships, not only excludes women's contribution to knowledge production, but also from access to the value of positive aging after the loss of an intimate partner. The aims of this thesis were to produce new knowledge but to also consider the ethical responsibility of attending to women's 'voice' for the potential to transform our research practices to open spaces for ongoing conversations *as* we produce knowledge of the effects of gendered social power relations on our everyday experiences. Retaining the integrity of women's voice in

the re-telling necessarily privileges the relational; a constant process of reflection in the telling and re-telling of stories built around specific and significant life events. The transformation is also political; it tends the chorus of voices textured by gendered social power relationships and marginal social location. In this way, the ethical conduct of the research enabled spaces where women came to critically question their social location and deliberate on the moral positions it enables and constrains bringing volume to an ongoing conversation on the socio-political experience of gender in the years following their loss. So rather than generate an ending, following Riessman (1993) the final level of representation occurs as the reader encounters the narrative produced through my critical interpretation and interacts with the text in new ways.

Ethical Responsibility

The process of gathering the women together and telling stories amidst a community of interpreters values the inclusivity and diversity of everyday lives as it produces such a community. It is these relationships that become visible for the research interpretation that addresses how gendered cultural narratives impact women's experience, collectively. It is the chorus, the amalgamation of voices that has the potential to generate shifts in meaning through the 'to and fro' of turns in the narrative production. As the women told of their experience of loss, they encountered the limits of dominant cultural narratives and began to renegotiate their position as single older women in a counter narrative.

Creating 'community' conversations in the practice of this research project lead to the opening up of 'discursive space' capable of being inclusive of the complexity of women's lives and experiences to provide a research experience for women that was transformative while retaining the integrity of the women's stories and valuing their agency.

Necessary to this ethical responsibility was to establish a careful communication process that involved staying in touch with the women who dedicated their time and stories to this project, both during the data collection and in the relational space that connected the women to the research as it unfolded. An advantage of the recruitment process was the coming together of a relationship among the participants where they had begun conversations with each other prior to participation. This can be understood as a process of iteration, stories inside stories, encounters that occur prior to participation that have already begun the storying process, and where agency can be engaged. For example, while I had not met several of the women sharing their stories prior to their participation, and several of the participants had never met each other, that we all shared the commonality of knowing a key person came to represent a common thread. Ngarita talked about how much "time she had for [the informant]" and some women found they knew each other through the key informant but had not seen each other for many years. Knowing the key informant provided common ground, an ease of encounter, a talking point.

Ongoing conversations brought my attention to how important the relationships that were formed had become in the process. For example, a conversation with Jude as we discussed her transcript revealed that she had enjoyed participating in the group, "they were lovely women to be sharing thoughts

with". Ngarita told me how enjoyable both "meeting the other women" and "sharing their stories together" had been.

The process of sharing stories with other people who have had the same types of experiences has been suggested to have therapeutic and personal benefit (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002). In conversation with Joan, such benefit was illustrated by her suggestion that being a part of the group allowed her to realise "that you are not alone and that other people share the same sort of feelings" and that participation in the group had "bolstered her sense of personal morale".

To ensure safe participation, the women were encouraged to ask questions about how I would interpret their stories. As the questions arose, I reflected on the processes of telling and listening, and I was able to retell how I heard the stories as they came together in chorus (my interpretation) and that as researcher it was this collective story that would come to be the representation; my story about what I had learned from them. I talked about how I would tend significant moments that emerged. As these conversations built over time, and as the writing of the narrative that is this thesis took shape, I was able to share how in all the diversity generated through the conversations in this project impressed on my own 'knowing' in different ways, moving across moments that emerged as significant. In this way, we negotiated the terrain that became the co-construction of knowledge. For example, group participants were interested in the differences in their experiences, their unique storylines within shared meanings. For example, connectedness among members of the focus groups was evidenced through hugging where as a group the women held a deep embrace to say goodbye; some of whom had been strangers just hours before, and variously made plans to meet again. It was through inclusive research practices that enabled the visibility of gender as an everyday lived reality for women to emerge; the shared experience of gender enabled space to negotiate meaning and form new relationships.

Through feminist standpoint epistemology, this research was explicitly located within feminist concerns to transform oppressive relationships in our knowledge production. Drawing on the literature that informs the generation of voice through gender, and attending to the criticality of my own social positioning, within psychology and as a speaking gendered subject, meant grappling with confronting emerging feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment through the on-going realisation of my own contribution to the marginalisation of women. Through these research relationships, I was able to become critical of the social dynamics that informed my own participation.

The contribution of socio-political research to the research environment is that it does not only provide opportunities for writing back to dominant cultural narratives that produce and reproduce women as a burden in neo-liberal discourse of positive aging, it also seeks to open up spaces for new forms of transformation. The chorus of voices produced here may be interpreted as a productive trajectory of action to transform everyday lives. It is also a commitment to disrupting gendered dominance in the knowledge production that informs New Zealand's aging policy by attending to the modes through which our everyday lives are diversely textured by the cultural and political conditions of gender. How we reflexively attend to the ways in which difference is always already textured through embodied gendered processes of subjectification remains vital to our critical reflexive engagement with social transformations within the discipline of psychology.

The limitations of this research are entwined with the epistemological assumptions underlying the theoretical framework employed. A feminist standpoint in knowledge production assumes that gendered meanings and knowledges are multiple, changeable and contextual. As a representation of a chorus of voices, including feminist literature, challenges the dominant cultural narrative that renders women as a 'burden' to destabilise gendered social power relations to open spaces for counter narratives. It is because of this epistemology that this research cannot claim to present a generalisable truth, rather it seeks to mobilise a trajectory of action to open up possibilities for transformation.

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Appendix A – Information Sheet



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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TE KURA PŪKENGĀ TANGATA

Identity Regeneration After the Death of an Intimate Other

INFORMATION SHEET

Hi, my name is Sarah Williams and I am a postgraduate student at Massey University. I am undertaking this project for the thesis component of my Master of Arts degree in Psychology.

For my project, I wish to collect women's stories of life after the death of an intimate other. From these stories, I hope to broaden the social understandings of the type of experiences women have and the meaning of them in regenerating women's identities after this type of loss.

I believe that knowledge is socially produced, so I am inviting women to share their stories by creating conversations across social networks, using a friend of friend approach. Those invited are all social contacts of my mother, Pauline Massey, and have experienced the passing of an intimate other no less than two years ago.

I would like to invite you to be a part of this project and to share your stories with me, and/or other women participants.

So that I can hear women's stories, I will be running focus group and individual interview sessions. Should you choose to participate, you are welcome to attend either or both. Sessions will run for between 1 and 3 hours on Saturday mornings (dates to be advised), refreshments and morning tea will be provided, and travel expenses reimbursed. The number of women in the focus groups will likely be between 4 and 6, and interview sessions will be one on one.

The focus group and interview sessions will be digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed into written text. Stories will be explored in relation to the types of experiences described and the role those experiences have as a source for women's identity regeneration. All participant details, digital recordings and written transcripts will be stored in a secure location at Massey University. Also all names and identifying features of persons and places within those stories will be changed. Recordings and transcripts will be used for the sole purpose of this project and kept only for the projects duration (no more than 2 years) at which point they will be disposed of accordingly.

While you will retain full ownership of your contribution towards this project, in participating you will be making those contributions available for interpretation by the researcher and for use in publication. A brief summary of the researcher's interpretation and copy of the final publication will be available for you to review prior

to print. Also should you like one, a complimentary copy of the final publication will be arranged.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Please note:

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting you and hearing your stories. Please feel free to contact myself, or Leigh Coombes, my thesis supervisor, at any time should you have any questions or require further information.

Sarah Williams
Email: sarah.williams.12@uni.massey.ac.nz
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Leigh Coombes -
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Appendix B – Participant Consent Form – Individual



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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

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 agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have my transcript returned to me.

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

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Full Name –
Printed _____

Appendix C – Participant Consent Form – Group



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FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

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

I agree not to disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group.

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

Signature:

Date:

Full Name -
Printed

Appendix D – Transcript Release Form



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Identity Regeneration After the Death of an Intimate Other

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Full Name - printed _____